



Field Guides Tour Report

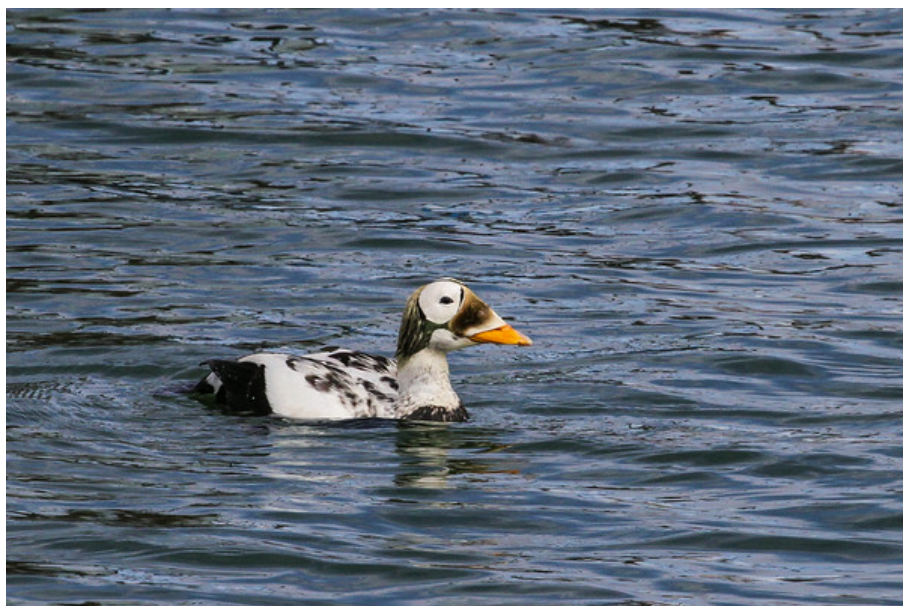
Alaska II - Part Two (Nome, Seward & Barrow) 2014

Jun 13, 2014 to Jun 23, 2014  
Megan Edwards Crewe & Doug Gochfeld

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

Part Two of our Alaska tour is a study in contrasts, alternating between the settled, relatively tame areas between Anchorage and Seward, the untrammelled icy fjords of the Kenai Peninsula, the vast uninhabited stretches around the former frontier town of Nome, and the flat endless tundra around Barrow. And exploring all of those areas brought us wonderful encounters with many of the creatures that live there.

Things started with a bang, with a male Spectacled Eider floating in the Nome harbor; we watched as he paddled around, satisfyingly close, among the boats and piers. A Sabine's Gull took a vigorous bath among a mob of Glaucous Gulls. Two Arctic Loons preened just offshore, and a third floated conveniently close to a pair of Pacific Loons. Arctic Warblers shouted challenges from tiny willows. A male Bluethroat flashed his iridescent namesake throat. Aleutian Terns flapped past giving their vaguely House Sparrow-like calls. A shaggy herd of Muskox snoozed beside the road. A Gyrfalcon preened on a rocky cliff. A trio of Northern Wheatears chased each other along the rocky banks of a tumbling stream. Along the scenic Kougarak road, every stop brought spectacular vistas of snow-covered mountains and the fluting songs of Gray-cheeked Thrushes intermingled with the slow whistles of Golden-crowned Sparrows.



*Finding a Spectacled Eider in a harbor in the middle of Nome was a definite surprise. Photo by participant Merl Arnot.*

In Anchorage's Hillside Park, a young male American Three-toed Woodpecker yammered incessantly for food, pausing for a few nanoseconds at a time when his parents shoved food into his open beak. A Bald Eagle fed its fluffy chicks in a huge stick nest. Rafts of Horned and Tufted puffins floated on the rolling waters of the Kenai Fjords, while Rhinoceros Auklets and Ancient Murrelets whirred past on flashing wings. A pod of Orcas hunted around our boat. Two Black Oystercatchers climbed the shore of a rocky islet. A handful of Pine Grosbeaks rummaged for tidbits on a soggy lawn. A Townsend's Warbler sang his heart out from the top of a tall Sitka Spruce. An American Dipper rested on a salmon weir, flashing its snowy-white eyelids. A pair of Barrow's Goldeneyes hugged the edge of a moss-green lake.

In Barrow, a ghostly-white Snowy Owl surveyed his domain from atop a utility pole. A pair of Steller's Eiders got frisky in a roadside pond. Pomarine Jaegers powered over the tundra, searching for lemmings. A Black Guillemot floated near the icy edge of a tundra pond. Red and Red-necked Phalaropes spun like tops on roadside puddles, or chased each other on flashing wings across the tundra. Male Pectoral Sandpipers stood on tiny humps in the tundra, or quartered the ground in humming display flights. And the pack ice stretched to the horizon in a jumble of broken plains and ridges.

