



*Field Guides Tour Report*

**Alaska II - Part One (Pribilofs & Denali) 2015**

Jun 5, 2015 to Jun 13, 2015  
Megan Edwards Crewe & Pepe Rojas

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



*Top of this year's rarities table had to be the gorgeous male Siberian Rubythroat we saw bouncing around a debris pile near the Saint Paul airport. Photo by guide Megan Edwards Crewe.*

The vast northern state of Alaska offers a fantastic wilderness backdrop against which to enjoy its special birds and mammals. Scenery stretches to the horizon, you can go days without seeing a passing plane, and the silence (except for the sounds of the wind and the sea and the wild creatures) on some of the roadsides and hilltops is truly amazing. On this first part of our grand tour, we visited the tiny ocean island of Saint Paul and the wild interior area around Denali National Park, moving from the rolling, grassy hills and rocky oceanside cliffs of the former to the endless spruce forests and soaring, snow-covered mountains of the latter. We got lucky with flights AND weather this year, getting everywhere we were supposed to go (more or less on time) and dodging most of the raindrops -- though not, as it turned out, the snowflakes!

As usual, we had plenty of highlights. Tops of the rarities department had to be our first day on Saint Paul; in less than 24 hours, we had a flyover Tundra Bean-Goose (which made several passes), a young Black-headed Gull lurking among a bathing flock of Red-legged and Black-legged kittiwakes, a point-blank Common Sandpiper scuttling around on a muddy stream bank, and a spectacular male Siberian Rubythroat bouncing through the grass around a pile of old boards! We also spent some very satisfying time with the "regulars" there, enjoying the hustle and bustle of the seabird breeding cliffs, where Common and Thick-billed murrets stood side by side (allowing nice comparison), Least and Parakeet auklets squabbled over real estate, Northern Fulmars nuzzled each other with their distinctive tube-nosed bills, Crested Auklets waved their curlicue head feathers at each other, Red-faced Cormorants flashed their eponymous red faces, and Tufted and Horned puffins snoozed on rocky ledges looking pretty adorable.

The shift to the northern forests and tundra around Anchorage and Denali brought new treats -- chief among them, some truly awe-inspiring scenery! A pair of Boreal Chickadees grumbled as they flicked through nearby spruces. A male Varied Thrush serenaded from an open branch. A hungry group of White-winged Crossbills swarmed through nearby treetops, prying open innumerable spruce cones. An elegant Gyrfalcon posed atop a lichen-encrusted ridge. A pair of Long-tailed Jaegers ghosted through a snowstorm. A Willow Ptarmigan crept, crouching, across the road in front of our bus. A Northern Hawk-Owl preened on a treetop. A Grizzly snuffled his way along the edge of the park road, resulting in an adrenalin surge or two for your guides. And on our wonderful last morning along the Denali-Paxson Highway, there were birds singing and flying and feeding everywhere -- and The Mountain made a bit of an appearance!

Of course, a cadre of fine travelling companions just made the whole thing even more enjoyable. Thanks for joining us and for making this trip such fun. We hope to see you all again soon! -- Megan (and Pepe)

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)

**TUNDRA BEAN-GOOSE** (*Anser serrirostris*) – Some great spotting by Alison netted us extended flight views of one as it flapped past over Big Lake - completely distracting us from our search for the Black-headed Gull. We later found it paddling around on the back edge of Webster Lake.

**SNOW GOOSE** (*Chen caerulescens*) – One, looking decidedly bedraggled, preened among the Mew Gulls on the little island near the parking lot at Westchester Lagoon. It was undoubtedly sick or hurt, as Snow Geese are generally long gone from Anchorage by the time of our tours.

**CANADA GOOSE** (*Branta canadensis*) – Good numbers floated on the main pond (or rested on the little islands) at Westchester Lagoon, and others nibbled on vegetation along the edges of the mudflats there. The common subspecies around Anchorage -- parvipes -- looks small, and small-billed to many of us from the Lower 48.

**TRUMPETER SWAN** (*Cygnus buccinator*) – The four very distant swans we saw flying over the forest beyond the Nenana River (while we watched from a high point along the Denali-Paxson Highway) were likely this species. Most Tundra Swans have reached their high arctic breeding grounds by the time of our tour.

**GADWALL** (*Anas strepera*) – A few pairs floated on the ponds at Westchester Lagoon, and others dabbled on the mudflats near Chester Creek there, seen as we searched in vain for the Terek Sandpiper.

