



Field Guides Tour Report

Alaska II - Part One (Pribilofs & Denali) 2017

Jun 6, 2017 to Jun 14, 2017
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For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please [VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE](#).



The view from Polychrome Pass. Even under a cloudy sky, Denali is filled with breathtaking view after breathtaking view, so much so that it's a wonder anyone has any breath left after a day in the park. Photo by guide Doug Gochfeld.

Alaska in the spring is one of the most exciting places you can visit as a naturalist. Part 1 of our tour took us from Anchorage all the way out into Pribilof Islands in the Central Bering Sea, then back to Anchorage and up through Susitna- region all the way to Denali National Park in the Alaska Range. This year, everything ran smoothly, and the various northern landscapes delivered one gem after another throughout our travels.

Our first birding excursion was just across the street from the hotel, as we walked the edge of Lake Spenard. Here we had our first gorgeous breeding plumaged Red-necked Grebes of the tour, and we also had great comparisons of Common and Barrow's Goldeneye side-by-side. Some great looks at sleek looking breeding-plumaged Bonaparte's Gulls were a treat here as well. After breakfast we then headed out to Ted Stevens International Airport for our trip to St. Paul Island, in the Pribilof Island group in the Bering Sea.

We arrived on St. Paul about an hour before dinner, but by the time we were eating our final meal of the day, we had already had good views of one of the most important Bering Sea specialty birds (Red-legged Kittiwake), and connected with two rare Asian vagrants: We discovered a Tufted Duck on Weather Bureau Lake, and then lucked into a Marsh Sandpiper at Cup Pond on the way into town. The Marsh Sandpiper was only the 10th or 11th record for the Western Hemisphere, and the first spring record for Alaska. After our first Trident meal, we came back out to the vans, from where Cameron Cox almost immediately found a Hawfinch! While looking at the Hawfinch, we also had excellent views of the endemic Alaskan island form of Pacific Wren. Riding high, we finished out the day by going to Northeast Point where, in addition to some great panoramic views and a disturbingly low number of Northern Fur Seals, we added Pomarine Jaeger and some White-winged Scoters, as well as very good looks at the Pribilof endemic "ptilocnemis" subspecies of Rock Sandpiper.

Day two was spent entirely on St. Paul Island, where a post-breakfast drive around Old Town yielded not just 1, but at least 2 Hawfinches, repeatedly perching on houses and light poles for us. After that, we made our way over to Ridge Wall on the south side of the island, where we drank in the remarkable aggregation of seabirds nesting on the cliffs, including Common and Thick-billed Murres, Black-legged and Red-legged Kittiwakes, Northern Fulmars, Horned Puffins, Parakeet Auklets, and Crested Auklet. It is a truly breathtaking scene. A seawatch at the scenic Southwest Point gave us even more chances to directly compare the two Murre species and the two Kittiwake species side-by-side. After lunch, we went to Pumphouse Lake, which produced a beautiful "Asian" Whimbrel flying low right overhead, and vocalizing the whole way, and eventually a Common Snipe, which was not very cooperative as it flushed from far ahead of us and flew dead-away. After this we took a trip up to Marunich, along the north coast of the island. Lots of Harlequin Ducks highlighted a scattering of more distant seabirds (including Short-tailed Shearwater and Long-tailed Jaeger), and then Megan's eagle eyes spotted a lump that turned out to be the continuing White-tailed Eagle perched on Crater Hill more than two miles away. Dinner was preceded

by Arctic Forget-me-nots at windy Lake Hill, and followed by a walk through the large stone quarry and a look around Antone Slough and Lake, the latter of which produced a Pacific Golden-Plover and some Aleutian Cackling Geese.

Our final day on St. Paul was highlighted by our time watching the nesting seabirds at the Reef Cliffs. Here we got more Tufted Puffins, and we connected with a bunch of the charismatic and behaviorally absurd Crested Auklets as well as a scattering of Least Auklets. This location afforded us with some of the closest views of these birds would get. We even had a couple of singing Ancient Murrelets put in an appearance on the water below the cliffs for a brief time. We then came full circle, with our final stop on St. Paul being Weather Bureau Lake, where we had started when we first arrived two days prior. We enjoyed more of the show put on by the Tufted Duck and Red-legged Kittiwakes before packing away the birding gear and heading for the airport.