Thanks for joining Doug and me for some adventures in the Great White North. Thanks too for coping gracefully with a recalcitrant boat engine (darn) and an unfound Bristle-thighed Curlew (double darn). In spite of those, may the memory of the spectacular scenery and the many birds and mammals we saw so well remain foremost. And I hope to see you all again someday, somewhere!

-- Megan

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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)*

**GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE** (*Anser albifrons*) – Quite common around Barrow, where we saw many wary pairs eyeing us from the tundra. We also had one lying on a nest, its neck stretched along the ground to make it less obvious to potential predators. [N]

**SNOW GOOSE** (*Chen caerulescens*) – Two medium-sized flocks winged past while we birded around Barrow: a dozen or so flapped over the ponds at

the start of Cake-eater Road, and another group flew along the coastline near Mount Barrow.

- BRANT (BLACK)** (*Branta bernicla nigricans*) – Regular in the back bays at Nome, with a sprinkling of others in Barrow. The subspecies here (*nigricans*) is much darker on the breast and flanks than are subspecies from further east.
- ACKLING GOOSE** (*Branta hutchinsii*) – A couple flying with the Snow Goose flock past Mount Barrow looked tiny by comparison.
- CANADA GOOSE** (*Branta canadensis*) – Particularly common at Westchester Lagoon (and other wetlands around Anchorage), with others around Nome. The most common subspecies over most of our tour route is *parvipes*.
- TRUMPETER SWAN** (*Cygnus buccinator*) – A pair floated with four small cygnets toward the back of a marshy pond near Seward. [N]
- TUNDRA SWAN (WHISTLING)** (*Cygnus columbianus columbianus*) – Scores -- many sleeping, some feeding -- dotted the back bays along the Council road out of Nome. This is the expected (New World) subspecies.
- TUNDRA SWAN (BEWICK'S)** (*Cygnus columbianus bewickii*) – We found what looked like one of these, the Old World subspecies, among the mass of "Whistling Swans" along the Council road. Our bird's beak was primarily yellow -- one of the key features of the *bewickii* subspecies.
- GADWALL** (*Anas strepera*) – Two along Gaswell Road outside Barrow were a bit of a surprise; this species isn't particularly common that far north.
- AMERICAN WIGEON** (*Anas americana*) – Quite common in the back bays along the Council road east of Nome, with a handful of others at Westchester Lagoon.
- MALLARD** (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Including a mama with ducklings at Westchester Lagoon, and a few birds in the ponds along the runway at Prudhoe Bay. [N]
- NORTHERN SHOVELER** (*Anas clypeata*) – Small numbers around Nome, particularly in the back bays along the Council road.
- NORTHERN PINTAIL** (*Anas acuta*) – This elegant duck was a regular part of the high arctic scenery, found on many ponds around Nome and Barrow.
- GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN)** (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) – Seen in small numbers everywhere but Seward, with especially nice looks at a few in the ponds along Cake-eater road.
- GREATER SCAUP** (*Aythya marila*) – Regular along Gaswell road outside Nome, with a handful of others at Westchester Lagoon.
- LESSER SCAUP** (*Aythya affinis*) – Seen in nice comparison with the previous species on the little island in Westchester Lagoon. This species shows a pronounced peak toward the back of its crown, somewhat "grubbier" flanks, a larger black nail on the bill and a purplish, rather than greenish, sheen to the male's head.
- STELLER'S EIDER** (*Polysticta stelleri*) – Several seen well around Barrow, including a frisky pair making ducklings along Freshwater Lake road and another pair foraging near Cake-eater road, their heads popping up and down out of the marshy grasses.
- SPECTACLED EIDER** (*Somateria fischeri*) – Wow! Spectacular views of a male paddling around the Nome harbor -- a very nice way to start our stay in that frontier town. We also had fine views of a female in the surf just east of Safety Sound, and at least one pair in a distant pond along the New Dump road in Barrow.
- KING EIDER** (*Somateria spectabilis*) – A scattering of males in Barrow, with a much closer look at a female (showing a strange twisted mark on one side of her face) waddling away from us along Cake-eater road.
- COMMON EIDER (PACIFIC)** (*Somateria mollissima v-nigrum*) – Appropriately, these were very common indeed east of Nome, with fine views of many on our afternoon along the Council road. The subspecies here (*v-nigrum*) has an orange (rather than greenish) bill and a v-shaped black mark under the chin -- very much an "only seen in the hand" feature!
- HARLEQUIN DUCK** (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) – Several wary pairs in the swiftly flowing rivers along the Teller road, northwest of Nome.
- SURF SCOTER** (*Melanitta perspicillata*) – A female flew past while we motored slowly back to Seward in our crippled little boat in the Kenai Fjords.
- BLACK SCOTER** (*Melanitta americana*) – A pair floated on one of the bigger ponds toward the end of our drive up the Kougak road.
- LONG-TAILED DUCK** (*Clangula hyemalis*) – Regular around Nome, but even more common around Barrow, where we had dozens and dozens floating in tundra puddles, snoozing on ice floes or winging rapidly across the horizon.
- BARROW'S GOLDENEYE** (*Bucephala islandica*) – A drake and a couple of hens floated along the shoreline on the back edge of Jerome Lake, seen as we drove south toward Seward.
- COMMON MERGANSER** (*Mergus merganser*) – A hen with a mob of strikingly patterned youngsters on the pond across from our Seward hotel were particularly photogenic. We saw others around Nome, including a flyby group of eleven drakes before breakfast one morning. [N]
- RED-BREASTED MERGANSER** (*Mergus serrator*) – Regular around Nome, including a few pairs floating in the sea outside our breakfast restaurant and others in the various fast-flowing rivers in the area.

