Alaska

Nome & the Seward Peninsula
30th May to 3rd June 2018 (5 days)

The Pribilofs
3rd to 6th June 2018 (4 days)

Denali & Kenai
7th to 15th June 2018 (9 days)

Barrow – The High Arctic
16th to 18th June 2018 (3 days)

Ross’s Gulls by Stephan Lorenz

Trip report compiled by Tour Leader: Stephan Lorenz
Tour Summary

This grand three-week journey through Alaska visited the finest birding locations this vast state has to offer. From the remote and lush tundra of Nome to the seabird spectacle of the Pribilof Islands, through the endless boreal forests of the interior and finally ending in the high arctic of Barrow, this tour got us in all the right places to see some phenomenal birds and wildlife. With so many birds and mammals seen, 201 and 24 respectively, we all went home with a treasure trove of memories. Some outstanding sightings in Nome included Gyrfalcon on a nest, several Bristle-thighed Curlews walking tamely on the tundra, displaying Bluethroat, rare Black-headed and Slaty-backed Gulls, surprise Bohemian Waxwings, and a stunning male Spectacled Eider on our final day there. Mammals were also abundant, with two Walrus just offshore and a Grizzly chasing a Moose being especially memorable. After returning to Anchorage, we flew out to the seabird haven of St Paul Island and, as always, the cliffs and tundra didn’t disappoint. We notched up an incredible nine species of alcids, plus local specialities in the form of Red-legged Kittiwake and Red-faced Cormorant. Yet, it was a slew of vagrant species from Eurasia that created hours of excitement, especially for the ABA listers in the group, and during our short visit we tallied Tufted Duck, Common and Terek Sandpipers, Common Greenshank, Oriental Cuckoo, Grey-streaked Flycatcher, Eyebrowed Thrush, Red-flanked Bluetail, Olive-backed Pipit, and Brambling. The tame Arctic Foxes were fun to watch, and we saw yet another Walrus that even hauled out onto the rocks – very rare here. The longest section of the tour covered the Denali area and Kenai Peninsula. The birds just kept falling into place, with multiple Northern Goshawks, Northern Hawk-Owls, close Spruce Grouse, Black-backed and American Three-toed Woodpeckers and breeding plumaged Smith’s Longspurs all noted in the Denali area. A boat trip into the magnificent Kenai Fjords National Park netted us the uncommon Kittlitz’s and Marbled Murrelets, plus a show of three pods of Orcas, including one breaching male. The tour ended with two days in Barrow, where the arctic tundra was alive with shorebirds and waterfowl. We had good views of all four eiders, saw Snowy Owls at an active nest, added Red-necked and Little Stints to our shorebird list, and enjoyed displaying Buff-breasted Sandpipers, but the biggest highlight was yet to come. On the final morning of the tour, we tracked down a pair of Ross’s Gulls, a truly spectacular and rare gull, for a grand finish to the tour. Along the way, we also took in Alaska’s breathtaking landscapes and enjoyed many seafood feasts.

Tour in Detail

The tour started with an afternoon arrival in Nome, with the flight from Anchorage landing right on time. After a short transfer to the Aurora Inn for check-in, we walked to lunch, heading out into the field during the early afternoon. We headed out of town along the Council Road and towards the very productive Safety Sound. Having some specific targets in mind, we drove steadily along the coast as the town slowly gave way to extensive wetlands and finally wild and remote tundra. Along the way, we recorded many of the common species of Nome, including Red-throated Loon, Sandhill Crane, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Red-necked Phalarope, all three jaegers, Black-legged Kittiwake, Mew and Glaucous Gulls, and Arctic Tern. All species we would become familiar with during the next three days. We made a short stop at Cape Nome, and once we reached Safety Sound waterfowl were present.
in abundance. We observed a good variety, including hundreds of Brent, a few Cackling Geese, Tundra Swan, Northern Shoveler, American Wigeon, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, and Greater Scaup scattered on ponds and lakes. Out at sea, we scoped a different variety of birds, and sea ducks included Common Eider, Harlequin Duck, White-winged and Black Scoters, Long-tailed Duck, and Red-breasted Merganser. We pushed on further along Council Road, following the Solomon River until we made a strategic stop where we were able to admire a female Gyrfalcon on a nest. The bird appeared to be incubating and we had scope-filling views, taking a few photos, before leaving the bird to tend its nest in its wild domain. Also of note was a Say’s Phoebe building a nest nearby. A pair of Peregrine Falcons was seen well as we were retracing our route, adding to the raptor tally.

We stopped near Safety Sound Bridge during the return journey and at another staked out area enjoyed an unparalleled shorebird spectacle. Hundreds of birds were feeding right along the shoreline, picking out fish eggs among washed-up kelp, and we were able to get within a few metres of Ruddy and Black Turnstones, Surfbirds, Sanderlings, Pectoral Sandpipers, and dozens of colourful Red Phalaropes. The best of the bunch was a flock of Sabine’s Gulls, with more than two dozen birds foraging almost within touching distance. It was time to head back to town for dinner, and as we neared Cape Nome we spotted a pair of Black-headed Gulls flying in the opposite direction. A quick radio call to the other van and fast manoeuvre to swing the van around had us soon chasing the birds as they continued on their flight path. We pulled ahead of them and everyone piled out of the van in record time to have both birds pass right over us for great views of this locally rare species. We arrived at dinner with only a minor delay and enjoyed a well-earned meal.

Due to unusually high snowfall, we stayed away from the Kougarok Road until we were sure that it was cleared, and so started our first full day in Nome along the Teller Road. Before heading out of town, we started the early morning at Cape Nome. A male King Eider was an excellent find and scoped well; while a breeding plumaged Yellow-billed Loon flew by fast. We also added Common and Thick-billed Murres and Horned Puffins here, but the best sighting was of two Walrus that appeared at the surface just offshore and eventually allowed leisurely scope views. We made a quick detour to the landfill, which turned out to be an excellent decision as we found an adult Slaty-backed Gull among the Glaucous and Herring Gulls. Proceeding through “downtown” Nome, we soon found ourselves on the other side, driving into the wild tundra and scenic mountains along the Teller Road. The riparian bushes and stunted shrubs along this route were full of Nome’s breeding Red Phalaropes. The best of the bunch was a flock of Sabine’s Gulls, with more than two dozen birds foraging almost within touching distance. It was time to head back to town for dinner, and as we neared Cape Nome we spotted a pair of Black-headed Gulls flying in the opposite direction. A quick radio call to the other van and fast manoeuvre to swing the van around had us soon chasing the birds as they continued on their flight path. We pulled ahead of them and everyone piled out of the van in record time to have both birds pass right over us for great views of this locally rare species. We arrived at dinner with only a minor delay and enjoyed a well-earned meal.

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passerines, all in full song, and we saw many Grey-cheeked Thrushes, American Robins, Lapland Longspurs, Northern Waterthrushes, and Orange-crowned, Yellow, Blackpoll and Wilson's Warblers. Sparrows were also well represented, with American Tree, Red Fox, White-crowned, Golden-crowned and Savannah Sparrows all plentiful.

One of the best birding spots along the Teller Road lies near Woolley Lagoon, and despite extensive snow cover we completed a short hike onto this drier, rocky tundra. We were rewarded with Red Knot and Rock Sandpiper, both very rare breeders locally, and after some searching we found a tame pair of Rock Ptarmigans among the numerous and vocal Willow Ptarmigans. At the bottom of the hill we heard a Buff-bellied Pipit singing, and while searching for it we noticed that all of a sudden its song had changed dramatically. It took a second to sink in, but instead of a pipit, we had a Bluethroat display right in front of us. This was atypical habitat for it, but we ended up with great scope views as the bird perched on a few scattered twigs or ran along right on the open tundra. This habitat definitely made it easier to see this sometimes skulky bird, and the pipit was also found a few minutes later. Before lunch, we drove the road to the lagoon and it didn’t take long until we had a pair of Grey Plovers in the scope. During lunch, we added a pair of Northern Wheatears. We also increased our growing raptor list with a Rough-legged Hawk on a nest and one studied in flight, Northern Harriers teetering above the tundra, and Golden Eagles soaring in the distance, while another Gyrfalcon raced past. The road to the tiny community of Teller is very scenic and excellent for mammals, offering many viewing opportunities of Muskox and a small herd of Reindeer, introduced here. During the drive back, we also chanced upon a Grizzly chasing a Moose. We stopped and scoped the scene. The Moose easily outpaced the bear, but we noticed two bears, a sow and a two-year-old, and were able to watch as they ambled off into the tundra. We made it back to town just in time for dinner after another eventful day.

