

Trip Report — Alaska Fall Goldmine: Ross's Gulls in Barrow 2024

October 4-8, 2024 with Cory Gregory



Polar Bears! We had the distinct treat of getting to ride up to Point Barrow where we found a mother and a cub. Photo by participant Kim Nelson.

The far north, high arctic, whatever you want to call it, we lived it! This short trip ventured to the northern tip of the United States with one main goal in mind, to witness the incredible migration of the poorly-understood Ross's Gull. But before we made it to Barrow, we had some time around Anchorage to go birding and that's where our triplist really began. Looking at Westchester Lagoon and surrounding areas, we added all the normal staples present that time of year: Common Goldeneye, Barrow's Goldeneye, Short-billed Gull, Bald Eagle, Black-billed Magpie, and others.



The Arctic Foxes were both curious and rather adorable in their winter coats. Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

Our flight up to Barrow was uneventful and we got underway immediately after getting bundled up. Scoping offshore, we saw distant Ross's Gulls (30-40!), migrating Long-tailed Ducks and Common Eiders, and nearly 1000 Glaucous Gulls lining the ground where the whaling was taking place. It was really quite interesting to see so many Short-tailed Shearwaters as well, and we ended up seeing hundreds!



At one point the two Polar Bears were right offshore from us in our vehicle! Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

We spent the following day scoping offshore and driving a few of the roads we could manage (but the roads were very icy!). We continued to see Ross's Gulls, migrating to the northeast distantly offshore. More flocks of migrating ducks were seen including hundreds of Long-tailed Ducks and more Common Eiders. Nearby in the short willowy habitat, we found a flock of Willow Ptarmigan. Offshore, we saw Yellow-billed and Pacific loons migrating south and getting to see some swimming Yellow-billed was a real highlight.



The only way we were able to visit Point Barrow, and to get a shot at seeing Polar Bear, was by riding in this giant truck. It was rather incredible where this vehicle could go. Photo by guide Cory Gregory.

Were there other birds around Barrow? Sure, though not many after the north had been gripped by the cold. We encountered a few Common Redpolls at some feeders, the usual couple Common Ravens, Snow Bunting, and we even found a Snowy Owl as we sat at our dinner table!

But before long, it was time to head back to Anchorage. Still, that morning we looked offshore and once the wind had started to pick up, we started seeing flock after flock of Ross's Gull heading north! It was our best birding of the trip and it so happened it was on the last afternoon. The cherry on top though was when a drop-dead gorgeous adult Ivory Gull flew by!

Lastly, here is the mammal list from our trip:

Arctic Fox (*Vulpes lagopus*)

Polar Bear (*Ursus maritimus*)

Beringian Stoat (*Mustela erminea*)



There were plenty of signs that there were even more Polar Bears around that we couldn't see. Here are some prints leading off into the ocean and the bears couldn't have been that far away. Photo by participant Kim Nelson.

We made it back to Anchorage and parted ways. It was such a short trip but was still a real treat getting to explore such a remote corner of the globe with you all and I hope you made lasting memories of the fun birding in the Far North. Until our tracks meet again, be well and good birding!

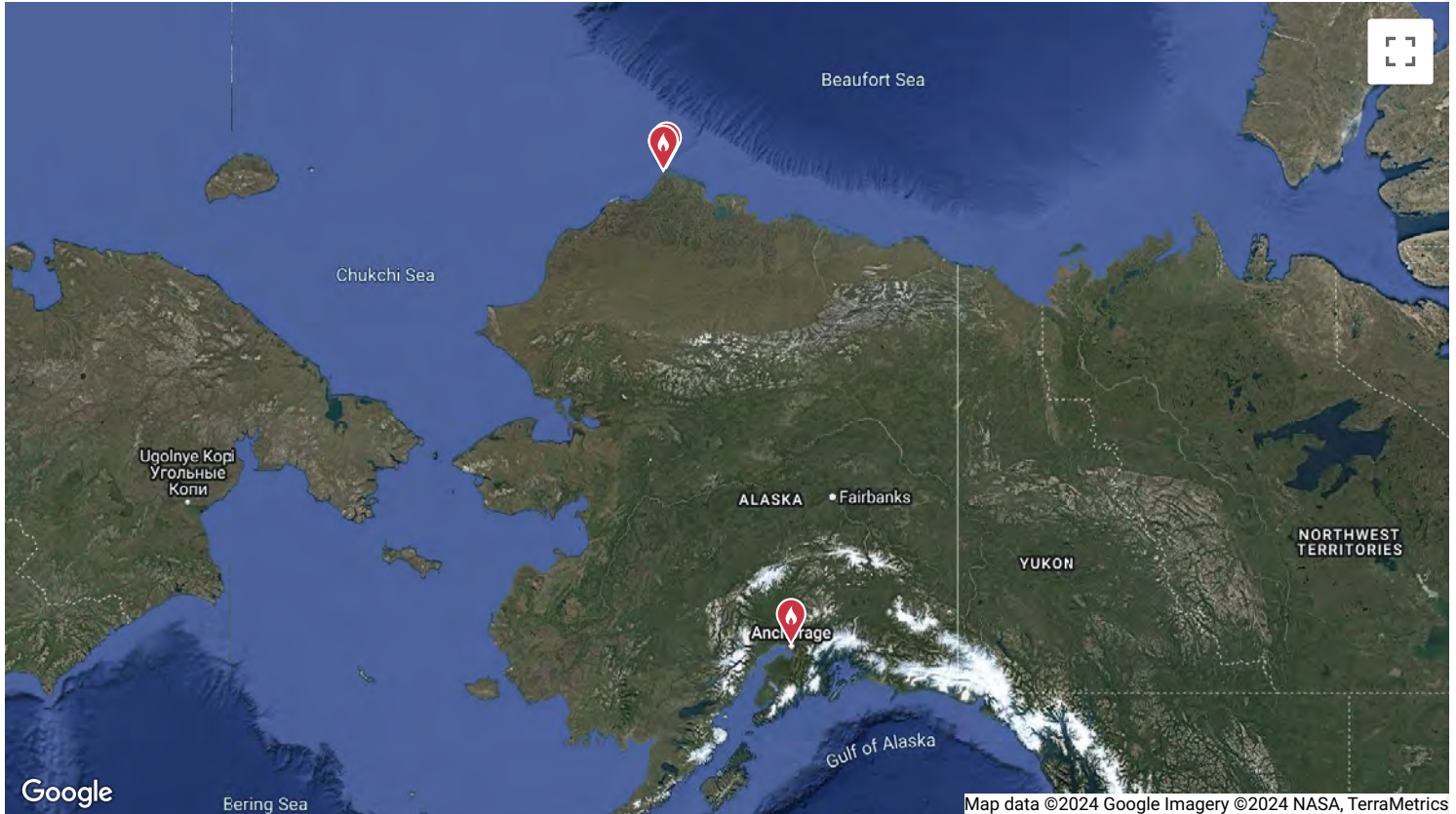
You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/284916>