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

- WILLOW PTARMIGAN** (*Lagopus lagopus*) – A trio cavorting on the tundra just off the road as we approached the Nome end of the Kougak road were seen nicely by those in Doug's vehicle. Unfortunately, backing the first van up to see them led to some complications!
- ROCK PTARMIGAN** (*Lagopus muta*) – One hiding in a bush near the trail we climbed while searching for the Bristle-thighed Curlew showed just how effective their camouflage is; though it was only yards away, it proved surprisingly tough to spot!

#### Gaviidae (Loons)

- RED-THROATED LOON** (*Gavia stellata*) – Super views of many on the little ponds around Nome, with somewhat fewer around Barrow.
- ARCTIC LOON** (*Gavia arctica*) – A pair preening on the water just offshore along Nome's Council road proved cooperative. We had another, slightly further along and a bit further out, that showed well the distinctive white marks along the waterline that help (along with a longer, stouter beak and a more uniformly gray head) to distinguish this species from the next.
- PACIFIC LOON** (*Gavia pacifica*) – Widespread throughout the tour route, missing only from Denali. We had especially nice studies of their rounder heads, frosty gray napes and short, uptilted beaks east of Nome -- including two in nearly side-by-side comparison with one of our Arctic Loons.
- COMMON LOON** (*Gavia immer*) – Scattered individuals, including one on Summit Lake en route to Seward, and a pair on Tern Lake, seen by some while Doug and I made our picnic lunch.

#### Podicipedidae (Grebes)

- RED-NECKED GREBE** (*Podiceps grisegena*) – Particularly common at Westchester Lagoon, with a dozen or more floating on the main pond and one snoozing on a nest on the little island near the parking lot. [N]

#### Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

**DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Scores dotted the waters of Resurrection Bay or flew past our boat on the Kenai Fjords boat trip.

**PELAGIC CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*) – Equally common around Seward, including good numbers standing on the rocky islets where we found our Steller's Sea Lions. This skinny-necked species has much more subdued facial skin than the previous species -- none of that flashy orange lores and gular pouch here!

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

**NORTHERN HARRIER** (*Circus cyaneus*) – A pair hunted low over the hillsides along the Kougarak road, occasionally almost disappearing into the vegetation. The female dropped to the ground at one point, but we couldn't tell if she had caught something or was visiting their nest.

**SHARP-SHINNED HAWK** (*Accipiter striatus*) – An adult dropped in to a dead tree just across the highway from Lower Summit Lake (where we stopped on our way down to Seward), allowing us to study it in the scopes.

**BALD EAGLE** (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – Very common around both Anchorage and Seward, with good scope views of two fluffy chicks with their parents on a huge stick nest overlooking Westchester Lagoon. [N]

**RED-TAILED HAWK (HARLAN'S)** (*Buteo jamaicensis harlani*) – One soaring over Westchester Lagoon looked especially dark against the clouds.

**ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK** (*Buteo lagopus*) – A few of the group spotted one hunting low over the hillside along the Kougarak road. Unfortunately, it was shortly before we found the harriers, which made refinding it considerably more complicated!

Gruidae (Cranes)

**SANDHILL CRANE** (*Grus canadensis*) – Dozens dotted the tundra along the Council road. Most were quite heavily stained with ferrous mud and blended quite nicely with the bronze-brown vegetation.

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

**BLACK OYSTERCATCHER** (*Haematopus bachmani*) – A pair rested on boulders high above the waterline on one of the islets in the Chiswells, proving a bit challenging to find as we drifted past. It's a good thing they have bright pink legs and a bright orange bill!

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

**BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER** (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – Some great spotting by Doug netted us somewhat distant views of one pattering around beside a tundra pond along the New Dump road in Barrow. The very whitish back of this species quickly separates it from the aptly named golden-plovers.

**AMERICAN GOLDEN-PLOVER** (*Pluvialis dominica*) – Several on some of the higher hills around Nome, including a pair that kept us entertained as we wandered back and forth on the hill across from Coffee Dome, looking for Bristle-thighed Curlews. We saw others along the Teller road northwest of Nome, and the Gaswell road near Barrow.