Day four was a travel day, but by no means was it a day lost to travel. We started out at Westchester Lagoon in Anchorage where, despite a massive foot race taking place, we got some good views of many local breeders, including Arctic Terns with tiny fluffball youngsters, Red-necked Grebes, a Bald Eagle on its nest, and direct comparisons of three species of Swallows and both species of Scaup. We then made our way to the "Sockeye Burn" near Willow, AK. This is a large area of forest that was torched by a devastating forest fire in spring 2015. The burned trees have become excellent habitat for woodpeckers to nest in, though due to the rainy, overcast conditions we only found a single Downy Woodpecker. We did, however, have great views of Western Wood-Pewee, Alder Flycatcher, a large flyover flock of White-winged Crossbills, and some other common boreal breeders that we had yet to encounter on the tour. After lunch at Sheep Creek, we only had time for a couple of additional stops along the Parks Highway, but they produced in big ways, with a recently fledged Black-backed Woodpecker calling incessantly alongside the road, and then a female Pine Grosbeak with pine needles in her bill at the Upper Chulitna rest area. We arrived at Denali Bluffs to the sounds of singing Orange-crowned and Wilson's Warblers, and then headed up the hill for a delightful dinner at the Alpenglöw.

Our first day of extensive birding around Denali was on the Denali Highway, which we birded roughly 40 miles of, out to mile 95. We had a phenomenal day, scoring such treasures as Northern Hawk Owl, and Bohemian Waxwing, as well as boreal specialties including Gray Jay, Boreal Chickadee, and scads of great looks at Blackpoll Warblers. We saw a pair of Merlins breathlessly defending their nesting area, got to compare Bald and Golden Eagles side-by-side at a distance, and had stellar looks at a male Barrow's Goldeneye up close and personal to the road. The sound of winnowing Wilson's Snipe was our constant companion, and we even got to see one of these. We also got extended scope views of a Porcupine which had seemingly stranded itself on a mud island in the middle of a river down below us, and was sauntering/waddling around the island in circles. We even successfully timed lunch to be the only time of the day where there was substantial and un-birdable rain.

Our next day was our day in the National Park. We all took the bus ride into the Eielson Visitor's Center, 66 miles into the park. Our mammal experience was excellent, possibly highlighted by 3 (!) different Gray Wolves, including one sauntering off into the woods with a Caribou leg in its mouth. We also had encounters with 3 separate Grizzly Bears with cubs, and a couple of hundred Caribou along the way. While mammals were the obvious highlight, we did have some very worthwhile birds, the highlights of which were Willow Ptarmigan, Golden Eagle, a brief view of a Long-tailed Jaeger, a pair of Say's Phoebes, and a beautiful gray Gyrfalcon stoically sitting on a cliff ledge below us at Polychrome Pass.

Our final day of part 1 of the tour saw us working our way back to Anchorage, starting at Riley Creek, and working our way south via the Parks Highway, with a brief detour to walk the spruce forest along the westernmost stretch of the Denali Highway. The highlight of the morning was Riley Creek, which sported a big mixed roving flock of White-winged Crossbills and Common Redpolls which were both spending some time on the forest floor almost at our feet. We continued to work our way south via a final delicious picnic lunch thrown together by Megan.

Part 1 of this Alaska adventure was an absolute joy for both of us, in large part because of you wonderful traveling companions. Thanks must also go to Karen, for providing all the logistical legwork, without which a tour of this scale simply could not happen. We hope this trip list brings back some fond memories, and we both look forward to reminiscing with each of you on another trip someday soon. Until then, happy travels!

-Doug and Megan

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*) – A flock of this Aleutian breeding form on Antone Lake on St. Paul accounted for the only Cackling Geese of the tour for us.

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) – We had a bunch of these "Anchorage Geese" around Westchester Lagoon in Anchorage. These are widely accepted to be the smallest subspecies of Canada Goose: *B.c. parvipes*.

TRUMPETER SWAN (*Cygnus buccinator*) – A couple of these were scattered along the Denali Highway, and then we also had a pair fly across the road in front of us while driving south on the Parks Highway, heading back in towards Anchorage.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*) – We had Gadwall at Westchester Lagoon in between the Pribilof and Denali legs.