The all-important day on the Kougarok Road was here, and we left Nome early in the morning with palpable excitement. Due to the late season snow, it was not guaranteed that the road would be open all the way to Coffee Dome and the only accessible site for nesting Bristle-thighed Curlews. We knew we had to try anyway. To reach the curlews, we had to tackle 72 miles of gravel that contained some rough spots and potholes, but we steadily made progress, stopping occasionally for breaks and birds. We noted many familiar species, but during a few stops added Varied Thrush and Spotted Sandpiper to the list. We made a brief stop along the Pilgrim River Bridge, where we soon found a male Rusty Blackbird,
another uncommon nester in the area, and it was entertaining to watch good numbers of Tree, Bank and Cliff Swallows. We reached Mile 72 just before lunch (the road literally having been cleared 15 minutes prior) and prepped a field lunch of sandwiches, chips and fruit at the bottom of the hill. Then the unexpected happened, a vocal Bristle-thighed Curlew flew right overhead, it was distant, but clearly identifiable as it sailed across the valley and landed on the brown slope of a distant hill. We could not relocate the bird in the distance, but for anyone opting out of the hike, they had the bird in the bag.

Almost everyone joined the hike to the top of the hill and on our way up we heard curlews calling repeatedly. Once atop and after the first Whimbrel “scare”, we positioned ourselves to listen. A Northern Raven flew over and every Whimbrel in the neighbourhood took to the sky, creating a melee of wings and calls with at least ten birds chasing after the raven. We could hear a Bristle-thighed Curlew calling, but the birds were too distant to make sense of. In the end, we didn’t have to worry as three birds came flying in to settle right in front of us. One was a Bristle-thighed, no two, no actually all three. The birds offered spectacular views as they calmly walked across the tundra in front of us. Needless to say this excellent sighting put a spring into our steps as we walked back down the hill, and all in all it had been one of the easier curlew searches. We drove back to Nome where, with some time to spare, we found a Northern Shrike nest near the edge of town and enjoyed excellent views of a pair.

For our final day in Nome, we revisited the Cape Nome area and Safety Sound, and drove about 75 miles out on Council Road to reach a stretch of boreal forest, a rare habitat in the Nome area. The first stop overlooking some ponds held one of the bigger highlights of the day, as we spotted a male Spectacled Eider. We all enjoyed extended scope views as the bird slowly paddled away, only to walk out onto a small island and settle down. The Safety Sound area was packed with birds, as usual, and a careful scan of the vast mudflats along Safety Sound Bridge revealed the hoped-for target, a single Emperor Goose among the throng of Brent. The bird was very distant, but we could see all the important field marks in the scope. Four Common Goldeneyes settled in on the lagoon, a locally uncommon species and welcome addition to our waterfowl list. We worked our way east and then north, picking up Vega Gull among the Glaucous Gulls, and had good views of calling Aleutian Terns.

We arrived at the small stand of boreal forest for a late lunch and then spent about an hour birding the area. We quickly found a small flock of Bohemian Waxwings – an uncommon species here and welcome find anywhere. We searched another stretch of forest and finally found a Boreal Chickadee,
another Rusty Blackbird and Ruby-crowned Kinglet before making our way back to Nome. While driving past Safety Sound one last time, a group of four Bar-tailed Godwits flew past, surprisingly we had missed this normally fairly common shorebird so far, but we were all happy to finally see it. We packed up in Nome and headed for the airport for an evening flight. The plane departed on time and we bid farewell to the endless mountains and tundra of the Seward Peninsula.

We enjoyed a bit of a rest before our mid-morning flight to St Paul Island. Despite recent difficulties with the local carrier, PenAir, we left for St Paul Island right on time and were eager to get stuck into some serious seabird photography and rarity chasing. After our arrival on the island, we checked into the King Eider Hotel, conveniently located right at the airport, and then readied our gear quickly in order to search for some rarities that had recently been reported. We drove north across the small island to an area known as Marunich, and a careful search here turned up Grey-streaked Flycatcher, a very rare bird in the ABA area and great vagrant. The Common Sandpiper along the shoreline proved unfortunately elusive. We headed into town proper to have our first of many delicious meals at the local canteen housed in the seafood processing plant. After dinner, we headed to the north-east point of the island and Hutchinson’s Hill, in particular. This area is one of the more famous vagrant traps on the island and this evening it was loaded. We ticked several Eyebrowed Thrushes, Olive-backed Pipits, and Bramblings. Normally, it is great to pick up one or maybe two of these species during a short visit, but we were seeing multiple of each and enjoyed lengthy scope views, including of the skulky pipits. Of course, we also had our first views of the local specialities, including Red-legged Kittiwake and Red-faced Cormorant, plus the ubiquitous Rock Sandpipers were hard to miss. Elated with the first haul of rarities, we returned to the hotel.

We devoted the morning to visiting Ridge Wall, one of the more productive and accessible nesting cliffs on the island. Here we enjoyed scope-filling views of several alcids, including Common and Thick-billed Murres (offering great comparisons), Parakeet, Least and Crested Auklets, and comical Horned and Tufted Puffins. All the while, Northern Fulmars were doing circles and Red-faced Cormorants busily carried nesting materials to the cliff. The morning rarity highlight was a Common Greenshank found in a productive marsh called Antone Slough. Eurasian Wigeon and Common Teal were added – both species of waterfowl are uncommon in the ABA area. In the afternoon, we worked various wetlands, finding a Common Tern of the Siberian subspecies, and also returned to some of the
previous hotspots, finding several Bramblings but no other rarities.

The final full day on the island dawned relatively clear, and we made our way to the Reef Wall. This location often harbours close views of puffins and Crested Auklets, and we were not disappointed. A Crested Auklet perched and called just below us while Tufted Puffins sat right at eye level. A Pacific Wren sang on the cliffside, offering great views of this large and quite dark subspecies with its oversized bill. We decided to check the quarry carefully, where steep rock walls provide shelter for birds from the wind. A Bramling, almost pedestrian by now, flew over, but much more exciting was a female Red-flanked Bluetail. Unfortunately, the bird stubbornly remained in a very rugged area of a lava flow and was not really accessible. A bit of a consolation was a pair of Tufted Ducks that we spotted on the way to dinner. The pair remained close, allowing for great scope views in the unseasonable sunshine. After dinner, we decided to photograph Red-legged Kittiwakes on Salt Lagoon when a sudden text had us racing back to the quarry – *I mean literally racing*. The simple message read “cuckoo quarry”. We arrived just as the bird had rounded a corner, but it was still present. During the following thirty minutes, we had excellent scope views of a female hepatic morph, and several flight photos and close views of the rump revealed it to be the much rarer Oriental Cuckoo, only the fifth local record. We were all pretty excited, but had one more bird on our minds. It was late, but we made the long trek back to Marunich on the north end of the island, and after an hour’s search on foot found the reported Terek Sandpiper and obtained good flight views. Wow, two more rarities in the bag.

The final morning on the island saw us back at the cliffs to enjoy the spectacle of alcids, gulls, cormorants and fulmars for the last time. We also carefully checked all the hotspots again and were able to obtain more views of the Oriental Cuckoo and Terek Sandpiper. The only new birds of note were a Tundra Swan and Buff-bellied Pipit, both wayward birds from the Alaskan mainland. Our return flight was delayed, but we did eventually arrive in Anchorage ready for some sleep and preparations for the next part of the tour.

The next leg of the journey started with a seafood feast for dinner in Anchorage, and we met the following morning, loading up the vans to start our trip to the interior and the Denali area right after breakfast. Our first stop out of Anchorage was at Hatcher Pass where a determined search along the steep slopes failed to rouse any White-tailed Ptarmigans, but a Willow Ptarmigan sitting up in a bush was a consolation. This species, which is the state bird of Alaska for good reason, proved to be common throughout the interior. Additional excellent finds included a roosting Harlequin Duck along a
small stream, and very approachable Golden-crowned Sparrows chirping atop bushes. We also encountered some of the common warblers of the interior, including Northern Waterthrush, and Wilson’s and Orange-crowned Warblers. A Hoary Marmot posed on some rocks for great photo opportunities. Our next port of call was the Eureka Roadside Rest House, where we not only topped off on coffee, but also added some birds on the lake right by the highway. Good finds included three Surf Scoters and our first Barrow’s Goldeneye, a male that showed well in the scope on the far side of the lake. A vocal Alder Flycatcher lured us around the corner and we soon had scope views of the bird calling from atop willows. While driving further towards Glenallen, we added roadside birds like Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk and Trumpeter Swan – all common, but no less stunning.