**PACIFIC GOLDEN-PLOVER** (*Pluvialis fulva*) – A few in the coastal wetlands around Nome. This species shows considerable more white on the flanks and undertail coverts than does the previous species.

**SEMPALMATED PLOVER** (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – One snoozed on a scrape nest at the edge of the Turnagain Arm mudflats at Westchester Lagoon, and we saw others in the back bays around Nome, and on tundra ponds in Barrow.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

**SPOTTED SANDPIPER** (*Actitis macularius*) – One beside Tern Lake after our picnic lunch there.

**WANDERING TATTLER** (*Tringa incana*) – One picked its way along a stony gravel bar in one of the rivers along the Teller road northwest of Nome, showing well its striped undersides.

**GREATER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – We heard one calling (and calling) near the edge of Tern Lake, but never spotted the bird. [\*]

**LESSER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa flavipes*) – A couple poked the earth around some of the little puddles on the mudflats off Westchester Lagoon.

**WHIMBREL (AMERICAN)** (*Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*) – We saw a handful of these big shorebirds while roaming the hilltops looking for Bristle-thighed Curlews.

**HUDSONIAN GODWIT** (*Limosa haemastica*) – A dozen or so snoozed on the little island in Westchester Lagoon.

**BAR-TAILED GODWIT** (*Limosa lapponica*) – Our best views came at one of the stony rivers along the Teller road northwest of Nome, where we found a couple mooching along the edge of a gravel bar.

**BLACK TURNSTONE** (*Arenaria melanocephala*) – Those in Doug's van spotted one along the edge of the back bay near the hunt camp on the Council road east of Nome; unfortunately, it flew off before the rest of us made it back to see it.

**DUNLIN** (*Calidris alpina*) – A few among the peeps along Gaswell Road in Barrow.

**BAIRD'S SANDPIPER** (*Calidris bairdii*) – Our best views came near the start of Cake-eater road, where a displaying bird hovered right over our heads. We saw others on our trip to Point Barrow.

**LEAST SANDPIPER** (*Calidris minutilla*) – A few poked along the muddy edges of the Nome River, seen as we worked our way north along the Kougarak road.

**PECTORAL SANDPIPER** (*Calidris melanotos*) – Abundant in Barrow, with scores standing on little mounds, or performing their booming, straight line flight displays over the tundra. For those who've only seen Pectoral Sandpipers in the winter, Barrow is a revelation!

**SEMPALMATED SANDPIPER** (*Calidris pusilla*) – Quite common around Nome and Barrow, including many in hovering display flights over the short tundra east of Nome. This was easily the most common of the tour's peeps.

**WESTERN SANDPIPER** (*Calidris mauri*) – Small numbers each day around Nome, with especially nice views of several, showing well their distinctive rusty scapulars, near the Nome River mouth.

**SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER** (*Limnodromus griseus*) – Two among the sleeping godwits at Westchester Lagoon. Anchorage is typically as far north as we see this species.

**LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER** (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – Surprisingly few this year on the tundra around Barrow. Fortunately, Kathy C spotted us a handsome pair foraging near the road.

**WILSON'S SNIBE** (*Gallinago delicata*) – One on a telephone wire near the start of the Kougarak road gave us a nice view. We saw others along the Teller road northwest of Nome and on Nash road outside Seward, and heard many more in their winnowing display flights various places.

**RED-NECKED PHALAROPE** (*Phalaropus lobatus*) – Particularly common in Barrow, where good numbers picked at the surface of ponds, or chased each other around in grassy puddles, or flashed past in little packs -- typically a gang of females tangling over a single male. We saw others daily around Nome.



**RED PHALAROPE** (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) – Daily around Barrow, where dozens spun in the shallow tundra puddles or flew past in a flurry of red and gray and white.

*Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)*

**POMARINE JAEGER** (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) – Fairly common around Barrow, with dozens seen nicely in flight; the spoon-shaped tail feathers of the breeding adults are distinctive.

**PARASITIC JAEGER** (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) – Regular along the coast in Nome and Barrow, including some dark morph birds hunting over the back bays along the Council road and a handful snoozing on nests in a loose colony on the tundra there. [N]

**LONG-TAILED JAEGER** (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) – Common around Nome, including dozens dipping and rising over the tundra along the Council and Teller roads. This is the smallest and most ternlike of the jaegers.

*Alcidae (Auks, Murres, and Puffins)*

**COMMON MURRE** (*Uria aalge*) – Abundant on the waters of Resurrection Bay and on the steep cliffs of some of the islets in the Chiswells. This was probably the most common alcid on our Kenai Fjords boat trip.

**THICK-BILLED MURRE** (*Uria lomvia*) – A handful among the far more common Common Murres (aptly named here) on one of the islets in the Chiswells. Their darker backs and the white slash on the cutting edges of their beaks helped to separate them.

