



*Field Guides Tour Report*

**Alaska I - Part One (Pribilofs & Denali) 2014**

May 30, 2014 to Jun 7, 2014

Chris Benesh & Pepe Rojas

*For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please [VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE](#).*



*Denali, the great one, showed beautifully for us south of Cantwell. (Photo by guide Chris Benesh)*

We were blessed with great weather and good fortune on the first part of the Alaska tour this year. Our visit to St. Paul had one of the better showing of Asian strays in recent years, not to mention all of the really terrific regulars. And our visit to the Denali area had pleasant weather and great views of Denali on the drive north. In fact, aside from our visit to Hillside Park in Anchorage, biting insects were scarcely noticed.

There is always so much happening in Alaska. The landscape is vast and compelling, offering a wonderful distraction to the birds and wildlife. There were many highlights with favorites including the Long-tailed Jaeger that performed for us in the park, the stately Tufted Puffins, the handsome male Spruce Grouse that Pepe found for us, Crested Auklets, and more.

Thanks to all of you for making the trip such a joy for Pepe and me. -- Chris

**KEYS FOR THIS LIST**

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: \* = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

**BIRDS**

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

**GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE** (*Anser albifrons*) – One at Westchester Lagoon was a bit out of place.

**EMPEROR GOOSE** (*Chen canagica*) – Mostly a headshot for folks owing to how close this bird was to shore, but we did find the right angle.

**BRANT (BLACK)** (*Branta bernicla nigricans*) – A lone bird hanging out at St. Paul.

**CANADA GOOSE** (*Branta canadensis*) – Around Anchorage.

**TRUMPETER SWAN** (*Cygnus buccinator*) – A couple seen up in the Denali area.

**TUNDRA SWAN (WHISTLING)** (*Cygnus columbianus columbianus*) – A lone bird at Antone Lake on St. Paul.

**TUNDRA SWAN (BEWICK'S)** (*Cygnus columbianus bewickii*) – There were three swans at Rocky Lake that showed characteristics of the Old World form of Tundra Swan with more extensive yellow on the bill.

**GADWALL** (*Anas strepera*)

**AMERICAN WIGEON** (*Anas americana*)

**MALLARD** (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Including a couple on St. Paul where they are scarce.

**NORTHERN SHOVELER** (*Anas clypeata*)

**NORTHERN PINTAIL** (*Anas acuta*)

**GREEN-WINGED TEAL (EURASIAN)** (*Anas crecca nimia*) – These are the Old World type Green-winged Teal that we saw a fair number of on St. Paul. There is some question as to whether nimia is a valid subspecies. If not, these become crecca.

**GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN)** (*Anas crecca carolinensis*)

**GREATER SCAUP** (*Aythya marila*)

**LESSER SCAUP** (*Aythya affinis*)

**KING EIDER** (*Somateria spectabilis*) – Seen at St. Paul.

**HARLEQUIN DUCK** (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) – In addition to the handsome birds on St. Paul there two males right in Anchorage.

**WHITE-WINGED SCOTER (NORTH AMERICAN)** (*Melanitta fusca deglandi*) – Nice looks at these at the Denali Highway float plane lake.

**LONG-TAILED DUCK** (*Clangula hyemalis*)

**BUFFLEHEAD** (*Bucephala albeola*)

**COMMON GOLDENEYE** (*Bucephala clangula*) – One at the float plane lake was a bit out of place.

**BARROW'S GOLDENEYE** (*Bucephala islandica*) – Best looks were at the float plane lake.

**RED-BREASTED MERGANSER** (*Mergus serrator*)

*Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)*

**SPRUCE GROUSE** (*Falcipennis canadensis*) – Wow! Pepe spotted this handsome male just minutes after entering the spruce woods on our way to Denali.

**WILLOW PTARMIGAN** (*Lagopus lagopus*) – We ended up seeing three of these on the bus ride.

**ROCK PTARMIGAN** (*Lagopus muta*) – Whew! Connected with a handsome male on Thoroughfare Pass on our bus ride.

*Gaviidae (Loons)*

**RED-THROATED LOON** (*Gavia stellata*)

**PACIFIC LOON** (*Gavia pacifica*) – One at St. Paul.

**COMMON LOON** (*Gavia immer*) – A close encounter with one at Byers Lake.

**YELLOW-BILLED LOON** (*Gavia adamsii*) – Alas, the quick flyover view of a subadult bird at St. Paul would turn out to be the only one of the trip.

