Trip Report — Alaska Fall Goldmine: Rarities on the Pribilofs 2026

September 23-October 1, 2026 with Cory Gregory



The subspecies of Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch on St. Paul Island is a regional endemic. We enjoyed seeing these huge finches each of the days we were on St. Paul. Photo by participant Eric Gustafson.

The remote outposts of western Alaska really are incredibly unique birding destinations. St. Paul Island in the Pribilofs is no exception. Because of its remote nature, some 200+ miles from the nearest land, the Pribilofs can be a phenomenal place to lost vagrants from Asia. On the flipside, that remote nature comes with some challenges, and that involves traveling to these places! The foul weather of the Bering Sea makes travel unreliable and although we experienced this firsthand, we did eventually get to St. Paul Island as well as a "Homer extension". Unplanned but still really enjoyable. For all the last-minute logistics that came with this trip, I still

really enjoyed visiting western Alaska this fall and I hope you made some good memories along the way.

We got started in Anchorage, where we thought we were going to depart for St. Paul Island but instead found the flight canceled for several days. And so we opted for Plan B (or was it Plan C, or D?), we departed Anchorage, and started our way down south into the Kenai Peninsula where good birding awaited. We saw a few birds in Potter Marsh as we passed, but it soon got dark and we found ourselves cautiously driving down towards Homer, watching carefully for the many Moose about! We finally made it to our home for the next couple nights, right on the water!



One of the vagrants we enjoyed on St. Paul Island was Garganey, an Old World dabbler. Here you can see it flying with two of the larger Northern Pintails. The dark bar along the leading edge of the underwing is really distinctive. Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

The next day greeted us with some cloudy, rainy weather, but we sure enjoyed our hotel being right on the water. For example, we started seeing

seabirds as we sat at the breakfast table! Black-legged Kittiwakes swirled around, a variety of scoters flew past, and we saw our first cormorants and loons, all before we left breakfast. Once outside, we visited a couple of spots along the spit and tallied a fun variety of species like Red-necked Grebe, Marbled Murrelet, and Pacific Loon. We then made our way to Anchor Point where the birding was actually quite phenomenal. In quick order, we tallied ducks like White-winged, Surf, and Black scoters, Harlequin Duck, and a Long-tailed Duck. One of our main targets materialized down along the rocky shore, Rock Sandpipers! Mixed in was a Sanderling as well. Other things offshore included migrating Horned Puffins, hundreds of kittiwakes, and more than 100 loons, including a Yellow-billed Loon. After lunch, we stopped by a reservoir but things were quiet, only sightings included a couple Trumpeter Swans, a quick Northern Shrike, and a few vocal Boreal Chickadees. Next up, we visited Wynn Nature Center but the rain kept our visit short. Still, we ticked off a couple more things like Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and even some very close North American Porcupines. Afterwards, we tried a few more seawatching spots, like Bishops Beach, where we saw more seabirds like Pelagic Cormorant, Common Loon, Horned Grebe, Short-billed Gull, Pigeon Guillemot, and a variety of waterfowl. We checked out Beluga Lake for a bit and saw a few more divers like Ring-necked Duck and Greater Scaup, but the White-winged Crossbill on a nearby conifer was the probable highlight from here. We closed out the day by returning down the Homer Spit, this time finding a Eurasian Wigeon, a few Parasitic Jaegers offshore, and another nice smattering of seabirds.



We had point blank views of this “Bewick’s” Tundra Swan at Town Marsh. Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

The following day started much like the day before, with some seawatching at breakfast. Afterwards, and checking out of our hotel, we birded a few spots down around the tip of the split before starting our way back north. This time, we found a nice Snow Goose along the spit, along with nearly a dozen Lapland Longspurs that we flushed out of the short grass. After leaving Homer, we returned to Anchor Point where we again found a flock of Rock Sandpipers and a similar variety of seabirds. We enjoyed Red-throated Loon, American Wigeon, Northern Pintail, Greater Yellowlegs, and four species of Alcids. By this point it was time to head north and we went to the Kasilof River area for lunch and some birding. We found a couple more Rock Sandpipers as well as a Greater Yellowlegs, but mostly the beach was quiet. We continued up to Tern Lake where we paused to stretch our legs. Of course, it became a lot more interesting when we spotted Mountain Goats and then an American Black Bear way up the hillside! We eventually made our way back to Anchorage where we enjoyed

some Mexican food and settled in for the night. Would we make it to the Pribilofs tomorrow?



