



Field Guides Tour Report

Alaska I - Part Two (Nome, Seward & Barrow) 2014

Jun 6, 2014 to Jun 16, 2014
Chris Benesh & Pepe Rojas

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



Scenic Aialik Glacier was among the numerous highlights of Part Two of our tour. (Photo by guide Chris Benesh)

Part Two of the Alaska Tour picked up where the first tour ended. We first headed toward Seward on the Kenai Peninsula. Located at the top of Resurrection Bay, Seward was our base for a boat trip out into Kenai Fjords National Park, home to a dizzying number of seabirds and lots of marine mammals. After a short false start, we were off to enjoy the bounties of the park. The weather was exceptional, and the sightings too.

We next headed north to Barrow, where we spent a couple of days at the top of the world (well, at least the top of the United States). Up there, we were treated to an assortment of breeding shorebirds and four species of colorful eiders. Jaegers seemed to be everywhere!

And finally, we headed to Nome to immerse ourselves in the best of what western Alaska has to offer. There really is no place like Nome, and we had some really terrific weather to enjoy it. Once we got settled, we headed off to see what was along the coast. A quick stop to see a male Spectacled Eider was followed by a journey that yielded a pair of Arctic Loons, Northern Wheatears, and a few active Eastern Yellow-Wagtails. The next day was a full one along the magical Kougarok Road, a place of hard to beat scenery. It was here we sought (and found) the elusive Bristle-thighed Curlew, Rock Ptarmigan, and the even more elusive Bluethroat. That left us with a final day to catch up with everything else, and we did a pretty good job of it. Our daring last minute effort to track down Gyrfalcon paid off, discovering a nest with young. A perfect way to wrap things up before our evening flight back to Anchorage.

Pepe and I feel very fortunate to have had you all along on our Alaska adventure. We enjoyed the laughs and high-fives, celebrating lifers and amazing spectacles. We also appreciate your patience during the transitions too. It's clients like you that make these tours work! Until next time, good birding to all of you. — Chris (&Pepe)

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)

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE (*Anser albifrons*) – Quite a few of these in Barrow.

SNOW GOOSE (*Chen caerulescens*) – Part of the group had two fly past us on our trip to Point Barrow.

BRANT (BLACK) (*Branta bernicla nigricans*)

CACKLING GOOSE (*Branta hutchinsii*) – Birds in Nome are the confusing Taverner's form, the largest of the Cackling.

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*)

TRUMPETER SWAN (*Cygnus buccinator*)

TUNDRA SWAN (WHISTLING) (*Cygnus columbianus columbianus*) – Quite a sight to see so many near Nome.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*)

EURASIAN WIGEON (*Anas penelope*) – Two males seen briefly together before flushing near Nome.

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*)

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*)

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*)

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

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*)

GREATER SCAUP (*Aythya marila*)

LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*)

STELLER'S EIDER (*Polysticta stelleri*) – It was a good year for this species in Barrow with a high day count of fifteen.

SPECTACLED EIDER (*Somateria fischeri*) – A total of four seen in Barrow and then a rather close male hanging out in the harbor in Nome.

KING EIDER (*Somateria spectabilis*) – As many as fourteen seen in Barrow.

COMMON EIDER (PACIFIC) (*Somateria mollissima v-nigrum*) – This form has a bright orange bill.

HARLEQUIN DUCK (*Histrionicus histrionicus*)

SURF SCOTER (*Melanitta perspicillata*)

BLACK SCOTER (*Melanitta americana*)

LONG-TAILED DUCK (*Clangula hyemalis*)

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala islandica*)

COMMON MERGANSER (*Mergus merganser*)

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*)

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

WILLOW PTARMIGAN (*Lagopus lagopus*) – Several seen on the Teller Road in Nome.

ROCK PTARMIGAN (*Lagopus muta*) – We lucked on to a male during our search for Bristle-thighed Curlew.

Gaviidae (Loons)

RED-THROATED LOON (*Gavia stellata*)

ARCTIC LOON (*Gavia arctica*) – Great looks at a pair of birds east of Nome. This pair is the most accessible one in North America.

PACIFIC LOON (*Gavia pacifica*) – A lovely bird when seen well.

COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*)

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

RED-NECKED GREBE (*Podiceps grisegena*)

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*)

RED-FACED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax urile*) – A few seen on our boat trip out of Seward.

PELAGIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*)

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – One seen in Nome where this species is scarce.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – One nesting on the Kougarok Road near Nome.