Stopping at Tolsona Wilderness Camp, I walked into the office to inquire about a certain owl. In past years a Great Grey Owl nested on their property and I was surprised to hear the manager say that the owls were back. That was unexpected and somewhat questionable news, since I had not heard anything through the birding grapevine. We headed up the hill anyway and, suddenly, a large bird flushed, it was not a Great Grey Owl, but one of the participants spotted it again and then another nearby, a pair of Great Horned Owls. We had great looks at these birds and they perched on spruce boughs – a very uncommon species in Alaska. The Great Grey Owl nest was of course empty and disused, as expected. The remainder of the woods were quiet, so we moved on towards Paxson and the Tangle River Inn. We finally pulled off the main highway and entered the Denali Highway, a beautiful stretch of wilderness backroad, winding for a wonderful 130 miles through endless stretches of tundra, mountains, and eventually boreal forest. We started on its eastern end, where the elevations are slightly higher and tundra and wetlands predominate. The first exciting find along the road was an adult Long-tailed Jaeger parked in the middle of the road feeding on some roadkill, and we were able to study the bird for as long as we liked. We reached the Tangle River Inn after what had been a long day, had dinner right away, and then settled into our cozy cabins. The resident Red Fox passed by once to offer some quick views.

We started the morning well before breakfast and assembled just outside of our cabins. A short drive down the highway got us in the right spot and we commenced our longish walk across the tundra. The uneven ground made progress slow, but we steadily advanced towards a low-lying area. Along the way, all the breeding sparrows were in full song, with American Tree, Red Fox, White-crowned and Savannah Sparrows sitting up to be admired. Ponds and lakes in the area held a fine assortment of waterfowl, including Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Mallard, Northern Pintail, our first Ring-necked Duck, Greater...
and Lesser Scaups, Long-tailed Duck, Bufflehead, and more Barrow's Goldeneye. We eventually reached a good spot and listened carefully, soon hearing the snappy song of a Smith’s Longspur. We tracked the bird carefully and ended up with good scope views of a pair as they crept through the tundra, generally keeping very low, but occasionally showing well. With such early success we hiked back, ready for breakfast. A pair of distant Rusty Blackbirds passed by while we had breakfast and after our meal we decided to explore the immediate environs of the lodge, adding good views of Blackpoll Warbler and Grey-cheeked Thrush. On the lake, several Bonaparte's Gulls showed among the throngs of Mew Gulls and Arctic Terns. With a packed lunch we drove back towards Paxson and stopped at mile 13, but unusually heavy snow blocked the trail to the top of the hill here, thwarting any chances for Rock Ptarmigan, unfortunately. We pushed on, and at the bridge found a nesting American Dipper and an obliging Wandering Tattler next to a Spotted Sandpiper. We birded some stretches of boreal forest before and after lunch, adding Grey Jay, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, the first Boreal Chickadees for this leg of the tour, and a singing Pine Grosbeak was a good find. Just before dinner some of us headed to the Paxson River and it did not take too long before we found Harlequin Ducks at a regular spot and a pair of Common Merganser that swam up the river. Happy with the day’s haul of birds, we returned for an early dinner. Upon returning to the lodge, we took a break before dinner and then enjoyed another hearty, home-cooked meal.

The following morning, we packed up and bid the Tangle River area goodbye, readying ourselves to drive the remainder of the Denali Highway. 120 miles of wilderness, dust, and gravel. The birding was spectacular throughout the day, with weather ranging from slight drizzle to rain to some sunshine. Before leaving the lodge area, we scanned the lake one last time, finding the usual Common Loon and Red-necked Grebe. A Merlin flew past the window while we were getting up from breakfast. We steadily drove along the deserted gravel road, stopping often to check the various wetlands and glacial kettle ponds. Several Barrow’s Goldeneyes close to the road were an early favourite and much further along we scoped a large lake late in the day, observing White-winged and Surf Scoters and the only Horned Grebe of the trip in full breeding plumage. Early on we also had a Horned Lark dust bathing in the middle of the road, and a perched Northern Shrike that eventually responded was also new for this portion of the trip.

A stunning surprise came halfway along the highway when a powerful raptor flushed by the side of the road. It was a Northern Goshawk carrying some mammalian prey. The bird took off and started circling in the distance with a nearby Northern Harrier, causing some confusion, so folks in the second van only
had fleeting looks. Luckily, much further along, we found yet another Northern Goshawk, this one sitting by the edge of a lake with a freshly killed duck in its talons. Amazing, as this species is not that commonly seen in Alaska. This time, everyone had good scope views. A flock of Bohemian Waxwing was unfortunately less cooperative, flying by too quickly. We made several strategic stops and finally heard an Arctic Warbler sing in some brush at quite a distance from the road. Fortunately, this territorial bird responded well and came right in, perching less than two metres from the photographers, offering some of the best views I have ever had of this species. Once we reached the boreal forest, we made a stop for Northern Hawk-Owl and, incredibly, the first stop we tried had a responsive bird. We were about to leave when one participant looked behind her in the second van and there it was, classically perched atop a spruce. We enjoyed scope views of the calling bird and it flew right over our heads, another great Alaskan bird. We eventually ran out of wilderness byway and rejoined the main highway near Cantwell, proceeding to the Denali National Park Wilderness Access Center to pick up bus tickets for the following morning. We then drove to the Tonglen Lakes Lodge, a beautiful place with secluded log cabins set among boreal forest overlooking a serene lake. As it was raining heavily, we quickly unloaded, got everyone settled and headed for dinner in Denali Village.

We left the Tonglen Lakes Lodge well before six in the morning with a packed breakfast and lunch, looking forward to our full day in Denali National Park. Our visit coincided with an unseasonal snow storm, giving us the unexpected opportunity to see what Denali looks like in the winter. Needless to say, the mountain itself was shrouded in clouds all day, and we never managed to see it on any other day during the tour either, which is expected. The rough weather slowed animal movements, but we still saw Moose, Thinhorn (Dall) Sheep, Caribou, dozens of Arctic Ground Squirrels, and Red Fox. On the first stretch of the park road bird activity was relatively subdued, with only Grey Jays and Black-billed Magpies noted. At the first major rest stop, we had to wait an extra thirty minutes as the road across the next pass was too icy. Naturally, we took the opportunity to walk around, take in the amazing views and look for birds. Suddenly, a Spruce Grouse shot across the road right next to us and disappeared in the dense spruce forest. Quickly going after it, we found it again and eventually gathered the entire group until everyone had close looks of this tame bird. It was a male, totally unconcerned by our presence as they often are, and nibbling away on spruce and herbage right in front of us. Finally, we got the go-ahead to proceed, boarded our bus again, and made another successful stop at Polychrome Pass, where a Gyrfalcon sat on the cliff, allowing us to scope it for a few minutes. We reached the Eielson Visitor Center, where we had our packed lunch and then headed back. A few
brave souls attempted to hike a bit near Polychrome Pass, but the snow came down thick, and except for a Golden Eagle on its nest, things were quiet. After the ten hours in the park, we returned to the lodge and had an excellent dinner in the lodge’s common room.