**AMERICAN WIGEON** (*Anas americana*) – A few pairs at Westchester Lagoon, dabbling on the ponds or rummaging on the mudflats.

**MALLARD** (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Including several females with ducklings around Anchorage. [N]

**NORTHERN SHOVELER** (*Anas clypeata*) – A few in the ponds at Westchester Lagoon.

**NORTHERN PINTAIL** (*Anas acuta*) – This elegant duck was common both on Saint Paul and on the mainland -- including a female with 8 very small ducklings beneath the bridge at Westchester Lagoon our first evening. [N]

**GREEN-WINGED TEAL (EURASIAN)** (*Anas crecca nimia*)

**GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN)** (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) – A trio of males snoozed along the edge of a swampy area at Westchester Lagoon during our morning visit there.

**GREATER SCAUP** (*Aythya marila*) – Easily the more common of the two scaup species seen on this tour, with dozens sprinkled around the main pond at Westchester Lagoon.

**LESSER SCAUP** (*Aythya affinis*) – A couple at Westchester Lagoon, including a male floating among male Greater Scaup for nice comparison; his distinctive head shape was clearly visible.

**KING EIDER** (*Somateria spectabilis*) – A drake snoozed on one of the harbor jetties at Saint Paul, and a hen floated in the surf south of town there on our last morning.

**HARLEQUIN DUCK** (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) – Common along the rocky jetties and coastlines of Saint Paul, where we had multiple chances to study the males' incredibly snazzy plumage.

**WHITE-WINGED SCOTER (NORTH AMERICAN)** (*Melanitta fusca deglandi*) – A pair floated on the sea off Saint Paul island; the male in particular showed his white wing patch -- and white eye crescent -- well.

**LONG-TAILED DUCK** (*Clangula hyemalis*) – Common on Saint Paul island, where we saw many -- all in their browner summer plumage -- floating on various ponds. We heard their distinctive, rising "a-ha-lek" calls regularly too.

**BUFFLEHEAD** (*Bucephala albeola*) – Our best looks came at Joe Lake, the float plane lake near the start of the Denali Highway, where we spotted a quintet of females and a single male. We had another trio along the back edge of the main lake at Westchester Lagoon.

**COMMON GOLDENEYE** (*Bucephala clangula*) – A male floated on the sea near Webster House, occasionally disappearing beneath the waves with a flick of his wings.

**BARROW'S GOLDENEYE** (*Bucephala islandica*) – A male floated on Saint Paul island's Weather Bureau Lake; this is a very uncommon bird on the island -- only the 11th ever recorded there!

**RED-BREASTED MERGANSER** (*Mergus serrator*) – A female on Weather Bureau Lake, not far from our Barrow's Goldeneye.

### Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

**WILLOW PTARMIGAN** (*Lagopus lagopus*) – One in front of our bus on the drive back out from Denali's Eielson visitor's center was amusing; it clearly thought we wouldn't notice it crouched and "sneaking" slowly across the road!

### Gaviidae (Loons)

**COMMON LOON** (*Gavia immer*) – One floated on the big pond at Westchester Lagoon on our morning visit there, adding a decidedly northern feel to our park photos.

### Podicipedidae (Grebes)

**HORNED GREBE** (*Podiceps auritus*) – Lovely views of a pair in a roadside pond along the Parks Highway; that breeding plumage is certainly stunning!

**RED-NECKED GREBE** (*Podiceps grisegena*) – Those sprinkled across Westchester Lagoon included a pair busily bringing mouthfuls of soggy vegetation to their floating nest, and another bird perched serenely on a completed nest among the godwits on the little island near the parking lot there.

### Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

**NORTHERN FULMAR** (*Fulmarus glacialis*) – Scores (hundreds?) swarmed around the stern of a fishing boat visible off Marunich (on Saint Paul island), but our best views came at Ridge Wall, where many pairs were dotted across the cliff face. With the scopes, we got fine (if soggy) views of their distinctively tube-nosed beaks.

### Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

**DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Single birds winging over on two different occasions on Saint Paul were certainly a surprise; the species is quite rare there.

**RED-FACED CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax urile*) – Common on Saint Paul island, with many seen in flight and dozens seen at close quarters along the various breeding cliffs. Our views of the vibrant scarlet and blue facial skin of these birds on our first sunny day were just outstanding!