**BLACK GUILLEMOT** (*Cepphus grylle*) – Our first were a rather distant pair floating on the ocean visible from the Mount Barrow overlook. Fortunately, we found a MUCH closer bird among the Long-tailed Ducks on one of the ponds near the end of our Point Barrow trip.

**PIGEON GUILLEMOT** (*Cepphus columba*) – A few of the group had one or two in the Seward harbor the afternoon we arrived in town there, and we all spotted scattered birds on the water during our Kenai Fjords boat trip -- including several bobbing among the ice cubes near the Aialik glacier.

**MARbled MURRELET** (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*) – Some from the boat on our Kenai Fjords boat trip, but our best views came the following day, when we drove down the dirt road toward Lowell Point -- we found two sitting on the surface between dives, right near the edge of the road.

**KITTLITZ'S MURRELET** (*Brachyramphus brevirostris*) – Good numbers of this pale little murrelet (mostly in flight) near the bottom of several scree slopes on our approach into the Aialik glacier. This species is honey-colored rather than the dark chocolate color of the previous species.

**ANCIENT MURRELET** (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*) – A couple of somewhat distant birds on the water near the start of the Aialik Bay were still distinguishable, thanks to their gray backs, black heads and pale beaks. They're named for their grizzled white display plumes, which look like grayish hair on the sides of their heads.

**PARAKEET AUKLET** (*Aethia psittacula*) – A little gang of them retreated in front of our boat near the Chiswell Islands, showing their small orange bills every time they surfaced.

**RHINOCEROS AUKLET** (*Cerorhinca monocerata*) – Quite common in Aialik bay this year, with dozens seen in whirring flight across our bow or along our flanks and others seen floating on the water's surface in small rafts.

**HORNED PUFFIN** (*Fratercula corniculata*) – Hundreds on our Kenai Fjords boat tour -- floating in the water or whizzing past over the boat en route to their breeding islands in the Chiswells.

**TUFTED PUFFIN** (*Fratercula cirrhata*) – Like the previous species, these were abundant on our Kenai Fjords boat tour, with huge rafts of them floating on the tossing seas and hundreds of others flying in every direction around the aptly named Beehive islands.

*Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)*

**BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE** (*Rissa tridactyla*) – Common around Nome and Seward, less so in Barrow; we saw thousands on the breeding seabird cliffs of the Chiswell Islands. [N]

**SABINE'S GULL** (*Xema sabini*) – Some good spotting by Doug netted us one bathing with the big gulls at the Nome River mouth our first afternoon there. We saw others around Barrow, where we also found a trio of dead birds in a snowbank, inexplicably shot by locals for target practice.

**BONAPARTE'S GULL** (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*) – Common at Westchester Lagoon, where we saw a mix of adults and immatures on the mudflats edging Turnagain Arm.

**MEW GULL (AMERICAN)** (*Larus canus brachyrhynchus*) – Common throughout much of the tour, including a few dozen adults (and some fluffy small chicks) on the island in the middle of Westchester Lagoon. They were certainly committed in their attempts to keep the Bald Eagles away from their nests! [N]

**HERRING GULL (AMERICAN)** (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*) – Not particularly common, though we did see at least one adult bird at Westchester Lagoon that appeared to be a purebred (rather than the far more common "Anchorage Gull" -- a hybrid between this species and Glaucous-winged Gull).

**HERRING GULL (VEGA)** (*Larus argentatus vegae*) – One near the Nome River mouth, and a second on the ice pack at Barrow.

**GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL** (*Larus glaucescens*) – Abundant around Seward, with lots of grubby-looking grayish youngsters among the cleaner adults.

**GLAUCOUS GULL** (*Larus hyperboreus*) – Very common around Nome and Barrow, including plenty of snowy-white youngsters.

**ALEUTIAN TERN** (*Onychoprion aleuticus*) – Best seen at the Nome River mouth, where a handful rested on a little island in the middle of the delta; we saw others in flight over the ocean along the Council road. This species has a call rather like that of the House Sparrow.

**ARCTIC TERN** (*Sterna paradisaea*) – Abundant across much of our tour route. The very short legs of this species were particularly apparent at Westchester Lagoon, where several birds perched on nearby posts and a couple of adorably fuzzy youngsters trundled around on the island. [N]

*Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)*

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) – Regular around Anchorage and Seward. [I]

*Strigidae (Owls)*

**SNOWY OWL** (*Bubo scandiacus*) – Our first was a bird sitting on a hummock in the cemetery in the middle of Barrow, seen as we drove from the airport to our hotel. Our best views, though, came along Cake-eater Road, where we spotted an appropriately snowy white male atop a telephone pole on several days.

*Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)*

**RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD** (*Selasphorus rufus*) – At least one penny-bright male made repeated visits to hummingbird feeders at a home we visited outside Seward, occasionally sitting for minutes at a time in a birch tree beside the house.

*Picidae (Woodpeckers)*

**DOWNY WOODPECKER** (*Picoides pubescens*) – At least three visited the feeders of a house near Seward, often posing conveniently close to the next species.