During this full day, we drove back to Anchorage to spend the night there before moving on to the Kenai Peninsula. We still had some target birds left and made several stops along the way. First, we pulled into a lakeside campground, and the mixed forest of deciduous trees and spruce was alive with birdsong. We saw the first Hairy Woodpecker of the trip, observed a Boreal Chickadee entering a nest cavity, got good views of a Northern Waterthrush, and finally found the main target, two Bohemian Waxwings that showed exceedingly well. Next on the agenda was a stop in a large burn near the small community of Willow. We pulled off the main road and, after turning down several gravel lanes, stopped at a location that had been productive in the past. Here we first noted that one of the tires on the second van was losing air. We decided to bird first and worry about the tire later. It took all but a few seconds before a Black-backed Woodpecker shot through the trees in front of us, and after some searching everyone had fantastic views. The second time around the male flew in to perch on a dead tree, preening in full view for minutes on end. We drove a bit further while the leaking tire still had enough air, and stopped at another promising spot. Again, it took about two minutes before an American Three-toed Woodpecker flew in, this was getting too easy. We found the nest quickly thereafter and a dedicated wait resulted in several fantastic views of this distinctive woodpecker. While waiting, the only Western Osprey of the trip flew over. We quickly exchanged the tire in place; but before driving back to Anchorage, we watched a pair of vocal Western Wood Pewees, heard an Olive-sided Flycatcher, and counted the first Black-capped Chickadee of the trip. Back in Anchorage, we settled into the familiar Coast Inn and then had the most excellent seafood and fresh salmon dinner in downtown. A few of us walked to Connors Lake to tick the breeding pair of Pacific Loons.

Today, we drove to the Kenai Peninsula with a completely different set of habitats and many new bird possibilities. Before leaving the area, we paid a visit to Westchester Lagoon, a must stop in the Anchorage area, and the high tide had brought in a Hudsonian Godwit that allowed close scope studies on the small island in the lagoon. We also found the first Downy Woodpeckers of the trip here. Pausing at Potter Marsh, we stretched our legs and took advantage of the many good photographic opportunities of Arctic Terns, Wilson's Snipes, Alder Flycatchers, and finally found our first Violet-green Swallows. Best of all, though, was a vocal pair of Rusty Blackbirds that offered much better views than earlier in the trip. The male sat up on some willows, uttering its strange but distinct call. We combined lunch with birding at Summit Lakes Lodge.
After a nice sit-down meal, we wandered towards the campground in the back and quickly found the main quarry, a Townsend’s Warbler lighting up the spruce tops as it bounced around. We also had excellent looks at a Hermit Thrush here, the only one actually seen during the trip. Before reaching Seward, our destination for the day, we made one final stop just outside of town to watch a very productive feeder setup. Here, Sooty Fox Sparrow, the bizarrely large, dark Song Sparrow, Pine Grosbeak, Pine Siskin and even the locally uncommon Red Crossbills all made regular visits. The hummingbird feeders were frequented by at least two Rufous Hummingbirds, and a Varied Thrush hopping on the lawn in front of the house gave better views than we could have hoped for. In Seward, we checked in and then paid a visit to the informative Alaska Sealife Center, studying up on some of the alcids we hoped to see the next day.

We could not have asked for better conditions – calm seas and sunshine all day – and it turned out to be a boat trip into Kenai Fjords for the books. We had a quick breakfast at the Lighthouse Cafe and before the boat tour even commenced, we picked up our first new bird in the form of a Northwestern Crow parading in the parking lot. We boarded the small boat on time and met the captain and deckhand, both very knowledgeable about the local bird and wildlife. First, we noted Double-crested Cormorants flying into the bay, and then we got a call from another boat about a pod of Orcas. While we always hope to see Orcas, it is never guaranteed. We caught up with the pod and were able to get good views of at least three animals coming to the surface regularly. Then the real drama unfolded as a group of Dall’s Porpoises swam close and the Orcas decided to chase after them. The male of the pod breached several times and we saw it fully out of the water. This was a transient pod and throughout the day we would see two additional resident pods with their longer dorsal fins. As we were leaving Resurrection Bay the bird numbers rose steadily, and we counted the first Tufted and Horned Puffins. Pigeon Guillemots were seen close to shore and Rhinoceros Auklets were numerous once we reached the entrance of Aialik Bay. A close Humpback Whale provided another mammal distraction while we were under steam.

Closer to the glacier in Aialik Bay, we started to scan for Kittlitz’s Murrelets, a tiny alcid that prefers the smooth, silty waters near the glacier. It was difficult to not get distracted by the dramatic landscape of towering mountains bisected by rugged glaciers. We found several murrelets, but all were Marbled, some of them giving great views. Then, finally, we spied a suspicious looking pair far ahead. We motored closer and the captain did an excellent job slowly circling the boat for better and better views. The Kittlitz’s Murrelets swam closely in front of us, with one bird in breeding plumage and the other in non-breeding plumage for a great comparison. With the main target of the boat trip under our belts, we headed out of the bay towards the Chiswell Islands, where we picked up many Ancient Murrelets, flighty Parakeet Auklets, and found a handful of Thick-billed
Murres among the Common Murre colony on the cliff. We also stopped at a Steller’s Sea Lion rookery and were able to admire these marine behemoths at close quarters, with the two-tonne males roaring above the surf.

For our final day of this leg of the tour, we planned to bird more in the Seward area and then drive back to Anchorage to arrive in the late afternoon. The morning started out overcast with a light drizzle, and we were glad we had completed the boat trip the day before. Nevertheless, we headed to Tonsina Point and duly added some birds to our list. First, a vocal group of Chestnut-backed Chickadees passed through the tall hemlocks and a thin whistle attracted us to a Brown Creeper right in front of us. On the final try, a Pacific Wren responded and the bird perched up right at the top of a spruce for phenomenal views as it belched forth its complex song. A pair of Golden-crowned Kinglets also passed through, completing the set of possible species. We stopped one last time at the feeders before leaving the Kenai and had better views of Chestnut-backed Chickadees. During the remainder of the day it rained heavily, and instead of making more stops we continued straight to Anchorage, where the dry and warm Coast Inn was most welcome.

Barrow was full of surprises and big bonuses this year, plus we had excellent views of all the expected species. In addition, it was a good lemming year, making Snowy Owls relatively numerous and easy to find. We touched down from Anchorage in the evening and proceeded to the Airport Inn to check in and sort our gear. We layered up and assembled relatively quickly to set out for our first exploration of the high arctic tundra surrounding Barrow. Barrow, or Utqiagvik, is the northernmost city in the United States, and perches on the coast where the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas meet. The land is flat as far as the eye can see and the annual spring melt creates endless wetlands favoured by loons, shorebirds, and waterfowl, most famously the eiders. Our first stop was along the shore of a gravel pond near the old dump. A wide collection of garbage made the location less than scenic, but after careful scrutiny we found the target Red-necked Stint here – a very rare breeding species in Alaska. We enjoyed close scope views of this bird, literally glowing in its breeding finery and thus easy to keep track of among the duller Semipalmated Sandpipers. Suddenly, another stint appeared, and this one was more flighty. After a short chase and scope views, it turned out to be a second Red-necked Stint, not the hoped-for Little Stint.

We turned onto Cake Eater road next and were immediately surrounded by shorebirds, with Pectoral Sandpipers booming across the tundra, Long-billed Dowitchers taking to the air excitedly calling, Dunlins chattering away, and Red-necked and Red Phalaropes spinning in every available puddle. At one stop, one participant asked whether what they saw was an owl or not. Sure enough, there it was, our first Snowy Owl, perched on a short post,
allowing us to get a bit closer for great scope views. It also proved to be an excellent year for Short-eared Owls, and we would see numerous birds each day. Later that evening, we would even find the Snowy Owl’s mate on an active nest nearby. We drove further into the tundra, where Greater White-fronted Geese, Brent, and Tundra Swans were all abundant. At Footprint Lake we finally hit the jackpot, with no less than a dozen Steller’s Eiders showing well, and the birds were clearly paired up already. A careful scan also revealed several stately King Eiders and then a pair of sleepy Spectacled Eiders. What a relief to have all the critical species so early. The long day and late hour finally caught up to us, and we returned to the hotel.

We covered many of the same areas today, but also explored Freshwater Lake Road and Stevenson’s Road, at least as far as we could drive. Barrow also had large amounts of snow remaining and big stretches of sea ice, thus concentrating many of the birds. Our main goal was to obtain better views of the eiders. We accomplished this in the evening, when we found many more Steller’s Eiders and multiple Spectacled Eiders that were active and showed very well. Some Common Eiders in flight earlier in the day got us the full eider sweep. Other new species that we turned up today included a flock of Snow Geese in flight, a Yellow-billed Loon that required some manoeuvring but eventually woke up to reveal its namesake bill, and a pair of Baird’s Sandpipers with the male in full display. A quick stop in town had us admiring Hoary Redpolls coming to a feeder and the short drive along Freshwater Lake road got us both Snowy and Short-eared Owls.