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*) – We had our first ones on our first morning stroll around Lake Hood, and then we saw several at Westchester Lagoon a few days later.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Seen most days of the tour, including on St. Paul (at Antone Lake), where they are fairly low density migrants, and not always expected.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*) – A couple seen on Lake Hood on the first morning, and then again on the final day of the tour, on the small pond near the railroad crossing as we departed the Denali area.

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – Probably the most common breeding duck species on St. Paul Island, we got to have many looks at these elegant waterfowl.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (EURASIAN) (*Anas crecca crecca*) – Eurasian types are actually more common than American types on St. Paul Island.

- GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN)** (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) – A few were seen here and there around Denali, but they were not nearly as common as their Eurasian counterpart was on St. Paul.
- TUFTED DUCK** (*Aythya fuligula*) – A great surprise at our first birding stop on St. Paul Island was this young male Tufted Duck, a vagrant from Asia, which we discovered in the company of 3 Greater Scaup. The Scaup had been hanging around for a while, but ours was the first sighting of Tufted Duck on the island for the spring.
- GREATER SCAUP** (*Aythya marila*) – The group at Weather Bureau Lake on St. Paul Island that was hanging out with the Tufted Duck were our first. Then we had them at Westchester Lagoon and along the Denali Highway.
- LESSER SCAUP** (*Aythya affinis*) – We had these at both Westchester Lagoon, and then along the Denali Highway.
- KING EIDER** (*Somateria spectabilis*) – Some distant flocks of females and young males around the coastal waters of St. Paul Island.
- HARLEQUIN DUCK** (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) – Common off shore at the Pribilofs, where we got to see many males in their stupendous high breeding plumage. We then had a pair along the Savage River as we crossed over the Savage River Bridge on the bus near the entrance to Denali National Park.
- WHITE-WINGED SCOTER (NORTH AMERICAN)** (*Melanitta fusca deglandi*) – A few birds were seen on two different days off shore at St. Paul Island, with the best views being at the Webster Seawatch. We also had some even closer and in better light at a lake along the Denali Highway.
- LONG-TAILED DUCK** (*Clangula hyemalis*) – These charismatic ducks are all over St. Paul Island, and we got to hear their bizarre calls and watch their breeding chase antics repeatedly as we navigated around the island.
- BUFFLEHEAD** (*Bucephala albeola*) – We had a few males and females at a couple of locations along the Denali Highway.
- COMMON GOLDENEYE** (*Bucephala clangula*) – The flock on Lake Hood on the first morning were our only ones of the tour.
- BARROW'S GOLDENEYE** (*Bucephala islandica*) – We had some on Lake Hood, including one mixed in with Common Goldeneyes for a great comparison, on the first morning. Then we had an amazingly cooperative male at a roadside pond along the Denali Highway.
- Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)*
- WILLOW PTARMIGAN** (*Lagopus lagopus*) – We had a female flush out from next to the bus as we drove through Denali NP, and then it stood still in some low vegetation about 25 yards off the road. Most people eventually got a reasonable look, after they could find this really well camouflaged northern chicken, that is!
- ROCK PTARMIGAN** (*Lagopus muta*) – A couple of distant Ptarmigans flushed off a rocky slope by a Golden Eagle we were watching were apparently this species. They eventually landed up high on a rocky scree slope, well above the line of vegetation on their hill.
- Gaviidae (Loons)*
- PACIFIC LOON** (*Gavia pacifica*) – One flew by at Webster Seawatch during our first evening on St. Paul, and then a surprising flock of 6 flew over heading south just after we got out of the vehicles at the Sockeye Burn.
- COMMON LOON** (*Gavia immer*) – A gorgeous adult at Lake Spenard/Hood.
- Podicipedidae (Grebes)*
- RED-NECKED GREBE** (*Podiceps grisegena*) – We saw them on both of our Anchorage birding expeditions, first at Lake Hood, and then at Westchester Lagoon. Many adults seemed to still be on nests at this point, so we didn't run into any young ones at this point. [N]
- Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)*
- NORTHERN FULMAR** (*Fulmarus glacialis*) – Great to see these stocky tubenoses on their nesting cliffs at St. Paul, as well as being able to watch their graceful flight as they rode the wind currents along the top of the cliff edges. [N]
- SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATER** (*Ardenna tenuirostris*) – We had a few distant ones fly by on a couple of days on St. Paul Island. The first was at Marunich, heading east, and the rest were fairly distant off of Southwest Point.
- Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)*
- RED-FACED CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax urile*) – Wow, what a gorgeous cormorant! This is the best time of year to see them in full breeding plumage, with their bold bright blue and red face patterns and the big white taillights on their flanks. [N]
- PELAGIC CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*) – Actually the scarcer cormorant on St. Paul, we had a few fly by at various places, and we also scoped a couple near East Landing and the Black Bluffs.
- Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)*
- GOLDEN EAGLE** (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – We had a distant one circling with a Bald Eagle for a great flight comparison during our day on the Denali Highway, and then we saw two or three at various points along the road inside Denali National Park, one of which seemed to be hunting a valley and flushed up a pair of Rock Ptarmigans.
- NORTHERN HARRIER** (*Circus cyaneus*) – A quick flyby along the Denali Highway was followed the next day by a couple of brief sightings within the National Park itself.
- SHARP-SHINNED HAWK** (*Accipiter striatus*) – Seen from the bus by a couple of folks on the way back to the visitor's center on the afternoon of our day in the park, and then a young bird seen by all present over the Riley Creek Campground on our final morning in Denali. These are surprisingly sparse along our tour route.
- BALD EAGLE** (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – A few were seen during our "layover" in Dillingham, and then we had them every day after we returned to the mainland from St. Paul. [N]
- WHITE-TAILED EAGLE** (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) – So, so far away. A fairly amazing spot by Megan of this bird sitting on the rim of Crater Hill ~2.25 miles away from our location at Marunich. A couple of folks saw it circling the same ridge a bit later, but distance precluded any satisfying views.
- RED-TAILED HAWK (HARLAN'S)** (*Buteo jamaicensis harlani*) – This in the second van saw one on the Denali Highway day, and then most people caught up to the species during the drive back down from Denali to Anchorage.
- Gruidae (Cranes)*
- SANDHILL CRANE** (*Antigone canadensis*) – One bird was heard vocalizing somewhere off to the south shortly after our arrival at the Sockeye Burn.
- Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)*
- PACIFIC GOLDEN-PLOVER** (*Pluvialis fulva*) – A breeding plumage bird dropped down in front of the group at Antone Slough on our final evening on St. Paul. This is a couple of weeks late for the species here, so it was quite a surprise, and a write-in on part 1 of the tour.