Another nice vagrant we enjoyed on St. Paul was this secretive Rustic Bunting. It took a lot of effort to see it well but we were eventually rewarded with some quick views. Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

Today started pretty early for us. We checked out of the hotel and I came over to the airport very early in hopes of snagging a stand-by ticket (which worked!). Once we convened there, it sounded like the St. Paul Island flight might actually happen! Sure enough, against all odds, we boarded our flight together and made the couple hour flight way out over the Bering Sea before circling and descending down onto St. Paul Island. We made it! We had lunch before heading out for our afternoon and evening birding. We started by going to Zap Ravine where we hiked up and into this interesting geographic feature and scored the continuing Rustic Bunting, our first vagrant! We then went to Town Marsh and enjoyed the continuing "Bewick's" Tundra Swan and another vagrant, a Garganey. Also around were American and Eurasian wigeon, lots of Northern Pintail, and

others. We started our way to the northeast where we birded at Webster House, Webster Celery, and then up to Hutch Hill. The lake had spinning Red Phalaropes in it, a Peregrine Falcon came in overhead, a Sabine's Gull flew low over the lake, a Golden-crowned Sparrow popped up out of the celery, and even a Red-breasted Nuthatch showed up at Hutch Hill. We closed out the day with a couple of good shorebirds, such as a distant Ruff at Dune Lake and a few Sharp-tailed Sandpipers in Novastoshna. It was a long day but what a great intro to St. Paul Island birding!



One of the many regional specialties that we were keen to see well was Red-faced Cormorant, a species essentially limited to the Bering Sea. We had great views of many on St. Paul as they flew by at close range. Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

The next day we had the entire day to explore the many parts of St. Paul Island. We started up at Hutch Hill, as we often do, where we flushed a tiny mystery bird but it got away in the flats. Still, we scrounged up some Yellow-rumped Warblers, another Golden-crowned Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, and even an American Tree Sparrow which is a very rare bird in the Pribs. We enjoyed being around the dozens of Snow Buntings and Gray-

crowned Rosy-Finches, of course, but also a few Redpolls and Lapland Longspurs. We checked out Polovina Hill and then Weather Bureau Lake, where we enjoyed seeing Red-legged Kittiwakes as they bathed alongside their Black-legged cousins. It was a good day for waterfowl too; we tallied Brant, Eurasian Wigeon, Mallard, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Tufted Duck, Greater Scaup, Harlequin Duck, Long-tailed Duck, and even a King Eider on the Salt Lagoon. Although most of the Rock Sandpipers had left St. Paul Island by this date, we still managed to find a couple. Lastly, we had great looks at Red-faced Cormorants as they flew by East Landing late in the day.



We enjoyed birding in Homer on the southern tip of the Kenai Peninsula. One highlight there was finding a flock of 50+ Rock Sandpipers at Anchor Point. Participant Eric Gustafson got this great picture of them.

We had until midday the following day to bird the island before we were supposed to fly back to Anchorage. However, the rain was steady and we didn't have time for much. And so we checked out Southwest Point and did a little seawatching for an hour or two. Despite the conditions, we actually did

pretty well and saw Horned Puffin, Crested Auklet, Parakeet Auklet, Ancient Murrelets, and some tubenoses like Short-tailed Shearwater and Northern Fulmar. But we had to head back to the airport in order to catch our plane off the island. The flight back went as planned and we landed in Anchorage with enough time to do a little birding. We visited Westchester Lagoon and enjoyed studying the side-by-side Barrow's/Common Goldeneye and Greater/Lesser Scaup. We even added a bonus Wilson's Snipe and some Bonaparte's Gulls as well.



When we were birding around Homer, we never were far away from numerous Bald Eagles. Here's one that did a close fly-by, photographed by guide Cory Gregory.

