



Field Guides Tour Report

Alaska I - Part One (Pribilofs & Denali) 2015

May 29, 2015 to Jun 6, 2015

Chris Benesh

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



A Northern Hawk Owl glides past us. (Photo by guide Chris Benesh)

Conditions in Alaska were unusually hot and dry during the spring and summer, yet we did not experience that sort of weather during our time there. In fact, it was a little unusual that the mildest weather we experienced was on St. Paul Island. Despite the cool and damp conditions, we still managed to see an interesting variety of things. While on St. Paul Island, we had a nice mix of all the interesting breeding birds plus a good sprinkling of rarities, which included a Goosander, an Asian Whimbrel, a Kamchatka Mew Gull, a Brambling and, from North America, a Swainson's Thrush.

Highlights from the Denali section of the trip included great looks at Gyrfalcon, Spruce Grouse, American Three-toed Woodpecker and, best of all, a Northern Hawk Owl we saw along the Denali Highway. There were a number of interesting mammal sightings along the way, too, with Moose and a variety of pinnipeds being highlights.

Thanks to all of you for making the trip a blast to lead!

Good birding to all,

--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)

SNOW GOOSE (*Chen caerulescens*) – A wayward stray was in Anchorage at Westchester Lagoon.

BRANT (BLACK) (*Branta bernicla nigricans*) – A lone bird was at Saint Paul.

ACKLING GOOSE (ALEUTIAN) (*Branta hutchinsii leucopareia*) – We had three together and later another single at Saint Paul.

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

TRUMPETER SWAN (*Cygnus buccinator*) – A few seen on the drive to Denali.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*)

EURASIAN WIGEON (*Anas penelope*) – A couple at Saint Paul.

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*)

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*)

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*)

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (EURASIAN) (*Anas crecca nimia*) – Quite a few of these at Saint Paul as well as some hybrids/intergrades.

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

CANVASBACK (*Aythya valisineria*)

REDHEAD (*Aythya americana*)

GREATER SCAUP (*Aythya marila*)

LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*)

STELLER'S EIDER (*Polysticta stelleri*) – A female plumaged bird showed up at the harbor at Saint Paul.

KING EIDER (*Somateria spectabilis*)

HARLEQUIN DUCK (*Histrionicus histrionicus*)

SURF SCOTER (*Melanitta perspicillata*)

LONG-TAILED DUCK (*Clangula hyemalis*)

BUFFLEHEAD (*Bucephala albeola*)

COMMON GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala clangula*)

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala islandica*) – A male at Saint Paul was quite a rarity there. Others seen near Denali.

COMMON MERGANSER (EURASIAN) (*Mergus merganser merganser*) – While not considered a good species universally, it was a real treat seeing a male of this distinctive Old World population where it is known as Goosander.

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*)

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

SPRUCE GROUSE (*Falcipennis canadensis*) – After a bit of searching we stumbled onto one. The fact that it was a handsome male was a bonus.

WILLOW PTARMIGAN (*Lagopus lagopus*) – We did come across one on our bus ride in Denali.

Gaviidae (Loons)

RED-THROATED LOON (*Gavia stellata*) – One on the float plane lake.

COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*)

YELLOW-BILLED LOON (*Gavia adamsii*) – Several sightings at Saint Paul this year, the best single visit total for me. Most were first year birds.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

HORNED GREBE (*Podiceps auritus*) – Two seen in the Denali area.

RED-NECKED GREBE (*Podiceps grisegena*)

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

NORTHERN FULMAR (*Fulmarus glacialis*)

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – One hanging out on the cliffs at Saint Paul. This species is very rare there in spring.

RED-FACED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax urile*) – Nice to see this Alaskan specialty.

PELAGIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*)

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – Wow, super memorable views of several in Denali NP including one that had caught a Rock Ptarmigan!

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)

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*)

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*)

WOOD SANDPIPER (*Tringa glareola*) – At least three seen on Saint Paul, one of the best places to see this species in the New World.

WHIMBREL (SIBERIAN) (*Numenius phaeopus variegatus*) – Nice flight views of this rare visitor at Saint Paul. Some authorities split this form from the North American subspecies *hudsonicus*.

HUDSONIAN GODWIT (*Limosa haemastica*) – Good looks in Anchorage.
BAR-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa lapponica*) – One turned upon Saint Paul.
RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*)
ROCK SANDPIPER (*Calidris ptilocnemis*) – One of the iconic species nesting at Saint Paul.
LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*)
SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*) – A single bird at Westchester.
WILSON'S SNIBE (*Gallinago delicata*)
RED-NECKED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus lobatus*)

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)

POMARINE JAEGER (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) – A single bird seen briefly at Saint Paul.
PARASITIC JAEGER (*Stercorarius parasiticus*)
LONG-TAILED JAEGER (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) – One seen at Denali.