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – Seen every day we were on St. Paul, where they breed in small numbers. [N]

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

WHIMBREL (SIBERIAN) (*Numenius phaeopus variegatus*) – An excellent flyover while we were walking Pumphouse Lake, on St. Paul Island. This bird serenaded us with the familiar ringing call of a Whimbrel as it flew over low, and was differentiated by our "American" Whimbrel (*N.p.hudsonicus*) by the obvious white wedge running up from the rump through the back.

ROCK SANDPIPER (PTILOCNEMIS) (*Calidris ptilocnemis ptilocnemis*) – The very distinctive Pribilof-breeding subspecies of Rock Sandpiper was, as always, very confiding. We repeatedly got to see them chase each other around and do their raised-wing displays as they chortled their bizarre buzzy song. Keep an eye on this one, as it could be split from Rock Sandpiper at some point down the road if a bit of fieldwork and research is done on them. [N]

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*) – These breed in small numbers on St. Paul, and we saw a few on our full day on the island, including seeing a couple doing display flights at Pumphouse Lake and Antone Slough. [N]

WILSON'S SNIPE (*Gallinago delicata*) – We got a taste of these as we headed north to Denali, hearing some winnowing from an unseen bird at Sockeye, and then seeing one dart across the road in front of the first van. The next day, along the Denali Highway, we got to see the species' winnowing flight display in its full glory right over our heads. What a great courtship they have!

COMMON SNIPE (*Gallinago gallinago*) – This one was a tad frustrating. We were walking Pumphouse Lake, looking specifically for this species, and one flushed from very far ahead of us and then flew directly away, though a couple of people who didn't do the full slog with us saw it fly right over their heads.

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus lobatus*) – The breeding phalarope on the Pribilofs, where they are abundant in wetlands. It's always a real treat to run into these repeatedly at close range. We also saw a couple at a distance at a large pond along the Denali Highway (the pond where we saw the Snipe displaying and the Yellowlegs perched on spruce trees).