**HAIRY WOODPECKER** (*Picoides villosus*) – A couple flashed in and out of a yard on the outskirts of Seward, clinging to the trunk of a small birch tree while waiting their turn for the suet feeders.

**AMERICAN THREE-TOED WOODPECKER** (*Picoides dorsalis*) – A friend of Doug's told us about a nesthole in Hillside Park, and (after a bit of a hike) we found it -- complete with a yammering little male demanding food from his parents. Eventually, mom went in and sat on him (though we could still hear his muffled calls from within), giving a silent little female her chance at the entrance. [N]

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

**GYRFALCON** (*Falco rusticolus*) – One preened on a rocky cliff along the Kougarok road -- super spotting Kathy C!

**PEREGRINE FALCON** (*Falco peregrinus*) – One sat on an ice ridge just offshore of the restaurant in Barrow, seen by some of the group as we ate lunch one afternoon.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

**ALDER FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax alnorum*) – We heard birds calling in several places (including at Kinkaid Park our last afternoon), but never actually spotted one. [\*]

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

**GRAY JAY** (*Perisoreus canadensis*) – A noisy family group boiled through some spruce trees near the parking lot at Hillside Park, and we had others checking out our picnic site at Tern Lake.

**STELLER'S JAY** (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) – One perched atop a spruce tree along Nash Road on our final morning around Seward, looking dark against the cloudy sky.

**BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE** (*Pica hudsonia*) – Common around Seward and Anchorage, including numbers foraging along the roadside on our drive south along Turnagain Arm.

**NORTHWESTERN CROW** (*Corvus caurinus*) – Regular around Seward, with especially nice views of a couple checking out a picnic table at Lowell Point.

**COMMON RAVEN** (*Corvus corax*) – Regular throughout, seen nearly every day of the tour.

Alaudidae (Larks)

**HORNED LARK** (*Eremophila alpestris*) – A few trotted around in the short tundra atop a ridge northeast of the Teller road, occasionally sitting up on a rock for a good look around.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

**TREE SWALLOW** (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – The most common and widespread of the tour's swallows, seen regularly around Nome, Anchorage and Seward -- including a pair checking out a nestbox on the side of one of the houses in the hunt camp along the Council road, and a small number zooming low over Benny Benson park across from our Seward hotel.

**VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW** (*Tachycineta thalassina*) – Our best looks came at Westchester Lagoon, where small numbers flashed back and forth over the water, showing their distinctively white faces and their apparent white "rump patch". We saw others on some of the ponds we passed between Anchorage and Seward.

**BANK SWALLOW** (*Riparia riparia*) – Small numbers mingled with the more common Tree and Violet-green swallows over Westchester Lagoon. This is the smallest and most compact of the tour's swallows.

**BARN SWALLOW** (*Hirundo rustica*) – One, showing the distinctively rusty belly of a North American bird, flew back and forth just beyond the fence around the maintenance buildings at Barrow's new dump -- well out of the normal range of this species.

**CLIFF SWALLOW** (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) – Especially nice views of the birds nesting under one of the big bridges along the Teller road northwest of Nome. [N]

Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)

**BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE** (*Poecile atricapillus*) – Scattered birds around Anchorage, including a pair with begging young in tow at Kincaid Park our last afternoon. [N]

**CHESTNUT-BACKED CHICKADEE** (*Poecile rufescens*) – Best seen at the feeders on Salmon Creek road near Seward, where a couple of birds made flashing raids from the taller trees nearby. We saw another along Rabbit Run on our way back to Anchorage.

**BOREAL CHICKADEE** (*Poecile hudsonicus*) – A little family group swirled through the spruces near where we parked in Hillside Park, seen at the start of our hike into the American Three-toed Woodpecker nest.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

**RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH** (*Sitta canadensis*) – One visited the suet cake several times, at the log cabin with all the feeders near Seward, and we heard another "honking" in the woods near Bear Lake.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

**PACIFIC WREN (SOUTHERN)** (*Troglodytes pacificus pacificus*) – One sang (and sang and sang) from the top of a big Sitka spruce just across the stream from the salmon counting station at Bear Lake.

Cinclidae (Dippers)

**AMERICAN DIPPER** (*Cinclus mexicanus*) – An adult stood for long minutes atop the salmon counting weir near Bear Lake, flashing its white eyelids. Eventually it went back to hunting, apparently provisioning a nearby mossy nest. [N]

Regulidae (Kinglets)

**GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET** (*Regulus satrapa*) – Some of the group spotted a pair flicking through a big spruce beside the road we walked near Bear Lake -- while the rest of the group were among the trees looking for Spruce Grouse!

**RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET** (*Regulus calendula*) – Regular between Denali and Seward, including a fired-up bird showing its red crown patch on Rabbit Run Road outside Seward.