*Podicipedidae (Grebes)*

**HORNED GREBE** (*Podiceps auritus*) – Two beautiful birds at the float plane lake.

**RED-NECKED GREBE** (*Podiceps grisegena*) – Great to watch the antics of these handsome birds.

*Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)*

**NORTHERN FULMAR** (*Fulmarus glacialis*) – The north Pacific birds are a candidate for a future split from the north Atlantic birds. The two have been isolated for many thousands of years.

*Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)*

**RED-FACED CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax urile*) – St. Paul Island was a great place for this species.

*Pandionidae (Osprey)*

**OSPREY** (*Pandion haliaetus*) – One in Anchorage on the first day of the trip was noteworthy.

*Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)*

**GOLDEN EAGLE** (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – Quite evident on our day in the park. The highlight for many was the male displaying near Polychrome Pass with deep, swooping undulations out over the vast valley below. What a sight!

**NORTHERN HARRIER** (*Circus cyaneus*)

**Bald Eagle** (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

**RED-TAILED HAWK (HARLAN'S)** (*Buteo jamaicensis harlani*)

*Gruidae (Cranes)*

**SANDHILL CRANE** (*Grus canadensis*)

*Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)*

**SEMIPALMATED PLOVER** (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)

*Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)*

**COMMON SANDPIPER** (*Actitis hypoleucos*) – St. Paul Tours guide Glen casually spotted one while we were enjoying the Emperor Goose on our first evening on the island. A good start to the visit.

**WANDERING TATTERL** (*Tringa incana*) – Four of these at East Landing on St. Paul.

**GREATER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

**LESSER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa flavipes*)

**WOOD SANDPIPER** (*Tringa glareola*) – Another treat on St. Paul was a cooperative bird found at Town Marsh. Lucky us!

**WHIMBREL (AMERICAN)** (*Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*)

**HUDSONIAN GODWIT** (*Limosa haemastica*) – Excellent views of this species in Anchorage during the high tide.

**BAR-TAILED GODWIT** (*Limosa lapponica*) – Two of these were on the beach at St. Paul.

**RUDDY TURNSTONE** (*Arenaria interpres*)

**SURFBIRD** (*Calidris virgata*) – Three of these were on the mudflats in Anchorage during our visit there.

**ROCK SANDPIPER** (*Calidris ptilocnemis*) – One of the most evident birds on St. Paul.

**LEAST SANDPIPER** (*Calidris minutilla*)

**SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER** (*Calidris pusilla*) – We had one hanging out with a Least Sandpiper at Pumphouse Lake. A very rare bird on St. Paul.

**SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER** (*Limnodromus griseus*)

**WILSON'S SNIPE** (*Gallinago delicata*)

**COMMON SNIPE** (*Gallinago gallinago*) – We had some good flight views of a bird at Antone Lake, including it doing some distinctive winnowing display sounds rather unlike those of Wilson's Snipe.

**RED-NECKED PHALAROPE** (*Phalaropus lobatus*)

**RED PHALAROPE** (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) – Flights and rafts of thousands of these just off of Northeast Point on St. Paul were a sight to see. Not normal in Spring.

*Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)*

**LONG-TAILED JAEGER** (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) – One briefly on St. Paul and then quite a show for some on the bus drive in the park.

*Alcidae (Auks, Murres, and Puffins)*

**COMMON MURRE** (*Uria aalge*)

**THICK-BILLED MURRE** (*Uria lomvia*)

**ANCIENT MURRELET** (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*) – A close encounter in the harbor on St. Paul for most (and with apologies to Michael for the mix-up).

**PARAKEET AUKLET** (*Aethia psittacula*)

**LEAST AUKLET** (*Aethia pusilla*)

**CRESTED AUKLET** (*Aethia cristatella*) – Always a crowd pleaser, we had some nice looks at St. Paul.

**HORNED PUFFIN** (*Fratercula corniculata*)

**TUFTED PUFFIN** (*Fratercula cirrhata*)

*Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)*

**BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE** (*Rissa tridactyla*)

**RED-LEGGED KITTIWAKE** (*Rissa brevirostris*) – One of the many draws for birders visiting the Pribilofs, we had nice looks at this Bering Sea endemic.

**BONAPARTE'S GULL** (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*)

**MEW GULL (AMERICAN)** (*Larus canus brachyrhynchus*)

**HERRING GULL (AMERICAN)** (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*)

**HERRING GULL (VEGA)** (*Larus argentatus vega*) – Beautiful looks at a pair of these at St. Paul. A distinctive dark backed form of Herring Gull.

**GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL** (*Larus glaucescens*)

**GLAUCOUS GULL** (*Larus hyperboreus*)

**ARCTIC TERN** (*Sterna paradisaea*)

*Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)*

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) [II]

*Cuculidae (Cuckoos)*

**COMMON CUCKOO** (*Cuculus canorus*) – Our last new bird seen just before heading to the airport for our flight back to the mainland. This marked the beginning of what turned out to be an amazing season for cuckoos on various Bering Sea islands.

*Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)*

**MERLIN** (*Falco columbarius*)

*Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)*

**GRAY JAY** (*Perisoreus canadensis*)

**BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE** (*Pica hudsonia*)

**COMMON RAVEN** (*Corvus corax*)

*Hirundinidae (Swallows)*

**TREE SWALLOW** (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

**VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW** (*Tachycineta thalassina*)

**BANK SWALLOW** (*Riparia riparia*)

**CLIFF SWALLOW** (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*)

*Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)*

**BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE** (*Poecile atricapillus*)

**BOREAL CHICKADEE** (*Poecile hudsonicus*) – We finally connected with one south of Denali on our way back to Anchorage.

*Sittidae (Nuthatches)*

**RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH** (*Sitta canadensis*)

### Regulidae (Kinglets)

**RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET** (*Regulus calendula*)

### Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

**NORTHERN WHEATEAR** (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) – Nice looks at least four of these during our walk down Polychrome Pass.

### Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

**GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH** (*Catharus minimus*) – Seen along the Denali Highway.

**SWAINSON'S THRUSH** (*Catharus ustulatus*)

**HERMIT THRUSH** (*Catharus guttatus*)

**AMERICAN ROBIN** (*Turdus migratorius*)

**VARIED THRUSH** (*Ixoreus naevius*) – Quite a handsome thrush.

### Sturnidae (Starlings)

**EUROPEAN STARLING** (*Sturnus vulgaris*) **[I]**

### Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

**BOHEMIAN WAXWING** (*Bombycilla garrulus*) – A single bird seen at the float plane lake on a couple of different days.

### Calciariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings)

**LAPLAND LONGSPUR** (*Calcarius lapponicus*)

**SNOW BUNTING** (*Plectrophenax nivalis*)

### Parulidae (New World Warblers)

**NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH** (*Parkesia noveboracensis*)

**ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER** (*Oreothlypis celata*)

**YELLOW WARBLER** (*Setophaga petechia*)

**BLACKPOLL WARBLER** (*Setophaga striata*)

**YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER** (*Setophaga coronata*)

**WILSON'S WARBLER** (*Cardellina pusilla*)

### Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

**AMERICAN TREE SPARROW** (*Spizella arborea*)

**SAVANNAH SPARROW** (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

**FOX SPARROW (RED)** (*Passerella iliaca zaboria*)

**WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (GAMBEL'S)** (*Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*)

**DARK-EYED JUNCO (SLATE-COLORED)** (*Junco hyemalis hyemalis*)

### Icteriidae (Troupials and Allies)

**RUSTY BLACKBIRD** (*Euphagus carolinus*) – Two seen along the highway in the marshes just outside of Anchorage.

### Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)

**GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH (PRIBILOF IS.)** (*Leucosticte tephrocotis umbrina*)

**WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL** (*Loxia leucoptera*) – Great looks at this species on a couple of occasions in the Denali region. Absent elsewhere.

**COMMON REDPOLL** (*Acanthis flammea*)

## **MAMMALS**

**COLLARED PIKA** (*Ochotona collaris*) – Terrific looks at one on Polychrome Pass that seemed to be quite curious about us.

**ARCTIC GROUND SQUIRREL** (*Spermophilus parryii*)

**RED SQUIRREL** (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)

**TUNDRA RED-BACKED VOLE** (*Clethrionomys rutilus*)

**ARCTIC FOX** (*Alopex lagopus*) – Well seen on St. Paul.

**BROWN (INCL. GRIZZLY) BEAR** (*Ursus arctos*) – Pepe spotted two in the distance that we were able to put in scopes. Otherwise, Michael had great looks at two on his bus ride back to the depot.

**NORTHERN FUR SEAL** (*Callorhinus ursinus*) – Great looks at some on St. Paul, where most of its global population breeds.

**HARBOR SEAL** (*Phoca vitulina*)

**MOOSE** (*Alces alces*) – Several of these distinctive animals seen.

**CARIBOU** (*Rangifer tarandus granti*)

**REINDEER** (*Rangifer tarandus sibiricus*) – Seen on St. Paul. **[I]**

**DALL'S SHEEP** (*Ovis dalli*)

## **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

**Totals for the tour: 117 bird taxa and 12 mammal taxa**