RED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) – We had a couple of these on St. Paul Island. Our first was on Antone Lake, but the best looks were of a bird foraging in Salt Lagoon, right next to the road!

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*) – Seen by a few in streams along the Denali Highway.

SOLITARY SANDPIPER (*Tringa solitaria*) – We had one at our last birding stop in the Denali area- the pond just before the railroad tracks. We were stopped to look at a few ducks when Roger spotted this one blending into the back corner of the pond.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*) – We got to see them displaying on their spruce bog breeding grounds. Seeing a Yellowlegs perching on top of a spruce tree just doesn't seem right!

MARSH SANDPIPER (*Tringa stagnatilis*) – Wow! What an unexpected addition to our trip list. This species is a mega rarity in north America, where it was something like the 8th or 9th record overall, and only the 2nd ever spring record. This bird had been around the island for more than a week leading up to our visit, but it had gone missing for two days before our arrival, and so we assumed it had left before we could get there. Luckily, it re-surfaced for us as we drove to our first dinner on the island- a very welcome detour indeed!

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)

POMARINE JAEGER (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) – We had one sitting on the beach well to the south of Webster Seawatch on our first evening on St. Paul, and then on our final day on the island we saw one on a breakwall in the harbor, and then saw what was likely the same individual bathing in Saucer Pond.

PARASITIC JAEGER (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) – We had a dark morph immature fly right over our heads while we were at Ridge Wall on our 2nd day on St. Paul, and then we had another adult-type harassing Kittiwakes off of Southwest Point.

LONG-TAILED JAEGER (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) – A distant bird flew by Marunich heading west far off shore while we were on St. Paul, and then a few people on the right side of the bus saw an adult flying away from us shortly after we left Eielson Visitor Center in Denali NP.

Alcidae (Auks, Murres, and Puffins)

COMMON MURRE (*Uria aalge*) – Actually the less common of the two species of Murres breeding on the Pribilofs, though still plenty common there. We even got lots of practice telling the species apart from Thick-billed Murre as they fly around together in mixed flocks, especially off of Southwest Point. [N]

THICK-BILLED MURRE (*Uria lomvia*) – It's a real treat to be able to go to a place where this is the dominant *Uria* species, as is the case on St. Paul Island. Most other accessible Murre breeding colonies feature largely Common Murres with just a few Thick-billed Murres sprinkled in. [N]

PIGEON GUILLEMOT (*Cepphus columba*) – A very distant and unsatisfactory one at Marunich on St. Paul Island was supplanted the next day by a couple of birds (one in breeding plumage, one in transitional plumage) off of the Zapadni seal blind which were at a much more agreeable distance for everybody.

ANCIENT MURRELET (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*) – Very nice! A pair of these materialized, seemingly out of nowhere, below the Reef Cliffs while we were enjoying the seabird spectacle there.

PARAKEET AUKLET (*Aethia psittacula*) – The most common of the three species of breeding Auklet on the Pribilof Islands, the antics of these pale-eyed goofballs kept us consistently entertained while we were at their breeding cliffs. This was one of Diane's top 3 birds of the tour. [N]

LEAST AUKLET (*Aethia pusilla*) – The smallest alcid in the world, we finally caught up with good views of these adorable auks with pink halos in their eyes at Reef Cliffs on our final day on St. Paul Island. It was rather disconcerting to see so few of this species around the cliffs and rocky coasts of the island- hopefully something is not amiss with them on a population level. [N]

CRESTED AUKLET (*Aethia cristatella*) – These are super charismatic even by Auklet standards. After seeing one at Ridge Wall, we got to see a few of them interacting with each other on the Reef Cliffs on our final day, and they sure did put on quite a show for us! Doug's favorite Auklet was also picked as one of the top 3 birds of the tour for Joanna, Jane, Suzanne, and Tony! [N]

HORNED PUFFIN (*Fratercula corniculata*) – The white-faced and white-bellied puffin on the Pribilofs, these were on the cliffs in reasonable numbers for our visit, and we had some very close and obliging ones at both Ridge Wall and Reef. This expressive Puffin was one of Melinda's top 3. [N]

TUFTED PUFFIN (*Fratercula cirrhata*) – A couple of people voted for this blonde bombshell as one of their favorite birds of the trip, and I find it very hard to argue! We had some good views of them perched on the cliffs at Ridge Wall, and then some great views of them on the Reef Cliffs. [N]

