

ITINERARY
ALASKA FALL GOLDMINE
ROSS'S GULLS IN BARROW & RARITIES ON ST. PAUL
September 30-October 9, 2017



Ross's Gull is a permanent inhabitant of the high Arctic. Our tour is timed to observe the migration of these small, elegant gulls from their breeding grounds to their wintering habitat on the Beaufort Sea. Photograph by guide Eric Hynes.

We include here information for those interested in the 2017 Field Guides Alaska Fall Goldmine: Ross's Gulls in Barrow & Rarities on St. Paul tour:

- a general introduction to the tour
- a description of the birding areas to be visited
- an abbreviated daily itinerary with some indication of the nature of each day's birding outings

Those who register for the tour will be sent this additional material:

- an annotated list of the birds recorded on a previous year's Field Guides trip to the area, with comments by guide(s) on notable species or sightings
- a detailed information bulletin with important logistical information and answers to questions regarding accommodations, air arrangements, clothing, currency, customs and immigration, documents, health precautions, and personal items
- a reference list
- a Field Guides checklist for preparing and keeping track of the birds we see on the tour
- after the conclusion of the tour, a list of birds seen

We'll start with a treasure hunt for Asian migrants (and American ones too!) on St. Paul Island in the Bering Sea before spending several days at Barrow above 71 degrees North latitude, the US's northernmost point, looking for the legendary Ross's Gull, loons, eiders, and possibly even Polar Bear and Ivory Gull.

Few birds in North America elicited more excitement when they were discovered than the diminutive, elegant Ross's Gull of the High Arctic. To see one in the Lower 48, you need to be lucky; you just can't predict when one will show up. Not so in Barrow in early October! Barrow is unique in many ways, and one of the more fascinating attributes of this remote site on the Arctic Ocean shore is its geographic position for witnessing the annual fall migration of Ross's Gulls. It's a migration phenomenon first witnessed here in the late 1800's and documented in the 1970's and 1980's. Every fall, beginning in late September, the majority of the world's Ross's Gulls migrate past this remote outpost from the Chukchi Sea in Arctic Russia to the Beaufort Sea in Arctic Alaska.

These Ross's Gulls often pass by, and in small numbers linger to feed in the coastal habitats on a daily basis at this season; local weather conditions sometimes force thousands of these beautiful, pink-plumaged birds close to shore. Small numbers of these gulls would be memorable enough, but the chance to see large numbers (we saw 1200+ on one of our tours!) compels us to offer this short trip to Alaska's far north for those who want the chance to witness one of birding's most intriguing and little-known spectacles.

During this fall season, Barrow offers the chance for other prizes as well, including Spectacled, King, and Common eiders, Yellow-billed Loon, Snowy Owl, and perhaps even an Ivory Gull or a Polar Bear.

This year, for the first time, we are combining our proven Barrow trip with a journey to St. Paul Island to search for the Asian migrants that stop off on this lonely Bering Sea outpost. Early October has recently proven to be one of the peak times for Asian migrants to appear here. Though the avian prizes vary from year to year, some of the exciting birds that



This Olive-backed Pipit was seen on a recent Field Guides tour in Japan. We will keep an eye out for these, and many other Asian migrants on St. Paul Island in the Pribiloffs. Photograph by guide Phil Gregory.

have appeared regularly in early October in recent years have included Tufted Duck, Common Snipe, Jack Snipe, Gray-tailed Tattler, Gyrfalcon, Brambling, Eurasian Skylark, Eyebrowed Thrush, Siberian Accentor, Olive-backed Pipit, McKay's Bunting, and Little Bunting. We'll check multiple migrant hotspots each day, and we'll walk through dense patches of island vegetation to look for skulking passerines and wetland birds. There is a very large pool of potential migrants we have a chance to encounter; however, we will certainly not see them all of them – that dynamic is part of the fun of this treasure hunt. The suite of migrants present fluctuates substantially year-to-year and is strongly weather dependent, but we stand an excellent chance of finding some Old World and Arctic goodies during our visit to this special island. The seabird show of the summer months is not at full force during early October, but we should find Short-tailed Shearwaters, both Tufted and Horned Puffins, and Red-faced Cormorants. We stand a good chance of finding Red-legged Kittiwakes and other Alaskan-breeding alcids during our travels around the island.