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

**GOLDEN EAGLE** (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – One, looking huge and dark, perched atop a ridge overlooking Polychrome Pass in Denali NP, seen as we searched for our Gyrfalcon. When it turned its head, we could even see its pale golden nape.

**NORTHERN HARRIER** (*Circus cyaneus*) – Distant views for a few of a male hovering over the tundra on the left side of our Denali NP bus as we headed toward the Eielson visitor's center.

**BALD EAGLE** (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – As always, common throughout -- including a long-staying adult on Saint Paul island. Especially fun were the fluffy youngsters in the massive stick nest in a backyard near the main pond at Westchester Lagoon.

Gruidae (Cranes)

**SANDHILL CRANE** (*Grus canadensis*) – Lovely views of one mud-stained bird at Westchester Lagoon our first evening; it flew in and landed on the mudflats just in front of us, then treated us to some trumpeting calls before lowering its head to feed.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

**SEMIPALMATED PLOVER** (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – Small numbers at several places on Saint Paul island, including Anton Slough (in the same area as our Common Sandpiper) and a couple in display flight near Big Lake.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

**COMMON SANDPIPER** (*Actitis hypoleucos*) – One feeding along the edge of Anton Creek on Saint Paul island was a highlight of our evening walk through the slough. We found it (or another) again the following day, right near the top of Ridge Wall. It dropped to the boulders along the shore, then worked its way steadily away from us. This is the Old World sister species of the Spotted Sandpiper.

**WANDERING TATTLER** (*Tringa incana*) – No fewer than five birds foraged along the tide line at Marunich on Saint Paul island, chasing down the flies that were attracted to the beached seaweed; we saw another along the edge of Salt Lagoon. All were in fine breeding plumage, with well-stripped underparts.

**LESSER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa flavipes*) – A few seen striding around the edge of the water at Westchester Lagoon gave us momentary hope that we'd caught up with the absent Terek Sandpiper.

**WHIMBREL (AMERICAN)** (*Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*) – A gang of at least four distant birds chased an adult Bald Eagle as it passed over their territories along the Denali Highway. Though they were too far away to see well, their large size and stuttering calls identified them to species, and their uniformly colored backs identified them to subspecies.

**HUDSONIAN GODWIT** (*Limosa haemastica*) – Our best views came on our morning visit to Westchester Lagoon, when we found a handful of brightly colored birds roosting on a little island in the main pond. We had a trio of more distant birds foraging on the mudflats there our first evening.

**RUDDY TURNSTONE** (*Arenaria interpres*) – A few rummaged along the tide line near Webster House on Saint Paul island, hunting for flies among the mass of seaweed.

**ROCK SANDPIPER** (*Calidris ptilocnemis*) – Abundant all across Saint Paul island, with many seen in display flights (and chases) over the tundra, and dozens taking splashing baths in virtually every wet spot we found.

**SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER** (*Limnodromus griseus*) – A couple of birds, looking decidedly smaller than their godwit companions, rested on the shore of a small island at Westchester Lagoon; others foraged at the far edge of the mudflats visible from the coastal trail there.

**WILSON'S SNIPE** (*Gallinago delicata*) – Heard more frequently than seen, though we did watch several in their rollercoasting display flights high above the spruce forests along the Denali Highway.

**RED-NECKED PHALAROPE** (*Phalaropus lobatus*) – Common on the ponds of Saint Paul island, where groups of brightly-colored, amorous females scuffled over (and chased after) the duller males.

**RED PHALAROPE** (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) – One bright female flew past at Big Lake on Saint Paul island, and another floated in a corner of Webster Lake. This species tends to be far less common than the previous on the island.

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)

**PARASITIC JAEGER** (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) – One flew past Marunich on Saint Paul island, looking powerful and determined.

**LONG-TAILED JAEGER** (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) – Two in the snow -- one sitting atop a mound, the other flying in through the huge flakes -- on one of the higher passes near Denali's Eielson visitor's center made for our first "bird stop" of the day. These graceful birds are the smallest of the jaegers.

Alcidae (Auks, Murres, and Puffins)

**COMMON MURRE** (*Uria aalge*) – Superb views of many on Saint Paul island, particularly on the cliffs of Ridge Wall, where several pairs stood conveniently side by side with pairs of the next species.

