



*Field Guides Tour Report*

**Alaska I - Part One (Pribilofs & Denali) 2018**

May 31, 2018 to Jun 8, 2018  
Chris Benesh & Doug Gochfeld

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



*The spectacular sight of Denali as seen from a viewpoint just south of Cantwell along the Parks Highway. Photo by guide Chris Benesh.*

The Field Guides Alaska Tour Part One will go down as one of the most memorable ones in recent years. The combination of favorable winds on St. Paul and good weather overall set us up for a nice diversity of species and some wonderful scenery. I get asked a lot whether I ever get tired of going to Alaska after so many years. I can't imagine tiring of all of the wonderful sights and wildlife encounters that make this a premier destination.

Our tour got off to an amazing start with a short visit to Bethel on route to St. Paul Island. Strong westerly winds had set us up for an unusual visit to the island, with one of the more vagrant rich visits in memory. Just as soon as we dropped off our bags in our rooms, we were off to Marunich to look for Gray-streaked Flycatcher, Terek and Common sandpipers, along with our first taste of St. Paul's normal bird life. That evening, we headed to the northeast part of the island to feast on Eyebrowed Thrushes, Olive-backed Pipits, and Bramblings, along with a massive number of Red Phalaropes! The breeding seabirds of St. Paul were kept largely off of their breeding cliffs by the strong southerly component to the wind, but we managed to see them floating on the water or flying past us. The winds set us up for a productive seawatch near Reef Rookery where we had a few Fork-tailed Storm-Petrels and a stream of Fulmars. Ponds also proved productive, and we were able to add Common Greenshank, Common Snipe, and a rare Long-toed Stint to our growing list of rarities. Eventually, we were off again to the mainland in preparation for our journey north to Denali.

After a morning visit to Westchester Lagoon, we were off to the Sockeye Burn to seek out woodpeckers. An American Three-toed Woodpecker nest was the big highlight there. Then we stopped along the Parks Highway in a few spots, picking up some nice birds along the way. Our next morning was a glorious one along the Denali Highway, but not before making a short detour south of Cantwell to take in the mighty view of Denali. What a sight! Then we headed east, birding our way surrounded at times by mountains in every direction! Highlights were numerous, but included our first pair of Willow Ptarmigan. The second morning was spent looking for grouse before catching the shuttle bus into the park itself. Early on were two terrific sightings, a male Spruce Grouse and a Northern Hawk Owl. Just past Polychrome Pass was a Gyrfalcon showing well for us! Mammals were cooperative with a terrific Toklat Grizzly at one point, as well as Caribou, Moose, Dall's Sheep, Arctic Ground-Squirrels, and even a Hoary Marmot. None of us will soon forget the overzealous shushing from our cautious driver. Our drive back down to Anchorage was also rewarding, with better views of White-winged Crossbill, a wonderful Short-tailed Weasel for part of the group, and a wonderful Black-backed Woodpecker at the Sockeye Burn on our second visit there.

Thanks to each of you for making part one such a success! It was a real treat for Doug and I to spent time with you in this magical place! — Chris

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#### 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

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## BIRDS

### Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

**ACKLING GOOSE (ALEUTIAN)** (*Branta hutchinsii leucopareia*) – We had a small flock of 18 or so out on St. Paul Island. This subspecies has made a remarkable recovery in recent years.

**CANADA GOOSE** (*Branta canadensis*)

**TRUMPETER SWAN** (*Cygnus buccinator*) – We had a couple of pairs of this species along the Denali Hwy where they breed.

**NORTHERN SHOVELER** (*Spatula clypeata*)

**EURASIAN WIGEON** (*Mareca penelope*) – There were at least three present on Antone Lake on St. Paul.

**AMERICAN WIGEON** (*Mareca americana*)

**MALLARD** (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

**NORTHERN PINTAIL** (*Anas acuta*)

**GREEN-WINGED TEAL (EURASIAN)** (*Anas crecca nimia*) – The jury is still out as to whether the Eurasian form should be considered a separate species or not.

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

**CANVASBACK** (*Aythya valisineria*) – A female was hanging out at Westchester Lagoon.

**RING-NECKED DUCK** (*Aythya collaris*) – A small group of these were on a roadside lake on the Parks Hwy.

**GREATER SCAUP** (*Aythya marila*)

**LESSER SCAUP** (*Aythya affinis*)

**KING EIDER** (*Somateria spectabilis*) – There were a small number of these seen at St. Paul.

**HARLEQUIN DUCK** (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) – Some good studies of this species at St. Paul and at least one pair was also seen on Brushkana Creek during our day on the Denali Hwy.