With our flight leaving in the evening, we made the most of the final day. First thing in the morning, we headed back out to Freshwater Lake Road. Near the end, a large snowdrift stopped us from driving further and we carefully scanned the tundra from there. Two Sabine’s Gulls were an excellent addition and we all studied them in the scope. I scanned a bit further out and noticed two small pinkish things walking across the snow: Ross’s Gulls! It was difficult to contain the excitement, but eventually, everyone got scope views. Then, we set out across the frozen tundra to obtain closer views and photos of these rare and beautiful gulls. We were able to follow them for an hour as they lazily drifted across the tundra, picking food off the snow and calling occasionally. Eventually, they settled close to the road where we could study them in the scope at leisure. The two pairs of gorgeous Sabine’s Gull nearby were almost forgotten about. Back in town, we had a celebratory lunch at the Top of the World Hotel before heading back out. This time we followed a side road and a short walk across flat tundra got us close to the display area of Buff-breasted Sandpipers. This must be one of the finest spectacles of the high arctic, and we watched two males lifting their wings, stretching their heads, and bouncing back and forth. One of the most memorable moments in Barrow.

We drove back out to Cake Eater road to see whether we could watch the Snowy Owl again on the nest, but foggy conditions made it difficult. We decided to drive back and get ready for our departure,
but Barrow was not quite done with us yet, or we were not quite finished in Barrow. As we drove, we flushed several small sandpipers and I noticed something bright rufous. A quick stop and exit from the car, careful scanning, and there it was: a Little Stint in full breeding plumage. For the next twenty minutes, we studied the bird in the scope as it foraged among Semipalated Sandpipers, occasionally even coming onto the gravel road. This was a great eleventh-hour bird and we returned to the hotel elated with what Barrow had offered us. We loaded up the vehicles one final time, drove to the airport to check in, and then made a run to Subway to get some snacks for the plane ride. The flight left slightly delayed, but got us to Anchorage in the early evening, where we said our goodbyes and returned home with many life birds and memories to share.

Annotated List of species recorded

Note: Number in brackets () indicate number of days on the tour the species was recorded. List powered through the report generator of our partner iGoTerra.

Birds (201 in total: 200 seen)


Status codes: E = Endemic, NE = Near-endemic, I = Introduced

IUCN codes: CR = Critically endangered, EN = Endangered, VU = Vulnerable, EW = Extinct in the Wild, NT = Near Threatened, DD = Data Deficient

United States (Continental)

**Ducks, Geese & Swans *Anatidae***

**Brant Goose**
Hundreds seen well in Nome and smaller numbers in Barrow. *Branta bernicla nigricans*

**Canada Goose**
Several seen in Anchorage. *Branta canadensis parvipes*

**Cackling Goose**
Common in the Nome area. *Branta hutchinsii taavneri*

**Emperor Goose (NT)**
One scoped at a distance in Nome where it was loafing on the mudflats of Safety Sound. *Anser canagicus*

**Snow Goose**
A flock seen well in flight in Barrow. *Anser caerulescens caerulescens*

**Greater White-fronted Goose**
Abundant in Barrow where we had many close views. *Anser albifrons gambelli*

**Trumpeter Swan**
Seen well along the Denali Highway and while travelling to and from Denali National Park, a stunning large swan. *Cygnus buccinator*
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**Tundra Swan**
Cygnus columbianus columbianus
Surprisingly several seen along the Denali Highway and common in Nome and Barrow, also noted on St Paul Island where it is a vagrant.

**Northern Shoveler**
Spatula clypeata
Several in Nome and along the Denali Highway.

**Gadwall**
Mareca strepera strepera
St Paul Island, Denali area, and Anchorage area.

**Eurasian Wigeon**
Mareca penelope
Pairs seen very well on St Paul Island.

**American Wigeon**
Mareca americana
Widespread.

**Mallard**
Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos
Fairly widespread.

**Northern Pintail**
Anas acuta
Abundant in many places.

**Eurasian Teal**
Anas crecca
Studied closely on St Paul Island.

**Green-winged Teal**
Anas carolinensis
Common in the Denali area and Nome.

**Ring-necked Duck**
Aythya collaris
Uncommon along Denali Highway and seen at Potter Marsh Anchorage.

**Tufted Duck**
Aythya fuligula
A pair studied at length on St Paul Island.

**Greater Scaup**
Aythya marila nearctica
Common throughout.

**Lesser Scaup**
Aythya affinis
Not as common as previous species.

**Steller's Eider (VU)**
Polysticta stelleri
Up to 40 of these beautiful and rare seaducks in Barrow with many close views.

**Spectacled Eider**
Somateria fischeri
First a male seen in Nome and then several pairs scoped in Barrow.

**King Eider**
Somateria spectabilis
First seen in Nome and St Paul Island with many more in Barrow.

**Common Eider**
Somateria mollissima v-nigrum
Abundant in Nome and also seen in flight in Barrow.

**Harlequin Duck**
Histrionicus histrionicus
Common throughout seen everywhere except Barrow.

**Surf Scoter**
Melanitta perspicillata
Many noted in Nome, seen again en route to Denali Highway and along the highway itself.

**White-winged Scoter**
Melanitta deglandi deglandi
Numerous in Nome with several large flocks, a single noted on St Paul Island and smaller numbers along the Denali Highway.

**Black Scoter (NT)**
Melanitta americana
Mainly observed in Nome.

**Long-tailed Duck (VU)**
Clangula hyemalis
Abundant throughout, the most common waterfowl of the trip.

**Bufflehead**
Bucephala albeola
A few seen along the Denali Highway.
Common Goldeneye  
*Bucephala clangula americana*
Small groups seen in Nome and along Denali Highway, surprisingly scarce during the trip.

Barrow's Goldeneye  
*Bucephala islandica*
Common along the Denali Highway where we had many close views of this beautiful duck.

Common Merganser  
*Mergus merganser americanus*
Denali Highway.

Red-breasted Merganser  
*Mergus serrator*
Common throughout.

**Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies Phasianidae**

Spruce Grouse  
*Falcipennis canadensis osgoodi*
During a weather delay along the park road in Denali National Park one flew across the road. A bit of searching in the dense forest resulted in views down to a metre or two as the bird foraged right in front of us!

Rock Ptarmigan  
*Lagopus muta rupestris*
Best seen along Teller Road in Nome where a pair posed for photos.

Willow Ptarmigan  
*Lagopus lagopus alascensis*
Common in Nome and in Denali National Park.

**Loons Gaviidae**

Red-throated Loon  
*Gavia stellata*
Abundant in Nome and many seen along Denali Highway also many in Barrow.

Pacific Loon  
*Gavia pacifica*
Best views Connor Lake Anchorage and many in Barrow.

Common Loon  
*Gavia immer*
Seen on St Paul Island and again along the Denali Highway.

Yellow-billed Loon (NT)  
*Gavia adamsii*
Great views of one resting on a lake in Barrow.

**Petrels, Shearwaters & Diving Petrels Procellariidae**

Northern Fulmar  
*Fulmarus glacialis rodgersii*
Breeding on St Paul Island.

**Grebes Podicipedidae**

Red-necked Grebe  
*Podiceps grisegena holbollii*
Common throughout the mainland with courting pairs in Anchorage.

Horned Grebe  
*Podiceps auritus cornutus*
One seen in full breeding plumage Denali Highway.

**Cormorants and Shags Phalacrocoracidae**

Pelagic Cormorant  
*Phalacrocorax pelagicus pelagicus*
Common in Nome, St Paul Island, and Kenai Fjords National Park.

Red-faced Cormorant  
*Phalacrocorax urile*
Great views on St Paul Island and seen again Kenai Fjords National Park.

Double-crested Cormorant  
*Phalacrocorax auritus cincinatus*
First seen on St Paul Island where it is rare and many seen during our boat tour in Kenai Fjords National Park.
Osprey Pandionidae
Western Osprey Pandion haliaetus carolinensis
Seen briefly overhead in the Willow area during our woodpecker quest.