Bring your jacket, hat, and adventurous spirit, and join us for this special Alaskan adventure!

About the Physical Requirements & Pace: For our migrant search on St. Paul Island, we'll be walking for moderate distances on uneven terrain (rocks and thick vegetation). This can be physically challenging, but intervals of activity like this will be interspersed with downtime when we go seawatching or take leisurely meal breaks. It is unlikely that there will be any long walks, but all of our activities here are dependent on the conditions. There are times when some members of the group can walk through the migrant hotspots while others stand watch in one spot, searching for birds that might flush in front of the walkers. In Anchorage and Barrow, getting in and out of vans and walking for short stretches will be the most challenging aspects of the tour. Early October in Barrow can be quite cold, and we will surely encounter some drifting snow or ice on the roads or around town, so a decent sense of balance on these potentially slick surfaces is required. If you are uncertain about whether this tour is a good match for your abilities, please don't hesitate to contact our office; if they cannot directly answer your queries, they will put you in touch with your guide(s) for the tour.

About the Birding Areas



St. Paul Island – The Pribilof Islands are some of the most isolated islands in the Bering Sea. While St. Paul Island is world renowned for the cornucopia of wildlife it hosts during the spring and summer months, fall is a very overlooked time of year here. The isolation that makes it so attractive to breeding seabirds also positions it very well to host southbound migrants blown off course over the sea from either Asia or North America, as well as some trans-Beringian migrants whose routes take them right over the islands. We will scour all the nooks and crannies of St. Paul in search of rare gems among the expected species. Most of the migrant traps that the birds favor are fairly close to the roads and consist of either rocky windbreaks or tall patches of thick vegetation that simulate forest, a habitat type completely lacking on the island. There are several productive freshwater marshes and lakes on the island that we will regularly check in pursuit of birds such as snipe and waterfowl. Because we would get

our feet wet in regular shoes here, we recommend that you wear insulated waterproof knee-high boots such as Xtra-tuffs or Muck Boots (some people prefer using NEOS overshoes over their regular shoes or hiking boots in these conditions). In addition to searching for landbird migrants, we will also spend time seawatching from elevated vantage points along the coast. Your guides have extensive experience on the island and will help to shape the birding plan to maximize our results based on daily weather conditions.

Anchorage area – Anchorage is the largest city in Alaska and the hub for all of our birding activities in the state. Around 300,000 people live in the Anchorage area, roughly 40% of the state’s population! On our day here between birding St. Paul Island and Barrow, we’ll search for boreal landbirds like northern finches (crossbills, Pine Grosbeak, redpolls), Bohemian Waxwing, Black-backed and American Three-toed Woodpeckers, American Dipper, and other specialties. Finding the nomadic woodpeckers will involve driving in vans to the north, rounding the Knik Arm, and heading to a recently burned patch of forest near Willow where we’ve had good success on recent spring tours. We’ll also check several of Anchorage’s lakes and coastal hotspots in pursuit of waterfowl and gulls.

Barrow - The land near the far-northern town of Barrow (now officially known by its native name of “Utqiaġvik” — *oot-kay-ahg-vik*—after a 2016 vote) is a flat, watery expanse in the grip of permafrost. The landscape is fractured into a maze of giant, ice-wedge polygons, a pattern resulting from the continual freezing and thawing of the surface of the land. The “aufeis,” overhanging shelves of ice formed by overflow waters of northflowing rivers, look like rivers of ice from the air. And “pingos,” or ice blisters—frozen hills formed by ice forced to expand upward in drained depressions—contribute further to the unique and fascinating aspect of Alaska’s North Slope. Our flights from Anchorage take us across 570 miles of northern Alaska and leave us on the coast of the Arctic Ocean at 71 degrees 20 minutes North latitude, more than 300 miles above the Arctic Circle! Clearly, Point Barrow, the northernmost point in Alaska, is off the beaten track. This is not hard to understand, for Barrow is a place of extremes, where the summer sun does not sink below the horizon for 67 days straight (and it is not dark for another 52 days!). On the other side of the coin, the sun does not shine on the town for 67 days straight in the winter; the weather is calm only 1% of the year; and annual precipitation is a meager 5 to 8 inches, the lowest in Alaska.