**SURF SCOTER** (*Melanitta perspicillata*) – We had four of these along the Denali Hwy that were a bit unusual for there.

**WHITE-WINGED SCOTER (NORTH AMERICAN)** (*Melanitta fusca deglandi*) – There were nine of these at the float plane lake on the Denali Hwy.

**LONG-TAILED DUCK** (*Clangula hyemalis*) – Some good studies of this species at St. Paul.

**BUFFLEHEAD** (*Bucephala albeola*) – A few of these were on the Parks Hwy in the big duck lake.

**BARROW'S GOLDENEYE** (*Bucephala islandica*) – Some good looks at this attractive species at the big duck lake as well.

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

**SPRUCE GROUSE** (*Falcipecten canadensis*) – A wonderful male bird seen on the bus ride in Denali. Sadly, the driver's decisions on how to view it made it a challenge to see.

**WILLOW PTARMIGAN** (*Lagopus lagopus*) – A wonderful encounter with a pair of birds along the Denali Hwy and several also in the park the following day.

### Gaviidae (Loons)

**RED-THROATED LOON** (*Gavia stellata*) – Three of these were on the narrow lake along the Parks Hwy on our way back to Anchorage.

### Podicipedidae (Grebes)

**HORNED GREBE** (*Podiceps auritus*) – A good scope view of one at the float plane lake. This species in breeding plumage is quite stunning!

**RED-NECKED GREBE** (*Podiceps grisegena*) – A real treat seeing this species breeding right in Anchorage!

### Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

**NORTHERN FULMAR** (*Fulmarus glacialis*) – Quite a show seeing dozens zooming past us near Reef in the high winds on St. Paul.

### Hydrobatidae (Storm-Petrels)

**FORK-TAILED STORM-PETREL** (*Oceanodroma furcata*) – The really strong winds on St. Paul were effective in driving a few seabirds close to shore including several of these seen from the road to Reef Rookery.

### Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

**RED-FACED CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax urile*) – Some nice looks at a few of these on St. Paul. Fewer than normal present overall.

### Pandionidae (Osprey)

**OSPREY** (*Pandion haliaetus*) – A bit of surprise was one cruising along the Denali Highway.

### Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

**GOLDEN EAGLE** (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – A couple of these wonderful raptors seen on the bus ride in the park.

**NORTHERN HARRIER** (*Circus hudsonius*) – A few of these were spotted around Denali.

**BALD EAGLE** (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – A couple were at Westchester Lagoon and another on the Denali Hwy.

**WHITE-TAILED EAGLE** (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) – This would qualify as a mega! Great scope views of this rare visitor on St. Paul Island. There are just a handful of US records of this species.

**RED-TAILED HAWK (HARLAN'S)** (*Buteo jamaicensis harlani*) – One was seen near the entrance to Denali NP. This subspecies is sometimes considered a good species.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings).

**SEMIPALMATED PLOVER** (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies).

**WHIMBREL (SIBERIAN)** (*Numenius phaeopus variegatus*) – We bumped into one standing in the road on St. Paul. This subspecies has a pale, contrasting rump and lower back when seen in flight.

**BAR-TAILED GODWIT** (*Limosa lapponica*) – One turned up at Salt Lagoon that put on a good show for us.

**HUDSONIAN GODWIT** (*Limosa haemastica*) – Specks in the distance unfortunately due to unfavorable tides.

**LONG-TOED STINT** (*Calidris subminuta*) – This one was a challenge to sort out, but after a few flight views and analysis of photos we were confident that the suspect was a Long-toed. Doug summed up the differences well on the eBird list: "Small brown calidrid with long yellow legs, fairly prominent toe projection beyond the body in flight, weak black line between the eye and bill on an otherwise fairly pale/blank face. Brown coming down the sides of the upper breast, noticeable white slashes in the underwing. Long wings, with an especially long hand, and therefore the flight style much more reminiscent of shorebirds with similarly proportionally long wings (Pectoral, tringas), than with Least Sandpiper."