Kites, Hawks & Eagles Accipitridae
Golden Eagle Aquila chrysaetos canadensis
Several seen along the Denali Highway and also seen well in Nome near at an active nest. We also found one on a nest in Denali National Park.
Northern Goshawk Accipiter gentilis atricapillus
Wow! Two in one day along the Denali Highway with both carrying prey. One in tundra with a mammal in its talons and another scoped on the edge of a lake with a recently captured duck. An uncommon bird in Alaska.
Northern Harrier Circus hudsonius
Common in the interior and Nome.
Bald Eagle Haliaeetus leucocephalus
Common in coastal Alaska.
Red-tailed Hawk Buteo jamaicensis harlani
Fairly common while driving in the interior.
Rough-legged Buzzard Buteo lagopus sanctijohannis
Best seen in Nome. Were present on an active nest along the Teller Road.

Cranes Gruidae
Sandhill Crane Antigone canadensis canadensis
Nome, Anchorage area, and Barrow.

Plovers and Lapwings Charadriidae
Pacific Golden Plover Pluvialis fulva
Common in Nome where many seen in their breeding finery.
American Golden Plover Pluvialis dominica
Nome and Barrow.
Grey Plover Pluvialis squatarola squatarola
Only seen in Nome along Teller Road.
Semipalmated Plover Charadrius semipalmatus
Common and seen throughout the tour.

Sandpipers and Allies Scolopacidae
Bristle-thighed Curlew (VU) Numenius tahitiensis
Our outing to Coffee Dome along the Kougarok Road proved very successful with at least five birds noted during our hike with three strolling in front of us for many minutes.
Whimbrel Numenius phaeopus rufiventris
Nome and Denali Highway.
Bar-tailed Godwit Limosa lapponica baueri
Flight views in Nome along Safety Sound road and one present throughout our stay on St Paul Island.
Hudsonian Godwit Limosa haemastica
Seen very well Westchester Lagoon in Anchorage.
Ruddy Turnstone Arenaria interpres morinella
Nome, St Paul Island, and Barrow.
Black Turnstone  
_Arenaria melanocephala_
Fantastic views in Nome of this range-restricted shorebird.

Red Knot  
_Calidris canutus roselaari_
Great to find one on its breeding grounds along the Teller Road in Nome where it is a low-density
nesting species.

Surfbird  
_Calidris virgata_
Many in the feeding aggregations in Nome along the shore.

Red-necked Stint  
_Calidris ruficollis_
Two breeding plumaged birds during our first evening in Barrow were a definite highlight.

Sanderling  
_Calidris alba rubida_
Nome and Barrow.

Dunlin  
_Calidris alpina pacifica_
Common in Nome and Barrow.

Rock Sandpiper  
_Calidris ptilocnemis ptilocnemis_
Abundant on St Paul Island and we also found them in Nome where it is an uncommon breeding
species. The subspecies in Nome is smaller and darker belonging to ssp. _C. p. tschuktschorum_.

Baird's Sandpiper  
_Calidris bairdii_
After a bit of searching, we found a pair with the male in full display in Barrow.

Little Stint  
_Calidris minuta_
The eleventh-hour bird in Barrow with a bird in full breeding regalia along Cake Eater Road.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper (NT)  
_Calidris subruficollis_
Wow, to see these neat sandpipers in full display on the remote tundra of Barrow will always
remain one of the top birding memories for all participants.

Pectoral Sandpiper  
_Calidris melanotos_
Common in Nome and abundant in Barrow with males hooting and in full display flights across the
tundra.

Semipalmated Sandpiper (NT)  
_Calidris pusilla_
Abundant in both Nome and Barrow.

Western Sandpiper  
_Calidris mauri_
Uncommon Nome and Barrow.

Long-billed Dowitcher  
_Limnodromus scolopaceus_
Common in Barrow.

Wilson's Snipe  
_Gallinago delicata_
Fairly common throughout and often heard.

Terek Sandpiper  
_Xenus cinereus_
Another vagrant from Eurasia and seen well during two days on St Paul Island.

Red-necked Phalarope  
_Phalaropus lobatus_
Abundant St Paul Island, Nome, Denali, and Barrow.

Red Phalarope  
_Phalaropus fulicarius_
Huge flocks on St Paul Island and an abundant nesting species in Barrow with birds spinning in
every available pond and puddle, even in the middle of the flooded road!

Common Sandpiper  
_Actitis hypoleucos_
Seen briefly on St Paul Island, but not by all.

Spotted Sandpiper  
_Actitis macularius_
Denali Highway.

Wandering Tattler  
_Tringa incana_
Great views along the Denali Highway with a bird scoped for many minutes.

Lesser Yellowlegs  
_Tringa flavipes_
Brief views in flight Potter Marsh Anchorage.

**Common Greenshank**  \(Tringa nebularia\)
Yet another rarity seen well on St Paul Island where it was present in Antone Slough.

**Greater Yellowlegs**  \(Tringa melanoleuca\)
Flight views only Denali Highway.

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**Gulls, Terns & Skimmers**  \(Laridae\)

**Black-legged Kittiwake**  \(Rissa tridactyla pollicaris\)
Abundant on St Paul Island, Nome, and Seward area.

**Red-legged Kittiwake (VU)**  \(Rissa brevirostris\)
Great views of this Alaska speciality on St Paul Island where we saw dozens.

**Sabine's Gull**  \(Xema sabini\)
Common this year in Nome with many observed very close to shore and seen again on the tundra in Barrow.

**Bonaparte's Gull**  \(Chroicocephalus philadelphia\)
Denali Highway and Anchorage area.

**Black-headed Gull**  \(Chroicocephalus ridibundus\)
As we were heading back to town for dinner two adult plumaged birds had us turn around quickly and a short chase resulted in good flight views of this rarity.

**Ross's Gull**  \(Rhodostethia rosea\)
One of the absolute trip highlights was a pair of these stunning, high arctic gulls in Barrow. We were able to follow them across the frozen tundra for nearly an hour, eventually getting scope views at less than five meters. A very rare bird in Alaska outside of the fall season.

**Mew Gull**  \(Larus canus brachyrhynchus\)
Common in the Nome, Denali, and Anchorage areas.

**Glaucous-winged Gull**  \(Larus glaucescens\)
The abundant large gull in the Anchorage and Seward areas.

**Glaucous Gull**  \(Larus hyperboreus barrovianus\)
Abundant in Nome and Barrow.

**American Herring Gull**  \(Larus smithsonianus\)
A few noted around Anchorage and along the Denali Highway where it is an uncommon nesting species.

**Vega Gull**  \(Larus vegae vegae\)
Seen well in Nome.

**Slaty-backed Gull**  \(Larus schistisagus\)
An adult bird at the landfill in Nome was scoped at length and a first cycle bird observed briefly on St Paul Island.

**Aleutian Tern**  \(Onychoprion aleuticus\)
Fairly common in Nome with excellent flight views.

**Common Tern**  \(Sternula hirundo longipennis\)
An uncommon species in Alaska, but we found one of the Siberian subspecies on Weather Bureau Lake on St Paul Island.

**Arctic Tern**  \(Sternula paradisaea\)
Abundant in Nome, Denali, and Anchorage, and a few had arrived in Barrow.

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**Skuas and Jaegers**  \(Stercorariidae\)

**Pomarine Jaeger**  \(Stercorarius pomarinus\)
Good numbers in Barrow this year with birds on nests already, also seen in Nome.
Parasitic Jaeger *Stercorarius parasiticus*
A pair tearing apart a lemming in Barrow revealed that it was indeed a good lemming year, also seen in Nome, both dark and pale morphs.

Long-tailed Jaeger *Stercorarius longicaudus pallescens*
Common in the Nome area and seen well on the Denali Highway, literally on the highway feeding on roadkill.

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**Auks, Murres, and Puffins *Alcidae***

Thick-billed Murre *Uria lomvia arra*
Common St Paul Island and a few seen in Nome and during Kenai Fjords National Park boat trip.

Common Murre *Uria aalge inornata*
Less numerous than previous species on St Paul Island, but abundant Nome and Kenai Fjords National Park.

Pigeon Guillemot *Cepphus columba adiantus*
Seen St Paul Island and many in Seward area.

Marbled Murrelet (EN) *Brachyramphus marmoratus*
Great views during our boat trip Kenai Fjords National Park.

Kittlitz's Murrelet (CR) *Brachyramphus brevirostris*
Fantastic views of a pair that kept coming closer and closer during our Kenai Fjords National Park boat trip as we neared the end of Aialik Bay.