**THICK-BILLED MURRE** (*Uria lomvia*) – Overall less common than the previous species on Saint Paul, with a few pairs seen well at Ridge Wall and others at Reef Rookery. Their blacker backs, thicker bills and the white line along the cutting edges of their mandibles are distinctive.

**PIGEON GUILLEMOT** (*Cephus columba*) – A handful floated in the surf off Marunich on Saint Paul's northern side, and another paddled near Southwest Point. The underwing of this species is black (as opposed to white, like that of the Black Guillemot), and its white wing patch typically shows a distinct black wedge.

**PARAKEET AUKLET** (*Aethia psittacula*) – Common on Saint Paul Island, with many interacting on the breeding cliffs or floating on the sea green waters below. Their white bellies and white facial tufts separated them from the similarly-sized Crested Auklets.

**LEAST AUKLET** (*Aethia pusilla*) – Abundant on Saint Paul island, where flocks of dozens flashed past on whirring wings while others danced and squabbled on cliff ledges.

**CRESTED AUKLET** (*Aethia cristatella*) – Especially nice looks at a bunch of these extravagantly-plumed birds on Saint Paul island, particularly on the cliffs of Reef Rookery, with others winging past offshore at Town Cliffs and Ridge Wall. Reportedly, these little seabirds smell strongly of citrus!

**HORNED PUFFIN** (*Fratercula corniculata*) – Scattered across the breeding cliffs of Saint Paul island, with others floating in the harbor or winging past offshore. The white belly of this species quickly separates it from the next, even at a great distance.

**TUFTED PUFFIN** (*Fratercula cirrhata*) – The more common of the two puffins on Saint Paul island, with nice studies of multiple pairs snoozing on the cliffs at Reef Rookery. This species is bigger -- and darker overall -- than is the Horned Puffin.



Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

**BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE** (*Rissa tridactyla*) – Abundant on Saint Paul island, where we watched scores bathing (and snoozing) along the edge of Big Lake, and hundreds (thousands?) of others flying past the coasts.

**RED-LEGGED KITTIWAKE** (*Rissa brevirostris*) – Far less common than the previous species, but also in reasonably good numbers along the edge of Big Lake -- where the bathing birds were flashing their red legs for us. This species also has larger eyes (they're nocturnal feeders) and a darker mantle and underwing than the previous.

**BONAPARTE'S GULL** (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*) – Common at Westchester Lagoon, where they quartered low over the main pond or pattered around on the exposed mudflats. Most were youngsters (lacking the adult's distinctive black head), but we did spot a few breeding-plumaged adults.

**BLACK-HEADED GULL** (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) – An immature bird among the big mixed kittiwake flock on Saint Paul island's Big Lake was a bit of a "where's Waldo" challenge. We arrived at a stakeout to find that the group there had lost sight of it, but with some patience and a bit of luck -- and our strategy of sneaking slowly closer to them -- we eventually relocated it.

**MEW GULL (KAMCHATKA)** (*Larus canus kamtschatschensis*) – One on Saint Paul island's Big Lake was a nice find. This subspecies of the Mew Gull is slightly larger and bulkier than the North American subspecies, with a longer bill and slightly darker plumage.

**MEW GULL (AMERICAN)** (*Larus canus brachyrhynchus*) – Abundant on the mainland, particularly around Anchorage, including a small colony on the island near the Westchester Lagoon parking lot.

**HERRING GULL (AMERICAN)** (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*) – One on a gravel bar in Denali NP's Savage River was being divebombed by a frantic quartet of nesting Mew Gulls. The big gulls around Anchorage are primarily hybrids between this and the next species.

**GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL** (*Larus glaucescens*) – Hundreds and hundreds on Saint Paul island, where they are easily the most common big gull. Most were scruffy-looking youngsters.

**GLAUCOUS GULL** (*Larus hyperboreus*) – A snowy white youngster stood out among the grubbier-looking young Glaucous-winged Gulls on Saint Paul island's Big Lake; its big, pink-based, black-tipped bill was also distinctive.

**ARCTIC TERN** (*Sterna paradisaea*) – Especially nice views of those hunting over the ponds at Westchester Lagoon -- including a few standing on the little island near the parking lot.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) – Dozens huddled on street light arms along the highways and byways of Anchorage. [I]

Strigidae (Owls)

**SNOWY OWL** (*Bubo scandiacus*) – One sitting on a boulder in Rocky Lake on Saint Paul island -- seen on our way to dinner one night -- was a nice surprise; the species migrates through the island but seldom stays for long.