**ROCK SANDPIPER (PTILOCNEMIS)** (*Calidris ptilocnemis ptilocnemis*) – One of the most iconic birds of St. Paul; we saw plenty of them. This nominate subspecies is quite a bit paler than others.

**LEAST SANDPIPER** (*Calidris minutilla*)

**WESTERN SANDPIPER** (*Calidris mauri*) – One was seen at St. Paul. This species is uncommon there in the Spring.

**COMMON SNIPE** (*Gallinago gallinago*) – Again, photos were helpful in confirming that the snipe seen on St. Paul was indeed this species.

**WILSON'S SNIPE** (*Gallinago delicata*)

**TEREK SANDPIPER** (*Xenus cinereus*) – Another wonderful species to see on St. Paul, we had at least two of these at Marunich on our first afternoon there.

**RED-NECKED PHALAROPE** (*Phalaropus lobatus*)

**RED PHALAROPE** (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) – An exceptional number of these for Spring were present on St. Paul.

**COMMON SANDPIPER** (*Actitis hypoleucos*) – One was seen briefly at Marunich on our first afternoon, being a bit overshadowed by the Tereks and the flycatcher.

**SPOTTED SANDPIPER** (*Actitis macularius*)

**COMMON GREENSHANK** (*Tringa nebularia*) – We caught up with this rarity at Antone Slough on St. Paul, yet another amazing shorebird!

**LESSER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa flavipes*)

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers).

**POMARINE JAEGER** (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) – Several seen while seawatching on the island.

Alcidae (Auks, Murres, and Puffins).

**COMMON MURRE** (*Uria aalge*) – Numbers of murres seemed to be way down at St. Paul.

**THICK-BILLED MURRE** (*Uria lomvia*)

**PARAKEET AUKLET** (*Aethia psittacula*) – One of the highlights of a visit to St. Paul are the alcids. This year was no exception though many were away from the cliffs.

**LEAST AUKLET** (*Aethia pusilla*) – We got to spend some quality time with these tiny, feisty auks along the rocky Antone wall.

**CRESTED AUKLET** (*Aethia cristatella*) – A handful of these were seen, but overall smaller numbers of this perennial favorite.

**HORNED PUFFIN** (*Fratercula corniculata*)

**TUFTED PUFFIN** (*Fratercula cirrhata*)

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers).

**BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE** (*Rissa tridactyla*)

**RED-LEGGED KITTIWAKE** (*Rissa brevirostris*) – The most accessible place on Earth to see this Bering Sea endemic.

**SABINE'S GULL** (*Xema sabini*) – We had up to three of these beautiful gulls at Salt Lagoon on St. Paul where this species is scarce.

**BONAPARTE'S GULL** (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*)

**BLACK-HEADED GULL** (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) – One or more were present during our stay on St. Paul.

**MEW GULL (AMERICAN)** (*Larus canus brachyrhynchus*)

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

**GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL** (*Larus glaucescens*)

**GLAUCOUS GULL** (*Larus hyperboreus*)

**ARCTIC TERN** (*Sterna paradisaea*)

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves).

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) [I]

Strigidae (Owls).

**NORTHERN HAWK OWL** (*Surnia ulula*) – One was spotted on our bus ride into Denali NP that we were able to enjoy for a few minutes before continuing on our ride.

**SHORT-EARED OWL** (*Asio flammeus*)

Picidae (Woodpeckers).

**DOWNY WOODPECKER** (*Picoides pubescens*)

**HAIRY WOODPECKER** (*Picoides villosus*)

**AMERICAN THREE-TOED WOODPECKER** (*Picoides dorsalis*) – We had a nest of this species on our first visit to the Sockeye Burn.

**BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKER** (*Picoides arcticus*) – The scarcer of the two "three-toes", we eventually tracked one down at the Sockeye Burn.

*Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras).*

**GYRFALCON** (*Falco rusticolus*) – Nice views of one at Denali NP. A few enjoyed it again later on on their return to the park entrance.

*Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers).*

**OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER** (*Contopus cooperi*) – One was at the Sockeye Burn along with Western Wood-Pewee.