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*)

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

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

ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK (*Buteo lagopus*) – A couple of sightings in the Nome area.

Gruidae (Cranes)

SANDHILL CRANE (*Grus canadensis*)

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – We found a handsome bird on the road to Woolley Lagoon.

AMERICAN GOLDEN-PLOVER (*Pluvialis dominica*) – Great views in Nome and Barrow. Stunning.

PACIFIC GOLDEN-PLOVER (*Pluvialis fulva*) – Nice views of a few birds on the Teller Road and out toward Woolley Lagoon.

SEMPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

WHIMBREL (AMERICAN) (*Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*)

BRISTLE-THIGHED CURLEW (*Numenius tahitiensis*) – It took us a while to track down the Numenius near Coffee Dome, but after hearing a curlew calling, Sarah spotted it creeping across the tundra which led to great scope views for all.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa lapponica*) – Not plentiful, but we did get some good scope views at the Nome River.

RUFF (*Calidris pugnax*) – Thanks to a tip from other birders, we were able to track down this male Ruff down the Gaswell Road in Barrow.
DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*)
BAIRD'S SANDPIPER (*Calidris bairdii*) – After not connecting, we finally tracked down this species in a small bit of tundra right across from the new Top Of The World Hotel.
LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*)
PECTORAL SANDPIPER (*Calidris melanotos*) – One of the real spectacles of a visit to Barrow is seeing and hearing this species in full display.
SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER (*Calidris pusilla*)
WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*)
LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*)
WILSON'S SNIPE (*Gallinago delicata*)
RED-NECKED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus lobatus*)
RED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) – Barrow is a wonderful place to enjoy up close studies of breeding plumaged birds.

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)

POMARINE JAEGER (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) – It was a really good year for this species in Barrow with multiple sightings.
PARASITIC JAEGER (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) – Most were in Nome with a few in Barrow too.
LONG-TAILED JAEGER (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) – Nome is a wonderful place to see this species.

Alcidae (Auks, Murres, and Puffins)

COMMON MURRE (*Uria aalge*)
THICK-BILLED MURRE (*Uria lomvia*) – We did spot one on the water with Commons in the Chiswell Islands.
PIGEON GUILLEMOT (*Cephus columba*) – Some nice looks on the Seward boat trip.
MARbled MURRELET (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*)
KITTLITZ'S MURRELET (*Brachyramphus brevirostris*) – As we approached Aialik Glacier, we did encounter a pair of these that allowed us some great views. Lots of Marbleds to compare them to.
PARAKEET AUKLET (*Aethia psittacula*) – We did encounter a small group in the Chiswells.
RHINOCEROS AUKLET (*Cerorhinca monocerata*) – Big numbers of these were seen in Aialik Bay.
HORNED PUFFIN (*Fratercula corniculata*)
TUFTED PUFFIN (*Fratercula cirrhata*)

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE (*Rissa tridactyla*)
SABINE'S GULL (*Xema sabini*) – Stunning birds seen in Barrow.
MEW GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus canus brachyrhynchus*)
HERRING GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*)
GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL (*Larus glaucescens*)
GLAUCOUS GULL (*Larus hyperboreus*)
ALEUTIAN TERN (*Onychoprion aleuticus*) – We saw small numbers of these around the Nome River mouth. This species is very localized in Alaska.
ARCTIC TERN (*Sterna paradisaea*)

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [I]

Strigidae (Owls)

SNOWY OWL (*Bubo scandiacus*) – It was a pretty good year for this species at Barrow where we saw several.
SHORT-EARED OWL (*Asio flammeus*) – We did manage to track down one near Nome.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD (*Selasphorus rufus*) – We had a couple visiting feeders in Seward.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megasceryle alcyon*)

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*)
HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*)
AMERICAN THREE-TOED WOODPECKER (*Picoides dorsalis*) – We managed to connect with one at Hillside Park in Anchorage though we had to pay in blood for the opportunity.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

GYRFALCON (*Falco rusticolus*) – Really tough this year! We got lucky on our last try outside of Nome, finding a nest with you and a couple of adults sitting around nearby. They were a ways off, but clearly identifiable.
PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – Sarah spotted this one on our boat trip.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER (*Contopus cooperi*) – Another good find in Hillside Park as we were donating blood that morning.
ALDER FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax alnorum*) – Seen at the Denali View and again in Nome.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

STELLER'S JAY (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) – At the northern limits of its range in Seward.