**NORTHERN HAWK OWL** (*Surnia ulula*) – Wow! After leap-frogging down the Denali Highway for a bit, stopping to scan the endless spruce tops periodically, we came around a corner and found one bird perched and preening right near the road. A quick radio message to Pepe's van and we all piled out for long and satisfying scope views as it sorted out its back and wings and belly and... Eventually, when a big, noisy motor home stopped right near its tree (trying to figure out what we were looking at, no doubt), it spread its wings and flew off across the road and away -- raising a moving wave of alarm calls from small birds in the area.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

**HAIRY WOODPECKER** (*Picoides villosus*) – A couple of busy birds near our Montana Creek picnic spot suggested there was a nest in the area. The male returned repeatedly to some birch trees near the parking area, often foraging below waist height.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

**AMERICAN KESTREL** (*Falco sparverius*) – Some of the group spotted one hovering over the low willows on one side of the bus as we headed back out from the Eielson visitor's center in Denali.

**GYRFALCON** (*Falco rusticolus*) – Yay! After dipping on our drive in to Denali's Eielson visitor's center, we scored big time on the way out; while we watched and waited for the big male Grizzly to clear the road, one of the Gyrs soared in and landed on a nearby cliff, and sat for long minutes preening and peering around. Great scope views ensued!

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

**WESTERN WOOD-PEWEE** (*Contopus sordidulus*) – One hunting from a couple of spruces near the river (and picnic shelter) at Brushkana Campground was a bit of a surprise; they're pretty uncommon north of Anchorage.

**ALDER FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax alnorum*) – One at the Denali South viewpoint showed nicely as it hunted among the trees near the path to the overlook. Its "fee-BE-oh" call was a regular part of the soundtrack during our visit there.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

**GRAY JAY** (*Perisoreus canadensis*) – A chortling adult near the top of a spruce at Hillside Park allowed scope views.

**BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE** (*Pica hudsonia*) – Common on the mainland, with especially nice views of several around Westchester Lagoon and McKinley View Lodge; their flashy black and white wings meant even the general tourists on the Denali NP buses were able to spot them.

**COMMON RAVEN** (*Corvus corax*) – Regular as we headed north to Denali, including several clearly patrolling the highways for roadkill.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

**VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW** (*Tachycineta thalassina*) – Daily, including a small gang hunting over our Anchorage hotel the first evening, and others quartering low over the main pond at Westchester Lagoon.

**CLIFF SWALLOW** (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) – A swirling mob of them surrounded us near one of the culverts along the Denali Highway, giving us great views of their buffy rump patches.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

**BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE** (*Poecile atricapillus*) – A noisy pair foraged in the birches along the bike path at Westchester Lagoon -- though we sort of lost track of them once we spotted the Moose! We found another pair in Hillside Park and still more at the Denali South viewpoint.

**BOREAL CHICKADEE** (*Poecile hudsonicus*) – A family group foraged around us -- calling regularly to keep the gang together -- as we started our walk in Hillside Park. Its call is hoarser and slower than that of the previous species.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

**PACIFIC WREN (ALASKAN ISLANDS)** (*Troglodytes pacificus alascensis*) – One acrobatic little bird hopped around atop the celery stalks at Reef Rookery, occasionally belting out his loud song from a convenient perch. The subspecies found on the Alaskan islands (*alascensis*) is larger and long-billed than are the subspecies on the mainland.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

**RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET** (*Regulus calendula*) – Especially nice views of a fired-up bird along one of the trails at Hillside Park, his red crown patch flared as he answered another bird further up the hill. We heard and saw others along the Denali Highway as well.

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

**SIBERIAN RUBYTHROAT** (*Calliope calliope*) – Yowza -- this one was MOST unexpected! We were headed back to dinner on Saint Paul when we got the text about this one; three birders leaving the island had found it while waiting for their plane. We raced to the airport and had superb views of a stunning male as he bounced through the grass around a pile of discarded boards.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

**GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH** (*Catharus minimus*) – Dozens sang from scattered treetops along the Denali Highway. Their complex, spiraling songs were a regular part of the Denali soundtrack.