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE (*Rissa tridactyla*) – The most common species of gull on the Pribilofs. This circumpolar bird may be the most abundant species of gull in the entire world, but that didn't take away from our enjoyment of their antics around the cliffs and lakes of St. Paul! [N]

RED-LEGGED KITTIWAKE (*Rissa brevirostris*) – One of the most range-restricted gulls in the world, breeding only in the Bering Sea, Red-legged Kittiwakes were numerous on St. Paul Island during our visit. We got to see a very high concentration of them bathing at Weather Bureau Lake, and also saw a couple on the breeding cliffs, as well as flybys in several locations. We even had an immature bird, born last year, which is a plumage we don't typically see at this season. Roger and Heidi both selected this adorable and rare gull as one of their top three birds of the trip. [N]

BONAPARTE'S GULL (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*) – We had a few beautiful breeding-plumaged birds with fully black heads during our first morning across the street from the hotel, at Lake Hood.

MEW GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus canus brachyrhynchus*) – The common small white-headed gull around Anchorage and Denali, breeding locally in both areas. [N]

HERRING GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*) – We saw a few of these scattered around the Denali area, where Herring-type gulls are less likely to show signs of introgression with Glaucous-winged Gulls. Hybridization among these two species is pervasive in the Cook Inlet area, so it's often difficult to determine whether something is a pure Herring Gull in Anchorage. One of the pairs of Herring Gulls in Denali was on a nest at the Savage River bridge. [N]

GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL (*Larus glaucescens*) – This is the most common large gull species at this season on St. Paul Island.

GLAUCOUS GULL (*Larus hyperboreus*) – We had them in a couple of locations on our first two days on St. Paul Island.

ARCTIC TERN (*Sterna paradisaea*) – Westchester Lagoon in Anchorage was actually the only place we caught up with the species during part 1. [N]

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – A few scattered around Anchorage as we drove through on a couple of different occasions. [I]

Strigidae (Owls)

NORTHERN HAWK OWL (*Surnia ulula*) – Whoa, what a bird! We had one of these awesome owls fly in and land right next to the road while we were on the Denali Highway. It even vocalize a few times before continuing on its merry way.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon*) – A few of us had one of these along the river near our first Boreal Chickadee spot along the Denali Highway.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*) – This was our only woodpecker at the Sockeye Burn.

BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKER (*Picoides arcticus*) – Thanks to Tom and Chris, who were doing the earlier Alaska tour, we were able to stop along the Parks Highway to see a newly fledged youngster chattering away on a deciduous tree, visible even from the road. This is often the hardest of the woodpeckers to see in Alaska, so it was a great pickup!

NORTHERN FLICKER (*Colaptes auratus*) – We had one close to the eastern terminus of our drive along the Denali Highway.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – A great experience with a couple of birds constantly vocalizing around a presumed nest site along the Denali Highway. We got to see them doing display flights where they flew like parakeets back-and-forth across the road, perhaps an insight into some of the science that shows that Falcons' closest relatives are indeed Parrots, rather than other diurnal birds of prey. [N]

GYRFALCON (*Falco rusticolus*) – Great looks at an adult gray morph individual on a ledge below us near Polychrome Pass in Denali.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

WESTERN WOOD-PEWEE (*Contopus sordidulus*) – Good views for all at the Sockeye Burn on the way north, and heard by Tony on the final day.

ALDER FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax alnorum*) – We encountered these on multiple days, but our most memorable ones were the ones that everyone got scope views of at the Sockeye Burn.

SAY'S PHOEBE (*Sayornis saya*) – A pair of these patchy breeders (in Alaska) were hanging around the Gyrfalcon area at Polychrome Pass.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

GRAY JAY (*Perisoreus canadensis*) – We saw these in a few places in the Denali area, including both the Denali Highway and inside the park itself. Perhaps the most confiding ones were a family hanging out around our lodging at Denali Bluffs.

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE (*Pica hudsonia*) – Seen in all of the habitats we went through aside from the Pribilofs.

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*) – Seen first during our layover in Dillingham, and then see commonly between Anchorage and Denali.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – Westchester Lagoon and Sockeye Burn.

VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW (*Tachycineta thalassina*) – These were nesting around our Hotel in Anchorage, where we saw them on our first morning. We also had a few at Westchester Lagoon a few days later.

BANK SWALLOW (*Riparia riparia*) – Some saw these at Lake Hood on day one, and Roger saw some at Westchester Lagoon on our way up to Denali.

CLIFF SWALLOW (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) – Encountered in a couple of places along the Denali and Parks Highways.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE (*Poecile atricapillus*) – Our only ones on Part 1 were at the Black-backed Woodpecker spot along the roadside on the Parks Highway.

BOREAL CHICKADEE (*Poecile hudsonicus*) – We had a family of these making some interesting vocalizations and being very cooperative for viewing at the very western end of the Denali Highway, and we also saw a couple of reasonably obliging individuals briefly at Riley Creek Campground.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

PACIFIC WREN (ALASCENSIS GROUP) (*Troglodytes pacificus alascensis*) – We recorded this endemic island subspecies of Pacific Wren on all three of our days on St. Paul, including some most excellent views and auditory experiences. This was heartening, as some years these can be exceptionally hard to find due to the effect a hard winter can have on these non-migratory wrens.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*) – We had a couple at the Black-backed Woodpecker spot along the Parks Highway, and then some heard them along the Denali Highway.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH (*Catharus minimus*) – We had great experiences with these along the Denali Highway, where their beautiful descending song is a common sound.

SWAINSON'S THRUSH (*Catharus ustulatus*) – It was really cool to have these singing and perching side-by-side with Gray-cheeked Thrushes along the Denali Highway.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*) – Common from Anchorage through Denali.

VARIED THRUSH (*Ixoreus naevius*) – We heard their resonant, buzzy, calls at several locations, along the Parks and Denali Highways, though we didn't lay eyes on these striking thrushes until Part 2.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Scattered sparsely through Anchorage and Wasilla, where we encountered a few on our drives.

Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

BOHEMIAN WAXWING (*Bombycilla garrulus*) – Great views of a vocalizing pair early on in our Denali Highway day. What a good-looking bird!

Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings)

LAPLAND LONGSPUR (*Calcarius lapponicus*) – Rule #1 of bird identification on St. Paul: It's a Lapland Longspur. It's pretty great to be in a place where this species, which people strive to see even one of during the winter farther south, is so abundant.

SNOW BUNTING (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) – Also a common breeder on St. Paul, they tend to stick to the rocky areas and boulder fields that we mostly avoid. during our time there. We still saw our fair share though.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) – Heard singing in a few places, including at Sockeye Burn and along the Denali Highway.

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*) – This common Alaska breeder was encountered in several locations, including at Sockeye Burn, along the Denali Highway, at Polychrome Pass, and along the Parks Highway.

BLACKPOLL WARBLER (*Setophaga striata*) – Heard at Sheep Creek, and then seen very well multiple times along the Denali Highway.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (MYRTLE) (*Setophaga coronata coronata*) – Sockeye Burn and the Denali Highway.

WILSON'S WARBLER (*Cardellina pusilla*) – We encountered these widespread northern breeders at Denali Highway and Polychrome Pass.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

AMERICAN TREE SPARROW (*Spizelloides arborea*) – Seen very well along the Denali Highway and then at Polychrome Pass.

FOX SPARROW (RED) (*Passerella iliaca zaboria*) – We had great views of these beauties at our first stop along the Denali Highway.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (*Junco hyemalis*) – We had an adult with some nearby vocalizing young ones on our first morning at Lake Hood/Spenard, and then we encountered them regularly on our trek from Anchorage and through Denali.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (GAMBEL'S) (*Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*) – Very widespread and common throughout with the exception of on St. Paul. We even heard these singing at Dillingham.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – Seen and heard from the bus inside Denali NP, and then again at Polychrome Pass. We caught up to them once more on our way south along the Parks Highway, at the location where we were taking in our best views of the mountain.

LINCOLN'S SPARROW (*Melospiza lincolni*) – We had one at the Black-backed Woodpecker spot on the way north, and then some heard them along the Denali Highway.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH (PRIBILOF IS.) (*Leucosticte tephrocotis umbrina*) – The House Sparrow of the Pribilofs. These oversized Rosy-Finches entertained us to no end with their inquisitive and obliging ways on St. Paul. This endemic race looks a lot like a giant version of the "Hepburn's" Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch.