Many of you are familiar with the bounty of birds to be found here during the breeding season from taking springtime tours to this fine destination. Breeding shorebirds, loons, eiders, Snowy Owls, Snow Buntings, and others highlight a visit here in late June. By early October, when the daylight hours have been reduced from twenty-four to about ten, nearly all of Barrow’s summer residents have long since headed south for the winter. Still, some species linger in the open waters offshore and the Ross’s Gull migration, the object of our visit at this season, is well underway. With some luck, we could encounter a few small groups of Spectacled Eiders among the much more common King and Common eiders, good

numbers of Yellow-billed Loons, or maybe even an Ivory Gull among the more common Glaucous Gulls. Most of our birding here will be from our comfortable vans or along the roadside. We may also include an afternoon foray to Pt. Barrow to search for Polar Bear if the conditions are right and if local reports indicate that it would be worth our while. Temperatures are likely to range from lows in the 20's or high teens to highs in the low to mid-30's.

Itinerary for Alaska Fall Goldmine: Ross's Gulls In Barrow & Rarities On St. Paul

Day 1, Sat, 30 Sep. Arrival in Anchorage. You can take the free courtesy shuttle to the Coast International Inn. We will meet in the lobby of the Coast International for dinner at 6 PM and will go over the tour plan before getting a good night's sleep. Night in Anchorage.

Day 2, Sun, 1 Oct. To the Pribilofs. After breakfast at our Anchorage hotel, we'll walk around a lake adjacent to the hotel and look for waterbirds and songbirds. Anchorage sunrise is after 8 AM on this date, so we won't have to get up too early. Mid-morning, we'll transfer to the Anchorage airport for our lunchtime flight out to St. Paul Island in the Bering Sea. Once on St. Paul, we'll check into our hotel rooms and then head straight out into the field after changing into our field clothes. It's important for this day that you wear your boots onto the plane and that you bring your optics and suitable waterproof outerwear with you in your carry-on luggage. Sometimes the airline will delay checked baggage deliveries, and we want to make sure that you make it to the island with what you need to enjoy the birding there. Night on St. Paul Island.



American Three-toed Woodpeckers.
Photograph by guide Tom Johnson.

Days 3-4, Mon-Tue, 2-3 Oct. St. Paul Island. We will spend our time searching migrant hotspots and scanning the coastline of St. Paul Island. In addition to local specialties like Red-faced Cormorant, a few lingering alcids, and perhaps Red-legged Kittiwakes, we'll focus our attention on finding migrant birds, hopefully including some vagrants from Asia. Our success will depend on how much time we spend in the field, weather, and of course, other random variables that only the birding gods can adjust. Whatever happens, this is sure to be an exciting time. Nights on St. Paul Island.

Day 5, Wed, 4 Oct. St. Paul Island; evening flight to Anchorage. We will spend the whole morning birding on St. Paul Island before packing up for our late afternoon flight back to Anchorage. In Anchorage, we will head to dinner at a restaurant close to our hotel. Night in Anchorage.

Day 6, Thu, 5 Oct. Anchorage. This is a flexible day in Anchorage to help mitigate against possible weather-related delays involving the flight back from St. Paul Island; however, it also gives us the opportunity to pursue some excellent mainland Alaskan species that we wouldn't otherwise find on this tour. We will start with breakfast at our hotel, and then we'll head out to the Sockeye Burn near Willow to look for Black-backed and American Three-toed Woodpeckers. After this, we'll visit other forested

patches and head to the Anchorage coastline in pursuit of waterbird migrants. We'll focus on searching for specialty species such as crossbills, American Dipper, and others, but the birding plan today will be flexible based on weather conditions and recent reports from our friends in Anchorage. We'll have a restaurant lunch midway through the day, and we'll return back to our Anchorage hotel before dinner at a nice restaurant nearby. Night in Anchorage.

Day 7, Fri, 6 Oct. Flight to Barrow. Off to the Far North! We'll take a morning flight across the Arctic Circle to Barrow, where we'll have the whole afternoon to bird after we pick up our rental vans and check into our hotel. Don't worry – there will be time to change into cold-weather clothing before we head out to the coast to start our search for Ross's Gulls and more! Night in Barrow.

