



Field Guides Tour Report

ALASKA I - PART ONE (PRIBILOFS & DENALI) 2016

May 23, 2016 to Jun 3, 2016

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



The spectacular view of Denali was one of the magical scenic moments of the trip. (Photo by participant Herb Fechter)

Alaska is such an amazing destination. Our trip began with a flight to St. Paul Island, stuck several hundred miles out in the middle of the Bering Sea. Just the idea of being in such a remote place is wondrous, but throw in all the amazing wildlife, and you've got the makings for an unforgettable adventure. I don't suppose anything can surpass the experience of spending time at the seabird cliffs watching hundreds of alcids, kittiwakes, and fulmars racing past, arriving at and departing from their nesting cliffs. While the weather was not conducive for seeing Asian vagrants, it provided some good photographic opportunities. Seeing sunshine on St. Paul is a rare treat indeed. We did however, see some pretty cool rarities there, including Wood Sandpiper and Yellow-billed Loon.

After we returned to Anchorage, we were off the next morning to Denali National Park, with a number of productive stops along the way. Perhaps most memorable of these was the big burned area near the Susitna River, which had a nice mix of woodpeckers. The Denali highway was fantastic, such a scenic place. And while hawk owls proved elusive, we did manage to see most of the other specialties we were hoping for. Our day in the park was also quite enjoyable, even if the weather was less than ideal. The biggest highlight for many was the closeup views of two grizzly bears feasting on a recent kill. I also enjoyed the sunning coyote, the first of these that I had seen in the park.

On our way back to Anchorage, we had a few more memorable birding stops including a productive Spruce Grouse search, which also provided us with Pine Grosbeak and White-winged Crossbill. And in addition to all of the wildlife, we managed to get a few fantastic looks at Denali itself! For some of us it was saying goodbye to new friends and preparing for Part Two, while for others it was a journey home. On behalf of Pepe and myself, thanks to all of you for making this a wonderfully memorable experience. We hope to see you all again in future!

--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)

CAKCLING GOOSE (ALEUTIAN) (*Branta hutchinsii leucopareia*) – We had some flyby cacklers on St. Paul.

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*)

TRUMPETER SWAN (*Cygnus buccinator*) – A few nice views of this species near Denali.

TUNDRA SWAN (WHISTLING) (*Cygnus columbianus columbianus*) – We had one along the Denali Hwy.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*) – A few of these were at Westchester Lagoon.

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*)

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Anas discors*) – A male was hanging out on the island at Westchester Lagoon.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*)

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*)

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (EURASIAN) (*Anas crecca nimia*) – St. Paul was a good place to see this subspecies as well as some hybrids.

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

REDHEAD (*Aythya americana*)

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*)

GREATER SCAUP (*Aythya marila*) – We had some terrific comparisons between Greater and Lesser at Westchester Lagoon.

LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*)

KING EIDER (*Somateria spectabilis*) – We had a single bird at St. Paul.

HARLEQUIN DUCK (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) – Some terrific looks at these colorful sea ducks at St. Paul where many summer.

LONG-TAILED DUCK (*Clangula hyemalis*)

BUFFLEHEAD (*Bucephala albeola*)

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala islandica*)

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

SPRUCE GROUSE (*Falcapennis canadensis*) – Beautiful looks at a male bird at a traditional spot along the Parks Hwy.

WILLOW PTARMIGAN (*Lagopus lagopus*) – We encountered at least four of these on our trip into the park.

Gaviidae (Loons)

COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*)

YELLOW-BILLED LOON (*Gavia adamsii*) – Some views of this species at St. Paul including one that was fairly close to shore across from Trident.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

HORNED GREBE (*Podiceps auritus*) – What a great looking bird. We had two different pairs.

RED-NECKED GREBE (*Podiceps grisegena*) – Great to see this species nesting at Westchester.

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

NORTHERN FULMAR (PACIFIC) (*Fulmarus glacialis rogersii*) – St. Paul is the place to see this species in good numbers nesting on the cliffs at Ridgeway.

SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATER (*Ardenna tenuirostris*) – Great study of one that was flying close by past Southwest Point.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – One hanging out at Ridgeway on St. Paul where this species is still a rare visitor.

RED-FACED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax urile*) – Some great looks at this north Pacific specialty.

PELAGIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*)

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – One nesting in Wasilla on our way back to Anchorage.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – We managed four sightings of this species in the park.

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*)

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

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

Gruidae (Cranes)

SANDHILL CRANE (*Grus canadensis*) – Two of these at a considerable distance in Anchorage.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

PACIFIC GOLDEN-PLOVER (*Pluvialis fulva*) – We had a couple of quick looks at this species at St. Paul.

SEMPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*)

SOLITARY SANDPIPER (*Tringa solitaria*) – One seen along the Denali Highway.

WANDERING TATTLER (*Tringa incana*) – Nice views of a couple of these at North Point on St. Paul.

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*)

WOOD SANDPIPER (*Tringa glareola*) – The looks were brief, but a nice find one St. Paul.

HUDSONIAN GODWIT (*Limosa haemastica*) – We managed to track down eight of these in Anchorage.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa lapponica*) – One was hanging out at Salt Lagoon during our visit to St. Paul.

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres morinella*) – We had two of these at St. Paul.

ROCK SANDPIPER (PTILOCNEMIS) (*Calidris ptilocnemis ptilocnemis*) – One of the more memorable shorebirds on St. Paul, where they seemed to be everywhere.

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*)

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*) – There were two of these seen in Anchorage. This species breeds further south than Long-billed.

WILSON'S SNIPE (*Gallinago delicata*)

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus lobatus*)

RED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) – We did manage to track down a single Red at St. Paul.

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)

PARASITIC JAEGER (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) – We had a single flyby at St. Paul.

LONG-TAILED JAEGER (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) – We saw a really distant bird in Denali NP.

Alcidae (Auks, Murres, and Puffins)

COMMON MURRE (*Uria aalge*)

THICK-BILLED MURRE (*Uria lomvia*) – Great views of this and the preceding species on St. Paul. Terrific to see so many side by side where the differences are easily discernible.

PIGEON GUILLEMOT (*Cepphus columba*) – We managed to track down a lone bird on St. Paul.

PARAKEET AUKLET (*Aethia psittacula*) – St. Paul is an outstanding place to see this species and we heard lots of their braying calls while there.

LEAST AUKLET (*Aethia pusilla*) – The smallest of the alcids seen, quite memorable being amongst them next to Antone Lake.

CRESTED AUKLET (*Aethia cristatella*) – One of the favorites, this species was present on St. Paul in good numbers which most of the sightings being of birds resting on the water.

HORNED PUFFIN (*Fratercula corniculata*) – And St. Paul is a terrific place to see the western puffins!

TUFTED PUFFIN (*Fratercula cirrhata*)

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE (*Rissa tridactyla*)

RED-LEGGED KITTIWAKE (*Rissa brevirostris*) – One of the real treats of St. Paul is seeing this Bering Sea specialty, while much less common than Black-legged on St. Paul, we had plenty of nice studies. Sad to know that the locals are still shooting them in numbers.

BONAPARTE'S GULL (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*) – We did see about four individuals during our time in the Denali area. This species is a tree-nester in boggy taiga areas.

MEW GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus canus brachyrhynchus*) – The common gull of the northern interior.

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

GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL (*Larus glaucescens*) – This was the default gull on St. Paul, with the vast majority being heavily worn or molting immature birds.

ARCTIC TERN (*Sterna paradisaea*) – Quite an attractive species, we had great looks beginning right in Anchorage.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [II]

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon*) – We did bump in to this species on our drive up to Denali.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*)

AMERICAN THREE-TOED WOODPECKER (*Picoides dorsalis*) – The big burn near the Susitna River was amazing for woodpeckers including this species.

BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKER (*Picoides arcticus*) – A real rarity in Alaska, the big burn hosted this species along with others.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*)

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*)

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER (*Contopus cooperi*) [*]

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*) – A couple of these were seen at St. Paul.

CLIFF SWALLOW (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*)

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE (*Poecile atricapillus*)

BOREAL CHICKADEE (*Poecile hudsonicus*) – It took us a bit of time, but we were eventually able to track down this species near Denali.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

PACIFIC WREN (ALASCENSIS GROUP) (*Troglodytes pacificus alascensis*) – It was an amazing year for this species on St. Paul, seeing and hearing more than I have ever encountered on a single visit. Nice to see, as this species had been rather scarce over the past few years.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*)

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH (*Catharus minimus*) – Nicely seen on the Denali Highway.

SWAINSON'S THRUSH (*Catharus ustulatus*)

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*)

VARIED THRUSH (*Ixoreus naevius*) – We had a couple of these attractive thrushes on the Denali Highway.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Increasing in the Anchorage area. [H]

Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

BOHEMIAN WAXWING (*Bombycilla garrulus*) – We managed to track down four of these along the Denali Highway.

Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings)

LAPLAND LONGSPUR (*Calcarius lapponicus*) – One of the magical aspects of a visit to St. Paul is the singing/parachuting longspurs displaying around the island.

SNOW BUNTING (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) – Another treat during our time on St. Paul.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH (*Parkesia noveboracensis*)

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*)

YELLOW WARBLER (*Setophaga petechia*)

BLACKPOLL WARBLER (*Setophaga striata*)

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

WILSON'S WARBLER (*Cardellina pusilla*)

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

AMERICAN TREE SPARROW (*Spizelloides arborea*)

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

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

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

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

LINCOLN'S SPARROW (*Melospiza lincolni*)

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – Briefly seen on our way back to Anchorage from Denali.

RUSTY BLACKBIRD (*Euphagus carolinus*) – One seen on the Denali Highway.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH (PRIBILOF IS.) (*Leucosticte tephrocotis umbrina*) – Another perk to a St. Paul Island visit is seeing so many of these large, colorful Rosy-Finches.

PINE GROSBEAK (*Pinicola enucleator*) – This was nice find on our way back to Anchorage from Denali seen right when we arrived at our grouse spot.

WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL (*Loxia leucoptera*) – We did manage to track down four of these in the grouse woods on our way back to Anchorage from Denali.

COMMON REDPOLL (*Acanthis flammea*)

MAMMALS

HOARY MARMOT (*Marmota caligata*) – See by a couple of folks on their bus ride back out of Denali NP.

ARCTIC GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus parryii*)

RED SQUIRREL (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)

MUSKRAT (*Ondatra zibethica*)

NORTH AMERICAN PORCUPINE (*Erethizon dorsatum*) – Deb C. spotted this trotting porcupine for us on our way during our side trip to see woodpeckers at the big burn.

ARCTIC FOX (*Alopex lagopus*) – This island form (blue morph) was pretty common on St. Paul.

COYOTE (*Canis latrans*) – We had a nice study of a sunning animal in Denali NP. This species is a relatively recent colonist to central Alaska.

BROWN (INCL. GRIZZLY) BEAR (*Ursus arctos*) – While it looked like we might miss this species in the park, we got word of a recent kill and had great views of two bears sharing a meal just before park staff arrived to close down that section of road for viewing.

STELLER'S SEA LION (*Eumetopias jubatus*) – A few of these seen at St. Paul.

NORTHERN FUR SEAL (*Callorhinus ursinus*)

HARBOR SEAL (*Phoca vitulina*)

MOOSE (*Alces alces*) – Quite a few good views of this iconic North Country animal.

CARIBOU (*Rangifer tarandus granti*) – Some nice views in Denali NP.

REINDEER (*Rangifer tarandus sibiricus*) – We encountered the large, domestic herd on St. Paul at Pumphouse Lake. [I]

DALL'S SHEEP (*Ovis dalli*) – Some mostly distant animals seen on slopes in the park.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 117 bird taxa and 15 mammal taxa