Our final day of birding together was spent around the Anchorage area. The weather looked dicey, as it had been all week, but we made the most of it and first drove up Arctic Valley Road to see if any grouse were out and about. And were they ever! Over the course of 5-10 miles of road, we tallied a staggering 14 Spruce Grouse! We next did a little birding along the Little Susitna River but found only a Bald Eagle and Black-billed Magpie. We tried

going higher in elevation but was met with heavy snow showers which made us turn back. After lunch we stopped by the Old Matanuska Townsite but tallied fewer than six species due to the heavy, cold rain. We came back into Anchorage, stopped at the fish hatchery, but the rain persisted there too. We closed out the birding by stopping at Spenard Crossing and were met with many familiar things such as Mallard, Greater Scaup, Lesser Scaup, Short-billed Gull, and even a couple of tame American Wigeon.



One of the highlights of birding around Anchorage was when we went up Arctic Valley Road looking for grouse. And yes, we found grouse, lots of grouse! We tallied 14 Spruce Grouse including this nice male photographed by participant Eric Gustafson.

In closing, I wanted to thank you guys for coming along on this Alaskan adventure and putting up with the many weather-related travel challenges we were faced with. In the end, I think we did very well, partially due to that extension down to Homer! We certainly saw lots of species we normally wouldn't see and yet we had several quality vagrants on St. Paul Island as well. Whether it was Rustic Bunting, Tufted Duck, Ruff, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, or the Garganey, all were quality rare nuggets on this goldmine

search. You never quite know what you're going to get, both with birds and weather, but either way, it's a fun place to visit and I hope you made some good memories of the excitement of the chase!

Other critters we tallied:

North American Porcupine (*Erethizon dorsatum*)
American Red Squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)
Killer Whale (*Orcinus orca*)
Arctic Fox (*Vulpes lagopus*)
Sea Otter (*Enhydra lutris*)
Northern Fur Seal (*Callorhinus ursinus*)
Harbor Seal (*Phoca vitulina*)
American Black Bear (*Ursus americanus)*
Moose (*Alces alces*)
Mountain Goat (*Oreamnos americanus)*
Dall's Sheep *(Ovis dalli* ssp. *dalli)*

You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link:
https://ebird.org/tripreport/578618

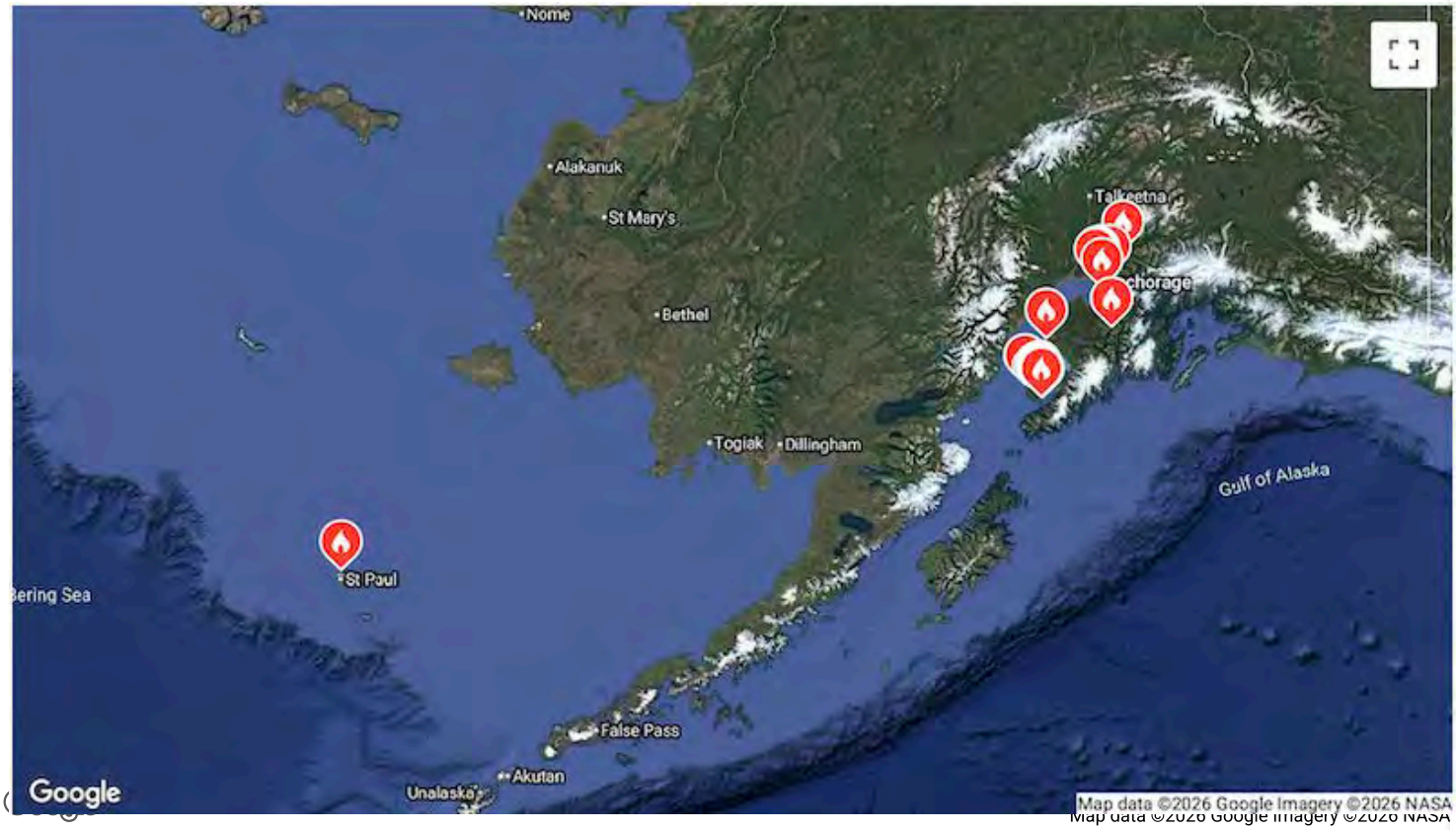
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-- Cory Gregory (Curlew)