-- Cory Gregory (Curlew)

Field Guides Birding Tours -- ALASKA FALL GOLDMINE: ROSS'S GULLS IN BARROW, 2024 (with Cory Gregory)



5 – 8 Oct 2024 (4 days) Link-only



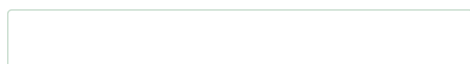
Alaska, United States

Anchorage Municipality | North Slope Borough

Cory Gregory



For a narrative summary of this tour, including a Field Guides photo gallery and additional media for this trip...



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Species Observed

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2	Gadwall <i>Mareca strepera</i>	  1
4	American Wigeon <i>Mareca americana</i>	  1
18	Mallard <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	  1
8	Lesser Scaup <i>Aythya affinis</i>	  1
14	King Eider <i>Somateria spectabilis</i>	  5
375	Common Eider <i>Somateria mollissima</i>	  6
820	Long-tailed Duck <i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	  6
15	Bufflehead <i>Bucephala albeola</i>	  1
3	Common Goldeneye <i>Bucephala clangula</i>	  1
10	Barrow's Goldeneye <i>Bucephala islandica</i>	  1
1	Common Merganser <i>Mergus merganser</i>	  1
36	Willow Ptarmigan <i>Lagopus lagopus</i>	  2
1	Greater Yellowlegs <i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>	  1
182	Ross's Gull <i>Rhodostethia rosea</i>	  5
281	Black-legged Kittiwake <i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	  6
1	Ivory Gull <i>Pagophila eburnea</i> 	  1
175	Short-billed Gull <i>Larus brachyrhynchus</i>	  1
4095	Glaucous Gull <i>Larus hyperboreus</i>	  2  6
2	Iceland Gull <i>Larus glaucoides</i>	  2
1	Horned Grebe <i>Podiceps auritus</i>	  1

- 8 **Red-throated Loon** *Gavia stellata* ▶ 📷 5
- 10 **Pacific Loon** *Gavia pacifica* ▶ 📷 5
- 13 **Yellow-billed Loon** *Gavia adamsii* ▶ 📷 5
- 243 **Short-tailed Shearwater** *Ardenna tenuirostris* ▶ 📷 1 📷 5
- 1 **Bald Eagle** *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* ▶ 📷 1
- 2 **Snowy Owl** *Bubo scandiacus* ▶ 📷 2
- 4 **Black-billed Magpie** *Pica hudsonia* ▶ 📷 1
- 5 **Common Raven** *Corvus corax* ▶ 📷 3
- 18 **European Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris* * ▶ 📷 1
- 1 **American Robin** *Turdus migratorius* ▶ 📷 1
- 8 **Redpoll** *Acanthis flammea* ▶ 📷 3
- 1 **Snow Bunting** *Plectrophenax nivalis* ▶ 📷 1

EXOTIC: PROVISIONAL

- 1 **Rock Pigeon** *Columba livia* * ▶ 📷 1

ADDITIONAL TAXA

- 20 Greater/Lesser Scaup *Aythya marila/affinis* ▶ 📷 1
- 10 Common/Barrow's Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula/islandica* ▶ 📷 1
- 12 American Herring/Vega Gull *Larus smithsonianus/vegae* ▶ 📷 6
- 40 gull sp. *Larinae sp.* ▶ 📷 1