PINE GROSBEEK (*Pinicola enucleator*) – We had a very obliging female with some pine needles in her bill at the Upper Chulitna Rest Area, on the way north along the Parks Highway.

WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL (*Loxia leucoptera*) – We had some brief encounters with these until the last day. We had a flock of over 40 chattering birds fly over us at Sockeye, and then we had a distant bird perched on a spruce upslope of us at the Denali Bluffs as we headed out to dinner on our second night there. Luckily, we connected wonderfully with them on our final morning at Riley Creek, where we had dozens of them in excellent light. Some of them were even coming to the ground to feed right in front of us- what a great experience!

COMMON REDPOLL (*Acanthis flammea*) – Our first was at Town Cliffs on St. Paul, and we had a few along the Denali Highway, at Sockeye, and at Polychrome Pass. Then on our final morning we had 150 or more hanging around Riley Creek, flying, perching, and coming down to the ground to feed.

HAWFINCH (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*) – Excellent looks at at least two of these birds in the Old Town area of St. Paul. We saw one on our first evening, from the Trident side, but then we saw a couple flying around and perching on the lampposts and old houses the next morning. What a fantastic looking animal!

MAMMALS

SNOWSHOE HARE (*Lepus americanus*) – Seen by a few on the Denali Highway and Denali NP days, but then seen by most everyone on our final day as we drove south down the Parks Highway.

HOARY MARMOT (*Marmota caligata*) – A few people on the 2nd returning bus saw one briefly on the left side of the bus as it scurried into a burrow.

ARCTIC GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus parryii*) – Seen a few times from the bus ride through Denali NP, but then several seen by those who got out at Polychrome Pass.

RED SQUIRREL (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) – Common throughout the Denali leg of the tour.

- BEAVER** (*Castor canadensis*) – One of these was floating on the surface at the back of the pond along the Denali Highway that held White-winged Scoters, Buffleheads, and both species of Scaup. Despite many sightings of beaver dams, this was the only beaver that we saw.
- NORTH AMERICAN PORCUPINE** (*Erethizon dorsatum*) – Megan spotted a porcupine far away, down in a valley below us while we were heading back to the west on the Denali Highway. It was on a sandbar in a river, and it didn't seem to be able to figure out how to get off, it simply ambled back and forth for the entire time that we were watching it.
- ARCTIC FOX** (*Alopex lagopus*) – We saw a bunch of "Blue Foxes", the darker Pribilof Island version of this taxon, in several locations around St. Paul.
- GRAY WOLF** (*Canis lupus*) – Probably the mammal highlight of the Denali bus ride, we had three different sightings of these majestic beasts. Two of them were at the Teklanika River, associated with a recent caribou kill there. Our first was the most memorable: a large pale wolf that ripped a leg off the carcass in front of us, and then carried it, trotting and wading its way across the river into the forest. We also encountered a very dark individual in the same area many hours later, on the way back, and we had a radio-collared individual much deeper into the park in between.
- BROWN (INCL. GRIZZLY) BEAR** (*Ursus arctos*) – Always one of the big draws at Denali, we came across three different mothers with cubs during our bus rides. One family was on the slopes above the Eielson visitor center and had all the hikers bunched up together down below them on the slope.
- STELLER'S SEA LION** (*Eumetopias jubatus*) – We had one of these bobbing in the water and killing a fish off of Southwest Point on our second day on St. Paul Island.
- NORTHERN FUR SEAL** (*Callorhinus ursinus*) – Some good close encounters with the humongous beach masters on St. Paul Island. That said, the numbers of these beasts seemed to be alarmingly low this spring, perhaps another result of the recent drastic warming of the Bering Sea and North Pacific.
- HARBOR SEAL** (*Phoca vitulina*) – The common non-eared seal at this season on St. Paul. We saw several floating below us at Southwest Point.
- MOOSE** (*Alces alces*) – Seen very day on the Denali leg of our journey, including several close encounters.
- CARIBOU** (*Rangifer tarandus granti*) – Including a herd of over 150 in Denali NP, where we saw a total of over 200 individuals while there.
- DALL'S SHEEP** (*Ovis dalli*) – We saw them from the bus in Denali NP at a couple of spots along the road.
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ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 115 bird taxa and 15 mammal taxa