Alcidae (Auks, Murres, and Puffins)

COMMON MURRE (*Uria aalge*)
THICK-BILLED MURRE (*Uria lomvia*)
PIGEON GUILLEMOT (*Cepphus columba*)
PARAKEET AUKLET (*Aethia psittacula*)
LEAST AUKLET (*Aethia pusilla*)
CRESTED AUKLET (*Aethia cristatella*)
HORNED PUFFIN (*Fratercula corniculata*)
TUFTED PUFFIN (*Fratercula cirrhata*)

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE (*Rissa tridactyla*)
RED-LEGGED KITTIWAKE (*Rissa brevirostris*) – A treat to see this Bering Sea endemic.
BONAPARTE'S GULL (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*)
MEW GULL (KAMCHATKA) (*Larus canus kamtschatschensis*) – Not too exciting unless you love gulls. This form of Mew Gull is split by many authorities, so it may be a bank bird for life lists.
MEW GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus canus brachyrhynchus*) – Quite a few in mainland Alaska.
HERRING GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*)
GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL (*Larus glaucescens*)
GLAUCOUS GULL (*Larus hyperboreus*)
ARCTIC TERN (*Sterna paradisaea*)

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [H]

Strigidae (Owls)

SNOWY OWL (*Bubo scandiacus*) – A nice encounter with one at the quarry on Saint Paul.
NORTHERN HAWK OWL (*Surnia ulula*) – Whew hew! What a treat finding this handsome bird along the Denali Highway.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

AMERICAN THREE-TOED WOODPECKER (*Picoides dorsalis*) – Thanks to an eBird tip, we had nice views of one near Susitna. It came in so fast it caught us unprepared for pictures!
NORTHERN FLICKER (YELLOW-SHAFTED) (*Colaptes auratus auratus*)

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – A couple of quick encounters.
GYRFALCON (*Falco rusticolus*) – After a few years absence, Gyrfalcons were back at Marmot Rock in Denali. We had a glorious time with a bird there.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

ALDER FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax alnorum*) – Well seen on our first afternoon in Anchorage.

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 (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

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

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

PACIFIC WREN (ALASKAN ISLANDS) (*Troglodytes pacificus alascensis*) – Marion spotted this scarce wren for us on Saint Paul. Larger and paler than continental Pacific Wrens, who knows what their taxonomic future holds.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*)

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH (*Catharus minimus*) – Quite a few of these along the Denali Highway.

SWAINSON'S THRUSH (*Catharus ustulatus*) – One seen on the road just south of Marunich on Saint Paul was apparently the first Spring record for the island.

HERMIT THRUSH (*Catharus guttatus*)

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*)

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Increasing in Anchorage. [I]

Calcariidae (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 (SOOTY) (*Passerella iliaca sinuosa*) – A couple of these were seen in Anchorage on the first morning of the trip.

FOX SPARROW (RED) (*Passerella iliaca zaboria*) – This was the common form seen in the interior of Alaska.

LINCOLN'S SPARROW (*Melospiza lincolnii*)

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

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

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

BRAMBLING (*Fringilla montifringilla*) – Saint Paul guide Alison had found a female that we were able to track down later near Seal Island.

GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH (PRIBILOF IS.) (*Leucosticte tephrocotis umbrina*) – The largest of the rosy-finches.

WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL (*Loxia leucoptera*) – We had a lone bird along the Parks Highway.

COMMON REDPOLL (*Acanthis flammea*)

PINE SISKIN (*Spinus pinus*)

MAMMALS

SNOWSHOE HARE (*Lepus americanus*)

HOARY MARMOT (*Marmota caligata*) – Great looks at one on Polychrome Pass.

ARCTIC GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus parryi*)

RED SQUIRREL (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)

TUNDRA RED-BACKED VOLE (*Clethrionomys rutilus*)

MUSKRAT (*Ondatra zibethica*) – One sunning itself at Westchester.

ARCTIC FOX (*Alopex lagopus*) – Plentiful on Saint Paul Island.

STELLER'S SEA LION (*Eumetopias jubatus*) – A handful of these were present at Saint Paul.

NORTHERN FUR SEAL (*Callorhinus ursinus*) – The largest breeding population in the world is on Saint Paul Island.

HARBOR SEAL (*Phoca vitulina*)

MOOSE (*Alces alces*) – Multiples seen on different days beginning with the two on the first morning in Anchorage.

CARIBOU (*Rangifer tarandus granti*)

DALL'S SHEEP (*Ovis dalli*)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 120 bird taxa and 13 mammal taxa