Phylloscopidae (Leaf-Warblers)

**ARCTIC WARBLER** (*Phylloscopus borealis*) – We had fine views of many singing along the Kougarok and Teller roads outside Nome. This species migrates to Asia for the winter.

*Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)*

**BLUETHROAT** (*Luscinia svecica*) – Wow! A male alternated between singing from bush tops and performing his bouncing display flights for more than 20 minutes along the Kougarok road (we finally drove away) and others did the same along the Teller road the following day.

**NORTHERN WHEATEAR** (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) – A male flicked from stone to stone in the ribble field near the Wooley Lagoon turnoff northwest of Nome, and a trio of them chased each other around along the river there, flashing their namesake white rumps and tails. "Wheatear" is reputedly a corruption of the old Saxon words for "white ass".

*Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)*

**GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH** (*Catharus minimus*) – Very common around Nome, with birds sitting up singing virtually everywhere we stopped along the Kougarok road.

**SWAINSON'S THRUSH** (*Catharus ustulatus*) – We heard the complex, rising song of this species in Hillside Park, but had to wait until we got to Kincaid Park on our last afternoon to actually see one. Then we found several, including a couple in the birches near where we turned around on our walk.

**HERMIT THRUSH** (*Catharus guttatus*) – The mellow fluting song was a regular part of the tour soundtrack around Seward (including a few instances where we heard them singing on the islets we passed in the Chiswells), but we never found one to look at. [\*]

**AMERICAN ROBIN** (*Turdus migratorius*) – Regular through much of the tour, though absent completely from Barrow.

**VARIED THRUSH** (*Ixoreus naevius*) – A male made a stop at the rainy feeding station we visited en route to Seward, and we found others in the subdivisions we walked through on our way back to Anchorage. The burry whistles of this species featured in the tour soundtrack too.

*Sturnidae (Starlings)*

**EUROPEAN STARLING** (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – A handful at Westchester Lagoon; this species used to make the Alaska rarities hotline, and are still relatively uncommon. [I]

*Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)*

**EASTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL** (*Motacilla tschutschensis*) – Two flashed around the tops of the little willows near the start of the Kougarok road one afternoon, and we saw others further up the same road the following day. This species was recently split from the Yellow Wagtail.

**AMERICAN PIPIT** (*Anthus rubescens*) – We heard a few calling along the Kougarok road, and connected with one striding around in the short tundra around the Wooley Lagoon turnoff.

*Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings)*

**LAPLAND LONGSPUR** (*Calcarius lapponicus*) – Common around Nome and Barrow, with dozens of males seen gliding towards earth in their parachuting display flights. Our best views probably came along the Council road east of Nome, where we had several pairs rummaging along the road edge.

**SNOW BUNTING** (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) – A few along the Teller road, northwest of Nome, but our best looks came around Barrow, where they were easily the most common passerine. The ones provisioning the nest box on the building beside our hotel were cooperative, as were the fluffy gray and white youngsters we found behind Bunna's house one evening.

*Parulidae (New World Warblers)*

**NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH** (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) – Quite common in the willow scrub along the Kougarok and Teller roads near Nome, with another heard singing in Benny Benson park near our hotel in Seward.

**ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER** (*Oreothlypis celata*) – Abundant around Anchorage, Nome and Seward, with far more heard than seen. We had particularly nice views of several along the Kougarok road while we searched for our first Arctic Warblers there.

**YELLOW WARBLER** (*Setophaga petechia*) – Common throughout, including a couple of birds chasing each other through the scrubby brush at the edge of Lower Summit Lake en route to Seward (seen while we tried to get better looks at our Lincoln's Sparrow).

**BLACKPOLL WARBLER** (*Setophaga striata*) – We heard them calling from the stunted willows around Nome -- and a few folks heard another at Tern Lake while Doug and I made lunch. Quite surprisingly, we never actually SAW one. [\*]

**YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (MYRTLE)** (*Setophaga coronata coronata*) – Scattered individuals at Hillside Park, Benny Benson Park and Kincaid Park. The subspecies typically found in Alaska is the "Myrtle" Warbler.

**TOWNSEND'S WARBLER** (*Setophaga townsendi*) – Fairly common around Seward, where they seem to prefer the large Sitka spruce trees. Our best views came in the Rabbit Run subdivision, where we found a male singing his heart out from a treetop.

**WILSON'S WARBLER** (*Cardellina pusilla*) – Common along the Kougarok road, with others chasing through the willows edging Lower Summit Lake.

*Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)*

**AMERICAN TREE SPARROW** (*Spizella arborea*) – A few singing along the Kougarok and Teller roads around Nome.

**SAVANNAH SPARROW** (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – Widespread and relatively common, including several singing from driftwood along the Council road east of Nome.

**FOX SPARROW (SOOTY)** (*Passerella iliaca sinuosa*) – One -- looking appropriately dark -- in the birch tree at the corner of the house with the feeding station that we visited outside Seward was cooperative despite the rain.