Ancient Murrelet *Synthliboramphus antiquus antiquus*
Many seen during Kenai Fjords boat trip.

Parakeet Auklet *Aethia psittacula*
Abundant on St Paul Island and three seen well Kenai Fjords.

Least Auklet *Aethia pusilla*
Abundant on St Paul Island.

Crested Auklet *Aethia cristatella*
Fairly common on St Paul Island with good studies of a single bird on the cliff.

Rhinoceros Auklet *Cerorhinca monocerata*
One briefly seen in flight on St Paul Island where it is rare and hundreds Kenai Fjords.

Horned Puffin *Fratercula corniculata*
Common St Paul Island, a few seen off Cape Nome, and common Kenai Fjords.

Tufted Puffin *Fratercula cirrhata*
Common St Paul Island and Kenai Fjords.

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**Pigeons and Doves *Columbidae***

Rock Dove *Columba livia var. domestica*
Seen around Nome and Anchorage.

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**Cuckoos *Cuculidae***

Oriental Cuckoo *Cuculus optatus*
One of the rarest birds of the trip with a hepatic morph female in the quarry on St Paul Island and we had good views of it during two days. Only the fifth local record.

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**Owls *Strigidae***

Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus*
A great year for this stunning owl in Barrow and we saw up to four per day with one active nest visible from the road.
Great Horned Owl  
*Bubo virginianus lagophonus*
A surprise find at Tolsona Wilderness Camp since this species is somewhat uncommon in Alaska, but we saw both members of the pair on their day roosts.

Northern Hawk-Owl  
*Surnia ulula caparoch*
Great spotting on this one along the Denali Highway and then two more in Denali National Park, including one on an active nest.

Short-eared Owl  
*Asio flammeus flammeus*
Seen briefly on St Paul Island, also Denali National Park in the snow, and then common in Barrow.

**Hummingbirds* Trochilidae**

Rufous Hummingbird  
*Selasphorus rufus*
Up to two seen on feeders outside of Seward.

**Kingfishers* Alcedinidae**

Belted Kingfisher  
*Megaceryle alcyon*
Seen briefly flying across road by some while driving to Seward.

**Woodpeckers* Picidae**

American Three-toed Woodpecker  
*Picoides dorsalis fasciatus*
A great find of an active nest near Willow where we could study this uncommon species at length.

Black-backed Woodpecker  
*Picoides arcticus*
Likely an active nest nearby and a male showed well several times near Willow.

Downy Woodpecker  
*Dryobates pubescens medianus*
Westchester Lagoon Anchorage.

Hairy Woodpecker  
*Leuconotopicus villosus septentrionalis*
Best seen at feeders outside of Seward.

Northern Flicker  
*Colaptes auratus luteus*
Seen in flight while driving towards the Denali Highway.

**Falcons and Caracaras* Falconidae**

Merlin  
*Falco columbarius columbarius*
Seen briefly outside our lodgings along the Denali Highway.

Gyrfalcon  
*Falco rusticolus*
Wow, what a start to the tour with one on a nest Council Road in Nome, another seen in flight along Teller Road, and yet another perched on a cliff in the scope Denali National Park.

Peregrine Falcon  
*Falco peregrinus tundrius*
A pair seen in Nome and one flying fast along the coast in Barrow.

**Tyrant Flycatchers* Tyrannidae**

Say's Phoebe  
*Sayornis saya saya*
Nesting in Nome and along the Denali Highway where a pair entertained us every morning at the Tangle River Inn.

Olive-sided Flycatcher (NT)  
*Contopus cooperi*
Heard only in the Willow area.

Western Wood Pewee  
*Contopus sordidulus saturatus*
A vocal pair studied closely Willow area.

Alder Flycatcher  
*Empidonax alnorum*
Common throughout the Denali and Kenai section of the tour.
**Shrikes Laniidae**

**Northern Shrike**  
*Lanius borealis borealis*  
Seen well in Nome, including an active nest, and scope views of one along the Denali Highway.

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**Crows, Jays, and Magpies Corvidae**

**Grey Jay**  
*Perisoreus canadensis pacificus*  
Common in the interior boreal forests with great views in the campground where we had a picnic lunch.

**Steller's Jay**  
*Cyanocitta stelleri stelleri*  
Seen well in the Seward area.

**Black-billed Magpie**  
*Pica hudsonia*  
Common throughout the Denali and Kenai sections of the trip.

**Northwestern Crow**  
*Corvus caurinus*  
Seen well in the Seward Harbor and Kenai Fjords National Park.

**Northern Raven**  
*Corvus corax principalis*  
Common throughout.

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**Waxwings Bombycillidae**

**Bohemian Waxwing**  
*Bombycilla garrulus pallidiceps*  
A great find at Byers Lake where two showed in the scope and also a small group near the end of Council Road in Nome where it is very rare.

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**Tits, Chickadees Paridae**

**Black-capped Chickadee**  
*Poecile atricapillus turneri*  
Seen well in the Willow area.

**Boreal Chickadee**  
*Poecile hudsonicus hudsonicus*  
Great views of a pair along the Denali Highway and seen again at an active nest Byers Lake.

**Chestnut-backed Chickadee**  
*Poecile rufescens rufescens*  
Good views of a small group Seward and then better views near the feeders outside of Seward.

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**Larks Alaudidae**

**Horned Lark**  
*Eremophila alpestris arcticola*  
One on the road Denali Highway.

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**Swallows Hirundinidae**

**Sand Martin**  
*Riparia riparia riparia*  
Common along Denali Highway and in Nome, also seen on St Paul Island.

**Tree Swallow**  
*Tachycineta bicolor*  
Common Denali Highway and abundant around Anchorage.

**Violet-green Swallow**  
*Tachycineta thalassina thalassina*  
Seen well Potter Marsh Anchorage and Seward.

**American Cliff Swallow**  
*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota pyrrhonota*  
Abundant Nome and Denali Highway.

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**Leaf warblers and allies Phylloscopidae**

**Arctic Warbler**  
*Phylloscopus borealis keniicotti*  
Some of the best views of this species along the Denali Highway where a bird came in very close, singing within a metre of us, offering great photo opportunities.
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**Kinglets Regulidae**

**Golden-crowned Kinglet**  
*Regulus satrapa apache*
Seward area where seen in the tops of the tall hemlocks.

**Ruby-crowned Kinglet**  
*Regulus calendula grinnelli*
Fairly numerous at least by voice in the boreal forest and one seen in Nome at the end of Council Road where rare.

**Wrens Troglodytidae**

**Pacific Wren**  
*Troglodytes pacificus alascensis*
Seen on St Paul Island and in Seward where one sang from the top of a tall spruce.

**Nuthatches Sittidae**

**Red-breasted Nuthatch**  
*Sitta canadensis*
At feeders outside of Seward.

**Treecreepers Certhiidae**

**Brown Creeper**  
*Certhia americana alascensis*
A single, vocal bird seen well Seward area.

**Starlings Sturnidae**

**Common Starling**  
*Sturnus vulgaris vulgaris*
Anchorage area.

**Thrushes and Allies Turdidae**

**Varied Thrush**  
*Ixoreus naevius meruloides*
Seen well in Nome and again at feeders outside of Seward.

**Grey-cheeked Thrush**  
*Catharus minimus aliciae*
Common in Nome and along the Denali Highway.

**Swainson's Thrush**  
*Catharus ustulatus incanus*
The common thrush of lush boreal and deciduous forests between Denali and Anchorage.

**Hermit Thrush**  
*Catharus guttatus guttatus*
Summit Lake had a responsive individual and others heard in the Seward area.

**Eyebrowed Thrush**  
*Turdus obscurus*
The first evening on St Paul Island delivered at least four of these rare vagrants between Hutchinson's Hill and Polovina Quarry.

**American Robin**  
*Turdus migratorius migratorius*
Common in Nome and Denali area.

**Chats, Old World Flycatchers Muscicapidae**

**Grey-streaked Flycatcher**  
*Muscicapa griseisticta*
One of the rarer vagrants from Eurasia with a bird present for three days on St Paul Island right on the beach at Marunich and we enjoyed many great views.

**Bluethroat**  
*Luscinia svecica svecica*
One dropped into our laps along the Teller Road in full flight display outside of typical habitat. The bird then perched on the tundra for minutes on end.