Days 8-9, Sat-Sun, 7-8 Oct. Birding the Barrow area. Birding in Barrow. The air temperature will be cold, but we'll stay warm with excitement and regular intervals in the heated vans and indoors for meals. Prepare to search for Ross's Gulls, Yellow-billed Loons, multiple species of eiders, and Polar Bear. Meals and lodging will be at the luxurious Top of the World Hotel. Depending on conditions and vehicle availability, on one day here, we might be able to take an off-road, 4x4 tour of Point Barrow. Nights in Barrow.

Day 10, Mon, 9 Oct. Barrow to Anchorage; departure for home. After breakfast at the Top of the World Hotel, we'll transfer to the airport for a morning flight back to Anchorage. You may schedule your departure from Anchorage anytime after 6:00p.m.

About Your Guides

Tom Johnson grew up watching birds in central Pennsylvania. Interested in science and the outdoors from a young age, Tom became involved in a variety of field projects throughout his school years, including banding migrant landbirds and conducting point counts for the 2nd Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas. He was fortunate to pursue undergraduate studies in biology at Cornell University, where he became even more excited to learn about systematics and migration while surrounded by the amazing ornithologists and birders of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Since graduating from college, Tom has spent much of his time studying seabirds off the east coast of North America, conducting line transect surveys from NOAA ships between Nova Scotia and the Bahamas. When he's not otherwise occupied, he loves to devote time to wandering, taking photos, and searching for vagrants and hybrid birds.

Tom has long been interested in sharing his enthusiasm for exploring bird identification, distribution, and migration dynamics; he is a regional editor for *North American Birds* magazine and writes a regular column on identification for *Birding* magazine. Perhaps most of all, he loves sharing his passion for the natural world with others out in the field, and he's excited to have the opportunity to do this while leading for Field Guides.

Doug Gochfeld made the jump from a love of trains, planes, and automobiles typical of many 7-year-olds to an avid interest in birds after a close encounter with a Steller's Jay in the Pacific Northwest. This filled his early formative years with scouring the urban landscape of New York City for birds with his father. After a teenage break from all things avian, he returned to it with a vengeance, and he hasn't looked back.

His first birding job was as a migration counter at the legendary Cape May Bird Observatory, where his love of and interest in the dynamics of migration (of anything with wings, insects included!) was cemented. From 2006 to 2016, he worked with birds from New Hampshire to Arizona, and from Suriname to Israel. He has also spent a substantial amount of time guiding in Alaska, the bulk of which was spent on St. Paul Island in the Pribilofs.

Doug's strongest interests in birding are migration, vagrancy, and overall patterns of distribution. Shorebirds and seabirds (and any other long-distance migrants, really) hold a special place in his heart, and he has done intensive work studying the breeding and wintering ecology of Hudsonian Godwits in Alaska and Semipalmated Sandpipers in Suriname and Brazil.

In addition to being on the New York State Avian Records Committee, Doug is passionate about spreading the gospel of birding and the outdoors, and to this end he participates in youth and urban birding initiatives and has guided at birding festivals across the country. His writing and photographs have been published in a myriad of venues.

Doug has co-led Field Guides groups to Alaska, Trinidad, Panama, Cape May, Arizona, and Newfoundland/Nova Scotia and has a busy and wide-ranging schedule coming up for late 2016 and all of 2017--from the US, Puerto Rico, and Mexico to New Guinea, Southeast Asia, and Madagascar.

Visit <http://fieldguides.com/guides> for complete tour schedules for Tom and Doug; just click on their photos.

"Tom has an amazing knowledge of birds and the natural world. His enthusiasm and professionalism comes through so much. He kept us on schedule -yet allowed for some great diversions that showed up. Field Guides is so fortunate to have him guiding." L.T. Arizona Nightbirds & More

"Doug and Tom ... were absolutely awesome -- so full of knowledge about both birds and people! I really can't praise them highly enough." L.B. Spring in Cape May.

Financial Information

FEE: \$6350 from Anchorage

DEPOSIT: \$650 per person

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: June 2, 2017

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$800 (singles may not be available on the Pribilofs)

LIMIT: 14

Other Things You Need to Know

TOUR MANAGER: The manager for this tour is Ruth Kuhl. Ruth will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call her!

AIR ARRANGEMENTS: Field Guides is a full service travel agency and your tour manager will be happy to assist you with flights to join this tour. Field Guides does not charge a service fee for these services to clients booking a tour. However, we understand that tech-savvy clients often prefer to shop online or that you may wish to use mileage to purchase tickets. Regardless of which method you choose, your tour manager will be happy to provide assistance regarding ticket prices and schedules, along with rental cars and extra hotel nights as needed.