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE (*Pica hudsonia*)

NORTHWESTERN CROW (*Corvus caurinus*) – Another corvid at the northern limit of its range in Seward.

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*)

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW (*Tachycineta thalassina*)

BANK SWALLOW (*Riparia riparia*)

CLIFF SWALLOW (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*)

Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)

CHESTNUT-BACKED CHICKADEE (*Poecile rufescens*)

BOREAL CHICKADEE (*Poecile hudsonicus*) – We tracked one down near Ptarmigan Creek.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*)

Cinclidae (Dippers)

AMERICAN DIPPER (*Cinclus mexicanus*) – We enjoyed the antics of a young Dipper already foraging for itself in the fast rushing waters near the salmon weir. Some saw an adult bird relaxing nearby.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*)

Phylloscopidae (Leaf-Warblers)

ARCTIC WARBLER (*Phylloscopus borealis*) – Some great looks at this species in the Nome area where it is rather common. This is one of those species that flies west into Asia before heading south in the fall.

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

BLUETHROAT (*Luscinia svecica*) – It took a lot of searching, but we did connect with this species in the end. What a relief as it is such a cool bird. This one also heads west in the fall.

NORTHERN WHEATEAR (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) – We had a couple of sightings of this species on the Counsel Road and the Woolley Lagoon Road.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH (*Catharus minimus*) – This species is amazingly common in the Nome area.

SWAINSON'S THRUSH (*Catharus ustulatus*)

HERMIT THRUSH (*Catharus guttatus*) [*]

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*)

VARIED THRUSH (*Ixoreus naevius*) – Birds hopping around on the ground near Seward.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [I]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

EASTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL (*Motacilla tschutschensis*) – Nice views of several near the ghost town of Solomon.

Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings)

LAPLAND LONGSPUR (*Calcarius lapponicus*)

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 (*Setophaga coronata*)

TOWNSEND'S WARBLER (*Setophaga townsendi*) – Some nice looks at this colorful warbler near Seward.

WILSON'S WARBLER (*Cardellina pusilla*)

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

AMERICAN TREE SPARROW (*Spizella arborea*)

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

FOX SPARROW (SOOTY) (*Passerella iliaca sinuosa*) – These chocolate brown Fox Sparrows were the type seen around Seward. There is some chance that they

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

LINCOLN'S SPARROW (*Melospiza lincolnii*) [*]

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

GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*) – This is another species that is plentiful in the Nome area.

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

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RUSTY BLACKBIRD (*Euphagus carolinus*) – We lucked into a group of three birds along the Kougarok Road.

Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)

PINE GROSBEAK (*Pinicola enucleator*) – Well seen visiting feeders in Seward.

COMMON REDPOLL (*Acanthis flammea*)

HOARY REDPOLL (*Acanthis hornemanni*)

PINE SISKIN (*Spinus pinus*)

MAMMALS

ARCTIC GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus parryii*)

RED SQUIRREL (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)

BEAVER (*Castor canadensis*) – Great looks at one in a pond along the Kougarok Road.

TUNDRA RED-BACKED VOLE (*Clethrionomys rutilus*)

BROWN LEMMING (*Lemmus sibiricus*)

DALL'S PORPOISE (*Phocoenoides dalli*) – Some memorable encounters with bow riding animals on our boat trip.

GRAY WHALE (*Eschrichtius robustus*) – A couple (mother and calf) seen close to shore in Nome.

HUMPBACK WHALE (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) – While they were a little cagey, we did see a few on our boat trip.

RED FOX (*Vulpes vulpes*)

SEA OTTER (*Enhydra lutris*) – Some terrific looks at these cuties early on on our Seward boat trip.

STELLER'S SEA LION (*Eumetopias jubatus*) – Well seen at a couple of haul out sites in the Chiswells.

HARBOR SEAL (*Phoca vitulina*) – Some seen on our boat trip.

SPOTTED SEAL (*Phoca largha*) – Seen in the harbor in Nome and at Barrow.

RINGED SEAL (*Phoca hispida*)

MOOSE (*Alces alces*) – We had a couple of these on the Kougarok Road in Nome and another on our drive to Seward.

MOUNTAIN GOAT (*Oreamnos americanus*) – We had a bunch of these (sixteen or so) near Tern Lake.

MUSKOX (*Ovibos moschatus*) – A big herd of these were near the mouth of the Nome River. A few others were scattered.

DALL'S SHEEP (*Ovis dalli*) – A couple seen on the drive to Seward.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 140 bird taxa and 18 mammal taxa