**WESTERN WOOD-PEWEE** (*Contopus sordidulus*)

**ALDER FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax alnorum*)

*Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies).*

**GRAY JAY** (*Perisoreus canadensis*) – Now known once again as Canada Jay.

**BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE** (*Pica hudsonia*)

**COMMON RAVEN** (*Corvus corax*)

*Hirundinidae (Swallows).*

**TREE SWALLOW** (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

**VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW** (*Tachycineta thalassina*)

**BANK SWALLOW** (*Riparia riparia*)

**CLIFF SWALLOW** (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*)

*Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice).*

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

**BOREAL CHICKADEE** (*Poecile hudsonicus*) – We had several nice encounters with this boreal species over our time near Denali.

*Troglodytidae (Wrens).*

**PACIFIC WREN (ALASCENSIS GROUP)** (*Troglodytes pacificus alascensis*) – We eventually encountered one singing near the Trident plant on St. Paul.

*Regulidae (Kinglets).*

**RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET** (*Regulus calendula*)

*Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers).*

**GRAY-STREAKED FLYCATCHER** (*Muscicapa griseisticta*) – A real treat seeing this rarity on St. Paul.

**SIBERIAN RUBYTHROAT** (*Calliope calliope*)

**NORTHERN WHEATEAR** (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) – One was seen briefly on the bus ride in Denali.

*Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies).*

**GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH** (*Catharus minimus*) – This species was really common in the boreal woods near Denali.

**SWAINSON'S THRUSH** (*Catharus ustulatus*)

**HERMIT THRUSH** (*Catharus guttatus*) [\*]

**EYEBROWED THRUSH** (*Turdus obscurus*) – We had an estimated four of these on St. Paul, one of several wonderful Asian species present for us.

**AMERICAN ROBIN** (*Turdus migratorius*)

**VARIED THRUSH** (*Ixoreus naevius*) – Some good views of this colorful species along with its haunting vocalizations.

*Sturnidae (Starlings).*

**EUROPEAN STARLING** (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [H]

*Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits).*

**OLIVE-BACKED PIPIT** (*Anthus hodgsoni*) – As many as four of these on St. Paul were a treat.

**AMERICAN PIPIT (JAPONICUS)** (*Anthus rubescens japonicus*)

*Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings).*

**LAPLAND LONGSPUR** (*Calcarius lapponicus*) – No one will soon forget the tinkling song of this species.

**SNOW BUNTING** (*Plectrophenax nivalis*)

*Parulidae (New World Warblers).*

**NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH** (*Parkesia noveboracensis*)

**ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER** (*Oreothlypis celata*)

**YELLOW WARBLER** (*Setophaga petechia*)

**BLACKPOLL WARBLER** (*Setophaga striata*)

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

**WILSON'S WARBLER** (*Cardellina pusilla*)

*Passerellidae (New World Buntings and 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*)

**SAVANNAH SPARROW** (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

**LINCOLN'S SPARROW** (*Melospiza lincolni*)

*Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies).*

**BRAMBLING** (*Fringilla montifringilla*) – One of the more regular Asian passerines to stray to St. Paul we had a good showing of several.

**GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH (PRIBILOF IS.)** (*Leucosticte tephrocotis umbrina*)

**COMMON REDPOLL** (*Acanthis flammea*)

**WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL** (*Loxia leucoptera*) – A couple of brief sightings before really connecting at the "grouse spot" on the Parks Hwy.

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## **MAMMALS**

**SNOWSHOE HARE** (*Lepus americanus*)

**HOARY MARMOT** (*Marmota caligata*)

**ARCTIC GROUND SQUIRREL** (*Spermophilus parryii*)

**RED SQUIRREL** (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)

**ARCTIC FOX** (*Alopex lagopus*)

**BROWN (INCL. GRIZZLY) BEAR** (*Ursus arctos*) – We didn't see a lot of bears but we saw them well!

**STOAT (SHORT-TAILED WEASEL)** (*Mustela erminea*) – A wonderful encounter with one that Cher spotted at Byers Lake for one of the vans.

**NORTHERN FUR SEAL** (*Callorhinus ursinus*) – A declining species, we saw some of the first arrivals of the season on St. Paul.

**HARBOR SEAL** (*Phoca vitulina*)

**MOOSE** (*Alces alces*) – Some terrific encounters of this species.

**CARIBOU** (*Rangifer tarandus granti*)

**REINDEER** (*Rangifer tarandus sibiricus*) [1]

**DALL'S SHEEP** (*Ovis dalli*)

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## **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

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**Totals for the tour: 122 bird taxa and 13 mammal taxa**