Please be sure to check with your tour manager prior to purchasing your ticket to make sure the flights you have chosen will work well with the tour itinerary and that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. Once purchased, most airline tickets are non-refundable and carry a penalty to change. Field Guides cannot be responsible for these fees.

Also, it is imperative that we receive a copy of your comprehensive flight itinerary—including any and all flights not covered in the tour fee—so that we may track you in the event of missed connections, delays, or other mishaps.

LUGGAGE: Please be aware that many airlines have recently modified their luggage policies and are charging additional fees for checked bags. Updates could easily occur before your departure, so you may wish to contact your airline to verify the policy. Additional charges for bags on any flights, whether these flights are covered by the tour fee or not, will be the client's responsibility.

TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS: The fee for this tour is \$6350 for one person in double occupancy from Anchorage. It includes all lodging from Day 1 through Day 9, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 10, *all flights within Alaska as outlined in this tour itinerary*, all ground transportation, entrance fees, baggage handling, and the guide services of the tour leader(s). Tipping at group meals and for drivers, porters, and local guides is included in your tour fee and will be handled for the group by your Field Guides leader(s). However, if you would like to recognize your Field Guides leader(s) or any local guide(s) for exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are optional and not expected.

The above fee does **not** include your airfare to and from Anchorage, airport taxes, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, any taxi hire to or from the airport, any alcoholic beverages, optional tips to local drivers, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The **single supplement** for the full tour is \$800. If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee. The single supplement is calculated by taking the actual cost of a single room and subtracting one-half of the cost of a double room (plus any applicable taxes).

TOUR LIMITS: Our limits are firm and we don't exceed the limit by one to accommodate a couple when only one space remains open. However, on occasion, we will send along a guide in training on a tour. In these cases one seat in the van or bus will be taken by the guide in training. Our guides will have a rotation system within the vehicle so that clients share the inconvenience equally. We hope this minor inconvenience will be more than offset by the advantages of having another guide along.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, complete the Registration/Release and Indemnity form and return it with a **deposit of \$650** per person. If registering by phone, a deposit must be received within fourteen days, or the space will

be released. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to departure, or **by June 2, 2017. We will bill you for the final payment at either 120 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later.** Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by your tour manager.

SMOKING: Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. If you smoke, please be sensitive to the group and refrain from smoking at meals, in vehicles, and in proximity to the group on trails and elsewhere.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refund of deposit and payment, less \$100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 120 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 119 and 70 days before the departure date, 50% of the tour fee is refundable. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable.

This policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change, or are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of the insurance is not refundable so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airlines restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute in case of emergency another guide for the original one.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE: We strongly recommend you consider purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to cover your investment in case of injury or illness to you or your family prior to or during a trip. Because we must remit early (and substantial) tour deposits to our suppliers, we cannot offer any refund when cancellation occurs within 70 days of departure, and only a partial refund from 70 to 119 days prior to departure (see CANCELLATION POLICY). In addition, the Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. US medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Furthermore, US Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States.

When making a decision regarding health insurance, Americans should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a medical evacuation to the United States may cost well in excess of \$50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or whether you will be reimbursed later for expenses that you incur.

US citizens will receive from us a brochure regarding optional tour cancellation/emergency medical insurance. Our agent, CSA, will insure for trip cancellation and interruption, medical coverage, travel delay, baggage loss and delay, 24-hour accident protection, and emergency medical transportation. If you purchase the insurance when making final payment for the tour, and cover all non-refundable parts of the trip (including any non-refundable flights), pre-existing conditions are covered. The CSA brochure includes a contact number; you may also purchase your CSA policy on-line by visiting our website at www.fieldguides.com/travelinsurance.htm and clicking the link to CSA. Please note, once the insurance is purchased it is non-refundable, so please check with your tour manager prior to making the purchase to assure the tour will operate as scheduled. Citizens of other countries are urged to consult their insurance broker.

RESPONSIBILITY: For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Field Guides Incorporated, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the reverse side of the registration form. Field Guides Incorporated acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motor coach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. Field Guides Incorporated accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. Field Guides Incorporated

reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, the information bulletin, and other pertinent matter provided by Field Guides. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.

THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION.
1/17 TBJ, RK; peg