**Red-flanked Bluetail**  
*Tarsiger cyanurus*
An elusive bird seen by guide only in a rugged section of the quarry St Paul Island.

**Northern Wheatear**  
*Oenanthe oenanthe oenanthe*
Great views in Nome and again in Denali National Park where it is uncommon, this species migrates to Alaska all the way from sub-Saharan Africa.

**Dippers Cinclidae**

**American Dipper**  
*Cinclus mexicanus unicolor*  
Seen well along the Denali Highway and briefly in Nome.

**Wagtails, Pipits Motacillidae**

**Eastern Yellow Wagtail**  
*Motacilla tschutschensis tschutschensis*  
Excellent views in Nome, a range restricted nesting species in Alaska.

**Olive-backed Pipit**  
*Anthus hodgsoni*  
St Paul Island witnessed a veritable invasion of this vagrant this spring and we saw up to three birds, including one on Polovina Hill in full flight display.

**Buff-bellied Pipit**  
*Anthus rubescens rubescens*  
Denali Highway and St Paul Island.

**Finches Fringillidae**

**Brambling**  
*Fringilla montifringilla*  
Several seen well on St Paul Island.

**Pine Grosbeak**  
*Pinicola enucleator leucura*  
First seen in campground where we enjoyed a picnic lunch Denali Highway and then a pair at feeders outside of Seward.

**Grey-crowned Rosy Finch**  
*Leucosticte tephrocotis umbrina*  
Abundant on St Paul Island.

**Common Redpoll**  
*Acanthis flammea flammea*  
Common along Denali Highway.

**Arctic Redpoll**  
*Acanthis hornemanni exilipes*  
Common in Nome and Barrow.

**Red Crossbill**  
*Loxia curvirostra sitkensis*  
A small flock was present just outside of Seward and seen well near feeders.

**Pine Siskin**  
*Spinus pinus pinus*  
Seen outside of Seward.

**Longspurs and Snow Buntings Calcariidae**

**Lapland Longspur**  
*Calcarius lapponicus alascensis*  
Abundant St Paul Island, Nome, and Barrow.

**Smith's Longspur**  
*Calcarius pictus*  
We saw at least two birds along the Denali Highway where it is a very rare breeding species. This was the same location that held around two pairs during the two prior springs.

**Snow Bunting**  
*Plectrophenax nivalis nivalis*  
St Paul Island and abundant in Barrow where birds were singing from every perch.

**New World Buntings and Sparrows Passerellidae**

**Red Fox Sparrow**  
*Passerella iliaca zaboria*  
Denali Highway and Nome.

**Sooty Fox Sparrow**  
*Passerella unalascensis sinuosa*  
Seen well in the Seward area, including good views near the feeders.

**Song Sparrow**  
*Melospiza melodia kenaiensis*  

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Seen well in the Seward area with many singing birds around and even in town, a large, dark subspecies here.

**Lincoln's Sparrow**  
*Melospiza lincolnii lincolnii*
Denali Highway and Tonglen Lake Lodge with even better views Potter Marsh.

**White-crowned Sparrow**  
*Zonotrichia leucomophrys gambelii*
Common in Nome and Denali Highway.

**Golden-crowned Sparrow**  
*Zonotrichia atricapilla*
Very common in Nome, also seen Hatcher Pass with a few along Denali Highway.

**Dark-eyed Junco**  
*Junco hyemalis hyemalis*
Fairly common in the boreal forests of the interior.

**Savannah Sparrow**  
*Passerculus sandwichensis anthinus*
Common in Nome, Denali Highway, and Barrow.

**American Tree Sparrow**  
*Spizelloides arborea ochracea*
Common Nome and Denali Highway.

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**Oropendolas, Orioles & Blackbirds Icteridae**

**Rusty Blackbird (VU)**  
*Euphagus carolinus carolinus*
Great views in Nome of a single bird along Kougarok Road and even better scope studies of a vocal pair Potter Marsh Anchorage.

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**New World Warblers Parulidae**

**Northern Waterthrush**  
*Parkesia noveboracensis*
Seen well in Nome and Byers Lake.

**Orange-crowned Warbler**  
*Leiothlypis celata celata*
Widespread and common Nome and Denali Highway.

**American Yellow Warbler**  
*Setophaga aestiva banksi*
Fairly common in riparian areas in Nome and Denali Highway.

**Blackpoll Warbler**  
*Setophaga striata*
Seen well in Nome and then abundant Denali Highway.

**Myrtle Warbler**  
*Setophaga coronata hooveri*
Seen well in the Denali and Anchorage areas.

**Townsend's Warbler**  
*Setophaga townsendi*
Seen well at Summit Lake on the way to Seward.

**Wilson's Warbler**  
*Cardellina pusilla pileolata*
Common in Nome and the Denali area.

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**Mammals (25 in total: 25 seen)**

**Status codes:**  
E = Endemic, NE = Near-endemic, I = Introduced

**IUCN codes:**  
CR = Critically endangered, EN = Endangered, VU = Vulnerable, EW = Extinct in the Wild, NT = Near Threatened, DD = Data Deficient

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**United States (Continental)**

**Rabbits, Hares Leporidae**

**Snowshoe Hare**  
*Lepus americanus*
A good year for this cyclical species.
Beavers *Castoridae*
American Beaver *Castor canadensis*
Dams and lodges seen throughout with the occasional animal glimpsed.

New World Porcupines *Erethizontidae*
North American Porcupine *Erethizon dorsatum*
Seen well by the roadside while driving back to Anchorage.

Hamsters, New World Rats and Mice, Voles *Cricetidae*
North American Brown Lemming *Lemmus trimucronatus*
Common in Barrow this year and seen throughout town.

Squirrels *Sciuridae*
Hoary Marmot *Marmota caligata*
Best seen at Hatcher Pass where one posed for pictures.
Arctic Ground Squirrel *Spermophilus parryii*
Abundant Denali area and Nome.
Red Squirrel *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*
Best seen Tolsona Wilderness Camp and other boreal forest.

Wolves, Coyote, Foxes, Jackals *Canidae*
Arctic Fox *Alopex lagopus*
Common on St Paul Island where the blue phase roams throughout the island.
Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*
Seen well outside our lodging Denali Highway.

Bears, Giant Panda *Ursidae*
Brown Bear *Ursus arctos horribilis*
A female and two-year-old Teller Road Nome.

Weasels, Skunks, Otters *Mustelidae*
Sea Otter *Enhydra lutris*
Great views Kenai Fjords.
Ermine *Mustela erminea*
Seen briefly near Denali Highway.

Walrus *Odobenidae*
Walrus *Odobenus rosmarus*
Seen well off Cape Nome and one on St. Paul Island.

Sea Lions *Otariidae*
Northern Fur Seal *Callorhinus ursinus*
Abundant on St Paul Island where beach masters had arrived.
Steller Sea Lion *Eumetopias jubatus jubatus*
St Paul Island and Kenai Fjords.

Seals *Phocidae*
Spotted Seal *Phoca largha*
Nome and Barrow.

**Harbour Seal**  
*Phoca vitulina*  
St Paul Island and Kenai Fjords.

**Ringed Seal**  
*Pusa hispida*  
Seen in Nome and Barrow.

**Oceanic Dolphins Delphinidae**

**Killer Whale**  
*Orcinus orca*  
One of the most memorable mammal sightings of the trip with three pods seen during our boat trip Kenai Fjords National Park. One transient pod chased a Dall's Porpoise with one breaching several times.

**Porpoises Phocoenidae**

**Dall's Porpoise**  
*Phocoenoides dalli*  
Seen well during our boat trip in Kenai Fjords as a group of three rode in the wake.

**Rorquals Balaenopteridae**

**Humpback Whale**  
*Megaptera novaeangliae*  
Close views in Kenai Fjords National Park.

**Deer Cervidae**

**Moose**  
*Alces americanus*  
Nome and many in Denali National Park and along the Denali Highway.

**Reindeer**  
*Rangifer tarandus*  
A small group seen along the Teller Road in Nome.

**Cattle, Antelopes, Sheep, Goats Bovidae**

**Muskox**  
*Ovibos moschatus*  
Many seen well in the Nome area.

**Thinhorn Sheep**  
*Ovis dalli*  
Denali National Park.

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