



Field Guides Tour Report

Alaska I - Part One (Pribilofs & Denali) 2017

May 30, 2017 to Jun 7, 2017

Chris Benesh & Tom Johnson

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



Participant Steve Rannels beautifully captured the spectacle of Denali, which we were fortunate to see on several occasions.

Part One of the Field Guides Alaska tour got off to a great start with a visit to Saint Paul Island, part of the Pribilof Islands group. In addition to the wonderful suite of regulars, we had the additional treat of seeing several exciting Asian visitors to the island. These included a couple of sizable flocks of Hawfinches, an attending Brambling, and the first Spring record of Marsh Sandpiper in North America!

Our visit north of Anchorage to the Denali region was also very rewarding, with great sightings of Black-backed and American Three-toed Woodpeckers at the Sockeye Burn, not to mention wonderful Bohemian Waxwing there as well. And we were treated to not one but two Northern Hawk Owls! A male Spruce Grouse that Steve found was the highlight for many. Mammals were also good, and our experience with the Toklat Grizzlies was first rate!

Thanks to all of you for making this trip such a great success. Tom and I had a blast guiding it and look forward to more adventures with you all 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)

EMPEROR GOOSE (*Chen canagica*) – A frustratingly brief view of two birds in flight seen from Hutch Hill on St. Paul.

CAKCLING GOOSE (ALEUTIAN) (*Branta hutchinsii leucopareia*) – A few sightings of the Aleutian subspecies on St. Paul, with a max of eight.

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) – About ten of these seen at Westchester Lagoon in Anchorage.

TRUMPETER SWAN (*Cygnus buccinator*) – We spotted two of these on a pond along the Parks Highway on our way to Denali.

TUNDRA SWAN (WHISTLING) (*Cygnus columbianus columbianus*) – We came across a pair of these along the Denali Highway.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*) – There was a single bird at Westchester Lagoon.

EURASIAN WIGEON (*Anas penelope*) – There were a pair of these at Antone Lake on St. Paul.

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*) – There was a pair on St. Paul, as well as a few in the Anchorage-Denali region.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Including three on St. Paul where this species is scarce.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*)

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*)

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (EURASIAN) (*Anas crecca nimia*) – This form was seen on St. Paul along with several birds that represent intergrades between this subspecies and its American counterpart.

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

GREATER SCAUP (*Aythya marila*) – Some nice comparisons with the next species in the Anchorage area.

LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*)

KING EIDER (*Somateria spectabilis*) – A small number of these were present on St. Paul, though no adult males were seen.

HARLEQUIN DUCK (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) – Some terrific looks at this species on St. Paul where it is fairly common in summer. One was also seen by some along Brushkana Creek.

SURF SCOTER (*Melanitta perspicillata*) – A distant bird was seen diving at Byers Lake along the Parks Hwy.

WHITE-WINGED SCOTER (NORTH AMERICAN) (*Melanitta fusca deglandi*) – Some good scope studies of this species at the float plane lake along the Denali Hwy.

LONG-TAILED DUCK (*Clangula hyemalis*) – Good numbers of these breed on St. Paul, a real treat to see.

BUFFLEHEAD (*Bucephala albeola*) – Seen at the float plane lake on the Denali Hwy.

COMMON GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala clangula*) – A distant comparison with Barrow's near the hotel in Anchorage on the first morning of the trip.

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala islandica*) – Seen at a few locations with a pair on the float plane lake providing the best views.

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*) – One was seen along Brushkana Creek and another four were at Byers Lake.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

SPRUCE GROUSE (*Falcapennis canadensis*) – One of the highlights of the trip, Steve spotted a gorgeous male along the Parks Hwy.

WILLOW PTARMIGAN (*Lagopus lagopus*) – Shocking number of these were seen on the bus ride through the park (close to 20 in total).

Gaviidae (Loons)

PACIFIC LOON (*Gavia pacifica*) – A nice view of this handsome species at Lake Spenard in Anchorage on the first morning of the trip.

COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*) – A close flyover of this species on the first morning of the trip. A couple more were at Westchester Lagoon.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

HORNED GREBE (*Podiceps auritus*) – A nice find on the first morning of the trip on Lake Spenard, seen hanging out with three Red-necked Grebes.

RED-NECKED GREBE (*Podiceps grisegena*) – Always a treat to see this handsome species nesting at Westchester Lagoon.

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

NORTHERN FULMAR (*Fulmarus glacialis*) – Some great studies of this species on the cliffs at St. Paul. Quite a few present this year.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

RED-FACED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax urile*) – St. Paul is the ideal place to really appreciate the beauty of this species.

PELAGIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*) – A scattering of these were on St. Paul.

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – We took a quick peek at an adult and chick nesting near Wasilla.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – As many as three seen in Denali NP.

NORTHERN HARRIER (AMERICAN) (*Circus cyaneus hudsonius*) – Seen in Denali NP and along the Denali Hwy. This is now a full species, separate from those in Europe.

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*) – One spotted by Sharon while we were driving along the Parks Hwy.

NORTHERN GOSHAWK (*Accipiter gentilis*) – Seen by some on the drive along the Denali Hwy.

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – An iconic bird of the American north, we saw nesting birds at Westchester Lagoon and a few more further north.

RED-TAILED HAWK (HARLAN'S) (*Buteo jamaicensis harlani*) – A couple of pale individuals seen near Denali.

Gruidae (Cranes)

SANDHILL CRANE (*Antigone canadensis*) – Seen in flight, flying past our hotel in Anchorage and then again at Westchester Lagoon a few days later.

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

BLACK OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus bachmani*) – Tom spotted one at Northeast Point, one of very few records of this species on St. Paul.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – Nesting and displaying out on St. Paul.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

WHIMBREL (HUDSONIAN) (*Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*) – One seen at Westchester Lagoon.

HUDSONIAN GODWIT (*Limosa haemastica*) – Thankfully, we had great looks at six birds at Westchester.

ROCK SANDPIPER (PTILOCNEMIS) (*Calidris ptilocnemis ptilocnemis*) – One of the more memorable species out on St. Paul.

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*) – One studied closely at Pumphouse Lake on St. Paul.

WILSON'S SNIPE (*Gallinago delicata*) – A few scattered encounters in the Denali region. Great to see and hear the winnowing flight display.

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus lobatus*) – Plentiful with the most memorable looks being at St. Paul.

RED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) – A total of four seen at St. Paul.

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*) – Seen at Westchester and near Cantwell.

SOLITARY SANDPIPER (*Tringa solitaria*) – One seen and heard briefly in flight along the Denali Hwy.

WANDERING TATTLER (*Tringa incana*) – After a lot of searching we did eventually track down three of these on St. Paul.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*)

MARSH SANDPIPER (*Tringa stagnatilis*) – Certainly the rarest bird seen on the trip, we had good views of it on two different days on St. Paul. This represents one of fewer than ten records in the ABA area and the first for spring!

WOOD SANDPIPER (*Tringa glareola*) – Seen briefly at Pumphouse Lake in company of the Marsh Sandpiper before taking flight and disappearing.

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)

POMARINE JAEGER (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) – We had a nice flyby of this species on St. Paul.

LONG-TAILED JAEGER (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) – Seen well by some on the bus ride in Denali NP.

Alcidae (Auks, Murres, and Puffins)

COMMON MURRE (*Uria aalge*) – Nice comparisons of this species and the more plentiful Thick-billed Murre at St. Paul.

THICK-BILLED MURRE (*Uria lomvia*)

PIGEON GUILLEMOT (*Cephus columba*) – As many as six seen on St. Paul.

ANCIENT MURRELET (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*) – A lucky break for us, seeing a pair of these swimming close to shore just west of Southwest Point on St. Paul.

PARAKEET AUKLET (*Aethia psittacula*) – One of the very conspicuous species at St. Paul with its distinctive braying call.

LEAST AUKLET (*Aethia pusilla*) – Hard not to love these tiny, hardy alcids that make their home at St. Paul.

CRESTED AUKLET (*Aethia cristatella*) – And the perennial favorites on St. Paul with their fancy crests and dog-like barks.

HORNED PUFFIN (*Fratercula corniculata*) – Another highlight of any St. Paul visit is seeing the two puffin species up close and personal. This is the smaller of the two species.

TUFTED PUFFIN (*Fratercula cirrhata*)

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE (*Rissa tridactyla*) – Perhaps overshadowed by its rarer cousin, St. Paul was nonetheless a wonderful place to become familiar with this species.

RED-LEGGED KITTIWAKE (*Rissa brevirostris*) – Another star at St. Paul, we were treated to some wonderful looks at this species whose range is restricted to the Bering Sea.

BONAPARTE'S GULL (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*) – This stylish gull was seen along the Denali Hwy and again at Westchester Lagoon.

BLACK-HEADED GULL (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) – One was seen bathing with the big gulls at Big Lake.

MEW GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus canus brachyrhynchus*) – This was the common breeding gull near Anchorage and Denali.

HERRING GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*) – Seen on St. Paul (one) and a couple seen briefly near Denali. This is the big gull one commonly sees in the Denali region.

HERRING GULL (VEGA) (*Larus argentatus vegae*) – An immature bird was hanging out at Southwest Point during our visit there.

GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL (*Larus glaucescens*) – A lot of big, ugly birds hanging out at St. Paul.

GLAUCOUS GULL (*Larus hyperboreus*) – There was a single bird at St. Paul.

ARCTIC TERN (*Sterna paradisaea*) – Some amazing studies of this species at Westchester Lagoon.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [I]

Strigidae (Owls)

NORTHERN HAWK OWL (*Surnia ulula*) – What a treat to see this amazing species so well, not only along the Denali Highway but again so close on our bus ride into the park!

SHORT-EARED OWL (*Asio flammeus*) – One was seen on our bus ride in the park.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon*) – A couple of brief sightings, with the first at Westchester Lagoon.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*) – Seen at the Sockeye Burn.

AMERICAN THREE-TOED WOODPECKER (*Picoides dorsalis*) – After a bit of searching we had great looks at this species at the Sockeye Burn.

BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKER (*Picoides arcticus*) – A real treat was seeing a nest of this species at the Sockeye Burn. This species is quite a bit less common than the American Three-toed.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – Three different sightings of this species, each characteristically brief.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

WESTERN WOOD-PEWEE (*Contopus sordidulus*) – At least four at the Sockeye Burn and another in Denali State Park.

ALDER FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax alnorum*) – One was present at the Denali View Lodge.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

GRAY JAY (*Perisoreus canadensis*) – Fairly numerous this year with several scattered sightings.

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE (*Pica hudsonia*)

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*)

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW (*Tachycineta thalassina*)

BANK SWALLOW (*Riparia riparia*) – One was out on St. Paul where it is a rare but regular visitor.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – Two out on St. Paul were unexpected there.

CLIFF SWALLOW (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) – Nesting under the bridge near the start of the Denali Hwy.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE (*Poecile atricapillus*)

BOREAL CHICKADEE (*Poecile hudsonicus*) – Several encounters with this species in various spruce woodlands around Denali.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

PACIFIC WREN (ALASCENSIS GROUP) (*Troglodytes pacificus alascensis*) – As many as seven recorded at St. Paul, with some nice looks. This species has rebounded here after a population dip a few years back. The taxonomy of this complex remains a bit unsettled.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus satrapa*) – Seen by some during our Spruce Grouse search.

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*)

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH (*Catharus minimus*) – A fair number were along the Denali Hwy.

SWAINSON'S THRUSH (*Catharus ustulatus*)

HERMIT THRUSH (*Catharus guttatus*) [*]

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*)

VARIED THRUSH (*Ixoreus naevius*) – We studied one along the Denali Hwy.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [I]

Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

BOHEMIAN WAXWING (*Bombycilla garrulus*) – Some great looks at the Sockeye Burn. More were along the Denali Hwy.

Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings)

LAPLAND LONGSPUR (*Calcarius lapponicus*) – One of the iconic birds at St. Paul with the males parachuting downward while singing their lilting song.

SNOW BUNTING (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) – Another great songster at 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 (*Junco hyemalis*)

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

GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*) – Seen by some on the bus ride into the park.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

LINCOLN'S SPARROW (*Melospiza lincolni*)

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

BRAMBLING (*Fringilla montifringilla*) – A handsome male was hanging out in the flock of Hawfinches in town on St. Paul.

GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH (PRIBILOF IS.) (*Leucosticte tephrocotis umbrina*) – Plentiful at St. Paul.

WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL (*Loxia leucoptera*) – Seen at a few locations near Denali including our hotel there.

COMMON REDPOLL (*Acanthis flammea*)

HAWFINCH (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*) – There were nearly 30 detected while we were on St. Paul with about 16 in town. Quite a remarkable concentration.

MAMMALS

SNOWSHOE HARE (*Lepus americanus*)

HOARY MARMOT (*Marmota caligata*) – One was hanging out on the slope above the Eilson Visitors Center in Denali NP.

ARCTIC GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus parryii*)

RED SQUIRREL (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)

TUNDRA RED-BACKED VOLE (*Clethrionomys rutilus*)

MUSKRAT (*Ondatra zibethica*)

BROWN (INCL. GRIZZLY) BEAR (*Ursus arctos*) – A wonderful encounter with some on our bus ride into Denali NP.

STELLER'S SEA LION (*Eumetopias jubatus*)

NORTHERN FUR SEAL (*Callorhinus ursinus*)

HARBOR SEAL (*Phoca vitulina*)

MOOSE (*Alces alces*)

CARIBOU (*Rangifer tarandus granti*)

DALL'S SHEEP (*Ovis dalli*)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 127 bird taxa and 13 mammal taxa