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LIFERS

Species Observed

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1	Snow Goose	*Anser caerulescens*	1
2	Brant	*Branta bernicla*	1
6	Canada Goose	*Branta canadensis*	2
10	Trumpeter Swan	*Cygnus buccinator*	4
1	Tundra Swan	*Cygnus columbianus*	1 1
1	Garganey	*Spatula querquedula*	6 1
2	Northern Shoveler	*Spatula clypeata*	1
8	Eurasian Wigeon	*Mareca penelope*	3
145	American Wigeon	*Mareca americana*	2 8
405	Mallard	*Anas platyrhynchos*	11
72	Northern Pintail	*Anas acuta*	6
43	Green-winged Teal	*Anas crecca*	1 7
3	Ring-necked Duck	*Aythya collaris*	2
2	Tufted Duck	*Aythya fuligula*	1
116	Greater Scaup	*Aythya marila*	7
4	Lesser Scaup	*Aythya affinis*	2
1	King Eider	*Somateria spectabilis*	1 1
43	Harlequin Duck	*Histrionicus histrionicus*	6
127	Surf Scoter	*Melanitta perspicillata*	5
53	White-winged Scoter	*Melanitta deglandi*	6
6	Black Scoter	*Melanitta americana*	1

8	Long-tailed Duck	*Clangula hyemalis*	4
10	Common Goldeneye	*Bucephala clangula*	1
6	Barrow's Goldeneye	*Bucephala islandica*	1
2	Common Merganser	*Mergus merganser*	1
1	Red-breasted Merganser	*Mergus serrator*	1
14	Spruce Grouse	*Canachites canadensis*	4 1
32	Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia* *	7
1	Pacific Golden-Plover	*Pluvialis fulva*	1
2	Long-billed Dowitcher	*Limnodromus scolopaceus*	1
1	Wilson's Snipe	*Gallinago delicata*	1
77	Red Phalarope	*Phalaropus fulicarius*	3
3	Greater Yellowlegs	*Tringa melanoleuca*	3
1	Ruff	*Calidris pugnax*	1
4	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	*Calidris acuminata*	1
2	Sanderling	*Calidris alba*	2
136	Rock Sandpiper	*Calidris ptilocnemis*	2 5
1	Pectoral Sandpiper	*Calidris melanotos*	1
3	Parasitic Jaeger	*Stercorarius parasiticus*	2
143	Horned Puffin	*Fratercula corniculata*	4
1	Crested Auklet	*Aethia cristatella*	1
2	Parakeet Auklet	*Aethia psittacula*	1
67	Marbled Murrelet	*Brachyramphus marmoratus*	7
19	Pigeon Guillemot	*Cepphus columba*	6