**SWAINSON'S THRUSH** (*Catharus ustulatus*) – We heard one singing from the hilly forest at Hillside Park, but couldn't entice it out for a view. [\*]

**HERMIT THRUSH** (*Catharus guttatus*) – One on a dead snag at the Denali South Viewpoint repeatedly threw back his head and poured his lovely song into the afternoon. His back was to us for much of the time, making it easy to see his distinctively rusty tail.

**AMERICAN ROBIN** (*Turdus migratorius*) – Regular throughout the mainland part of our tour, including one with a mouthful of worms that came to check out the hawk-owl.

**VARIED THRUSH** (*Ixoreus naevius*) – The ethereal song of this thrush greeted us as we arrived at Hillside Park, and after a bit of hill climbing, we were rewarded by fine views of the singer on his spruce bough. We heard others en route to Denali.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

**EUROPEAN STARLING** (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Roadside birds around Anchorage, including quite a sizeable flock near Wasilla. When I first started doing Alaska tours (way back in the mid-90s), starling sightings were reported to the rare bird alert! [I]

Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings)

**LAPLAND LONGSPUR** (*Calcarius lapponicus*) – Abundant on Saint Paul, where displaying males parachuted gently earthwards all over the place. Last year's dead celery flower stalks made particularly good perching spots.

**SNOW BUNTING** (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) – Also regular on Saint Paul, though in far smaller numbers than the previous species. We had especially nice looks at a little gang of them chasing flies across the beached seaweed at Marunich, with others bouncing in and out of the giant boulders piled along the shore at Town Cliffs.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

**NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH** (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) – We heard the loud, ringing song of this species along streams at Montana Creek campground (while Pepe and I made lunch) and the Denali Highway. [\*]

**ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER** (*Oreothlypis celata*) – Relatively common across the mainland, with scope views of a male singing from a tree top near the railroad tracks at Westchester Lagoon, and others seen rummaging through the roadside bushes along the Denali Highway.

**YELLOW WARBLER** (*Setophaga petechia*) – A bright male sang exuberantly from a little spruce tree along the Denali Highway on our second morning there.

**BLACKPOLL WARBLER** (*Setophaga striata*) – Our first was a singing male that flicked from spruce top to spruce top near the quarry on the Parks Highway; we saw (and heard) others along the Denali Highway.

**YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (MYRTLE)** (*Setophaga coronata coronata*) – Larry spotted one at Westchester Lagoon on our morning visit, but the rest of the group had to wait until we got to Denali to see one. Singing males along the Denali Highway perched up nicely for viewing. The subspecies found in Alaska is *coronata* -- the Myrtle Warbler.

**WILSON'S WARBLER** (*Cardellina pusilla*) – A black-capped male singing along the Denali Highway allowed good scope views, and we saw other -- more furtive -- birds hunting for insects among the roadside vegetation there.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

**AMERICAN TREE SPARROW** (*Spizella arborea*) – Super views on our second morning along the Denali Highway, when one cooperative bird foraged through some bushes at the edge of the road, showing well its rusty cap and eye line and its distinctive dark breast spot.

**SAVANNAH SPARROW** (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – One singing from a little bush along the Denali Highway sat long enough for everyone to get the chance to study him in the scope.

**FOX SPARROW (RED)** (*Passerella iliaca zaboria*) – These big sparrows were very common around Denali, often singing exuberantly from the tops of spruces (which allowed us great opportunity to study them at leisure).

**LINCOLN'S SPARROW** (*Melospiza lincolni*) – One at Westchester Lagoon danced through the cattails edging Chester Creek, then flicked out to perch in clear view on the fence around the radio tower. Some of the gang spotted another briefly near our first Savannah Sparrow.

**WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (GAMBEL'S)** (*Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*) – Seen well most days on the mainland, including on in a little tree beside the bike path at Westchester Lagoon. The "Gambel's" subspecies has a shorter eyeline than do other White-crowned Sparrow subspecies (it doesn't extend forward of the eye as it does in other subspecies) and its bill is yellow rather than pink.

**DARK-EYED JUNCO (SLATE-COLORED)** (*Junco hyemalis hyemalis*) – A couple gathering food at Hillside Park for loudly begging (but out of sight) youngsters gave us great eye level views. We heard the musical trills of this species in spruce forests around Denali.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

**RUSTY BLACKBIRD** (*Euphagus carolinus*) – Tim spotted one flying past our Denali hotel while waiting for the group to gather one morning. This species is in steep decline across its range.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

**GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH (PRIBILOF IS.)** (*Leucosticte tephrocotis umbrina*) – Almost ridiculously common on Saint Paul, with dozens chasing each other across the tundra or bouncing through the rocks near the seabird cliffs. The subspecies on the Pribilofs -- *umbrina* -- is much

larger than those found on the mainland.

**WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL** (*Loxia leucoptera*) – Locally good spruce cone crops meant we saw lots of these cone specialists this year, with particularly nice views of a gang gobbling seeds near the quarry on the Parks Highway.

**COMMON REDPOLL** (*Acanthis flammea*) – Most of the birds we saw (and heard) were in flight, bounding over in small noisy groups, but we did find a few birds perched up along the Denali Highway.

**PINE SISKIN** (*Spinus pinus*) – Nice views of one streaky bird perched up on a spruce tree at Hillside Park. The buzzy rising call of this species was a regular part of the tour soundtrack there.

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## MAMMALS

**HOARY MARMOT** (*Marmota caligata*) – One high above the road through Denali NP alternately stood at attention or lay sprawled on a rock. It's named for its grizzled pale fur.

**ARCTIC GROUND SQUIRREL** (*Spermophilus parryii*) – Small numbers in Denali NP, where most of them appeared to be holed up underground, avoiding the snow! We did see one or two scamper across the road, plus a few keeping a watchful eye on us while we waited for the Gyrfalcon to make an appearance.

**RED SQUIRREL** (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) – Regular on the mainland, including a few churring from the forest at Hillside Park, and others scampering through the spruces around our cabins at Denali and our picnic table in Brushkana Campground.

**MUSKRAT** (*Ondatra zibethica*) – One paddled across a pond beyond some sleeping Green-winged Teal at Westchester Lagoon.

**HUMPBACK WHALE** (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) – One blew a few times from the sea off Tolstoi cliffs on Saint Paul island -- a low, bushy puff of steam above the water, with occasionally just a hint of a broad gray back.

**ARCTIC FOX** (*Alopex lagopus*) – A handful seen around Saint Paul island, including one snoozing on the rocky jetty near the fish packing plant, one nosing along the mudflats at Salt Lagoon and one picking its way along a distant cliff top. The foxes on the island are quite dark compared to mainland animals -- which helps them to blend in better with the island's dark lava rocks.

**BROWN (INCL. GRIZZLY) BEAR** (*Ursus arctos*) – We saw a couple in Denali. The first was a sleeping animal Pepe spotted far up the hill on our drive towards the Eielson visitor's center, but the second was considerably closer -- and we were on foot! We came around the corner near the Gyrfalcon nest to discover a big male Grizzly right in the road, though fortunately with a bus and a road grader in between him and us. While we watched with some trepidation, the bus driver gently herded him up the road. Phew!

**NORTHERN FUR SEAL** (*Callorhinus ursinus*) – The males -- a mix of huge beach masters and whip-fast youngsters -- were already back on the beaches around the island. The former were staking out territories in the rockier, hillier sections (with much growling and baring of teeth) while the latter were sprawled on the flatter, smooth sand beaches.

**HARBOR SEAL** (*Phoca vitulina*) – Regular off Saint Paul island, including a bobbing septet eyeing us from just beyond the breaking waves at Marunich and another floating among the kelp at Southwest Point.

**MOOSE** (*Alces alces*) – Scattered individuals, including a female wading along the back edge of the big pond at Westchester Lagoon, another female nibbling in a roadside pond south of Denali, and a big bull (with an impressive spread of antlers) in the park itself. Surprisingly, we saw no calves this year.

**CARIBOU** (*Rangifer tarandus granti*) – Quite common in Denali NP, including one grazing herd spotted through the heavy snowfall, and a big male chowing on willows in the middle of a stream. We spied another trio resting high on one of the mountains along the Denali Highway.

**REINDEER** (*Rangifer tarandus sibiricus*) – A massive herd crossing the road west of Ridge Wall was fun to watch -- particularly when the old male with the massive set of antlers (Chandelier, he's apparently called locally) made an appearance. This is the Old World subspecies, introduced to the island in the early 1900s to provide an additional food source. [1]

**DALL'S SHEEP** (*Ovis dalli*) – Several groups in Denali NP, including a couple of bouncy, frolicking lambs with their more docile mothers near Polychrome Pass.

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## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

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**Totals for the tour: 107 bird taxa and 13 mammal taxa**