27	Thick-billed Murre	*Uria lomvia*	1
191	Common Murre	*Uria aalge*	7
16	Ancient Murrelet	*Synthliboramphus antiquus*	4
1170	Black-legged Kittiwake	*Rissa tridactyla*	10
14	Red-legged Kittiwake	*Rissa brevirostris*	2
1	Sabine's Gull	*Xema sabini*	1 1
7	Bonaparte's Gull	*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*	1
200	Short-billed Gull	*Larus brachyrhynchus*	8
2	American Herring Gull	*Larus smithsonianus*	1
1	Glaucous Gull	*Larus hyperboreus*	1
389	Glaucous-winged Gull	*Larus glaucescens*	12
15	Horned Grebe	*Podiceps auritus*	5
57	Red-necked Grebe	*Podiceps grisegena*	8
2	Red-throated Loon	*Gavia stellata*	2
114	Pacific Loon	*Gavia pacifica*	7
28	Common Loon	*Gavia immer*	5
2	Yellow-billed Loon	*Gavia adamsii*	2
8	Northern Fulmar	*Fulmarus glacialis*	1
7	Short-tailed Shearwater	*Ardenna tenuirostris*	1
61	Red-faced Cormorant	*Urile urile*	1 2
48	Pelagic Cormorant	*Urile pelagicus*	8
1	Double-crested Cormorant	*Nannopterum auritum*	1
18	Bald Eagle	*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*	8 10

1	Hairy Woodpecker	*Leuconotopicus villosus*	1
1	Peregrine Falcon	*Falco peregrinus*	3 1
1	Northern Shrike	*Lanius borealis*	1
2	Steller's Jay	*Cyanocitta stelleri*	1
22	Black-billed Magpie	*Pica hudsonia*	11
13	American Crow	*Corvus brachyrhynchos*	5
5	Common Raven	*Corvus corax*	5
9	Black-capped Chickadee	*Poecile atricapillus*	3
11	Boreal Chickadee	*Poecile hudsonicus*	2
1	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	*Corthylio calendula*	1
4	Golden-crowned Kinglet	*Regulus satrapa*	2
3	Red-breasted Nuthatch	*Sitta canadensis*	1 2
3	Brown Creeper	*Certhia americana*	2
34	European Starling	*Sturnus vulgaris* *	3
83	Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch	*Leucosticte tephrocotis*	1 3
9	Redpoll	*Acanthis flammea*	2
3	White-winged Crossbill	*Loxia leucoptera*	1
40	Pine Siskin	*Spinus pinus*	1
54	Lapland Longspur	*Calcarius lapponicus*	4
112	Snow Bunting	*Plectrophenax nivalis*	2 3
1	Rustic Bunting	*Schoeniclus rusticus*	2 1
1	American Tree Sparrow	*Spizelloides arborea*	1 1
6	Fox Sparrow	*Passerella iliaca*	2 3

2	Golden-crowned Sparrow	*Zonotrichia atricapilla*	2
2	Song Sparrow	*Melospiza melodia*	2 1
8	Yellow-rumped Warbler	*Setophaga coronata*	2 2

HYBRIDS

2	American Herring x Glaucous-winged Gull (hybrid)	*Larus smithsonianus x glaucescens*	2

ADDITIONAL TAXA

2	scoter sp.	*Melanitta sp.*	1
1	Common/Barrow's Goldeneye	*Bucephala clangula/islandica*	1
2	Common/Red-breasted Merganser	*Mergus merganser/serrator*	1
20	Sooty/Short-tailed Shearwater	*Ardenna grisea/tenuirostris*	1
1	passerine sp.	*Passeriformes sp.*	1 1