**FOX SPARROW (RED)** (*Passerella iliaca zaboria*) – Daily around Nome, including many perched up and singing in the willows along the Kougarok road.

**SONG SPARROW** (*Melospiza melodia*) – One singing from a dead spruce in Benny Benson park in Seward garnered some attention. The subspecies found on the peninsula -- kenaiensis -- is quite dark.

**LINCOLN'S SPARROW** (*Melospiza lincolni*) – It took some patience, but we eventually all got good looks at one Doug spotted singing in a birch at the edge of Summit Lake. We had others on Nash Road and at Kincaid Park.

**WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (GAMBEL'S)** (*Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*) – Common around Nome and Seward, but our best views may have come on the grounds of the Millenium Hotel our final evening, when we found a gang of them foraging in the birches near the road. The subspecies in Alaska (*gambelii*) has pale lores, with a dark eyeline that extends only behind the eye.

**GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROW** (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*) – Very common around Nome, with several seen nicely as they sat up singing along the Kougarak road. We had others at Lower Summit Lake and Benny Benson Park.

**DARK-EYED JUNCO (SLATE-COLORED)** (*Junco hyemalis hyemalis*) – A few sang from spruce tops in Hillside Park, and others foraged along the paths at Kincaid Park, both in Anchorage. We saw others around Seward.

#### *Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)*

**RUSTY BLACKBIRD** (*Euphagus carolinus*) – A few sat up in alder trees or chased each other through the taller vegetation along the river near the end of the Kougarak road. This species is in precipitous decline all across its range.

#### *Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)*

**PINE GROSBEAK** (*Pinicola enucleator*) – Fabulous views of two males and a trio of females in a yard along Salmon Lake Road near Seward. The birds feeding on the edge of the driveway right beside our vans were particularly entertaining.

**WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL** (*Loxia leucoptera*) – Some of the group heard one calling near our Seward hotel one morning, while waiting for the group to gather. [\*]

**COMMON REDPOLL** (*Acanthis flammea*) – Regular throughout, including some seen relatively soon after the following species, which allowed us to compare them. This species is much darker overall, with faint brown streaking across the pale rump.

**HOARY REDPOLL** (*Acanthis hornemanni*) – Quite common in Barrow, including some gritting along the roadside near the start of Cake-eater Road. This species is a bit larger and much paler than the previous, with an unstreaked white rump.

**PINE SISKIN** (*Spinus pinus*) – Those feeding on the yellow nut bags at the house we visited on Salmon Lake road (outside Seward) gave us our best views.

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## MAMMALS

**SNOWSHOE HARE** (*Lepus americanus*) – One bounced across the road in front of the first van as we drove toward Hillside Park.

**ARCTIC GROUND SQUIRREL** (*Spermophilus parryii*) – Daily around Nome, generally scurrying along the roadsides.

**RED SQUIRREL** (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) – A few in the neighborhoods around Seward, including one chirring from the spruce trees near the parking lot at Benny Benson park.

**ORCA** (*Orcinus orca*) – A pod scattered across the mouth of the Aialik bay, their tall fins betraying their locations. At least a few were youngsters with their mothers. Local Orcas are fish eaters; transients eat mammals (including those adorable Sea Otters).

**DALL'S PORPOISE** (*Phocoenoides dalli*) – A entertaining pod spent several minutes riding our bow wave as we steamed up the Aialik Bay, and we saw the "rooster tail" splashes of several others crossing our bow as we headed back toward Seward.

**GRAY WHALE** (*Eschrichtius robustus*) – A cow and calf just offshore of the Polar Den cafe in Nome one morning gave us something to watch as we waited for our breakfast.

**FIN WHALE** (*Balaenoptera physalus*) – We saw the towering blow, long sleek black backs and small, curved dorsal fins of several on our Kenai Fjords boat trip.

**HUMPBACK WHALE** (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) – A handful on our Kenai Fjords boat trip, including one feeding near the start of the Aialik Bay. The blunt bump of a dorsal fin on this species is diagnostic.

**BOWHEAD WHALE** (*Balaena mysticetus*) – Smooth finless backs and bushy blows betrayed the presence of several of these big whales off the coast by Mount Barrow.

**RED FOX** (*Vulpes vulpes*) – Many saw one along the Teller road.

**SEA OTTER** (*Enhydra lutris*) – A handful floated on the surface of Resurrection and Aialik bays, including one with a very small baby resting on its chest.

**STELLER'S SEA LION** (*Eumetopias jubatus*) – Scores -- including a few huge males sprawled among their harems -- on several rocky islets in the Chiswells. This species is in steep decline across its range.

**HARBOR SEAL** (*Phoca vitulina*) – A few bobbed offshore along the Council road east of Nome, but our best sightings came on the Kenai Fjords boat trip, where we saw dozens and dozens hauled out on rocky shores, islets and glacier calvings.

**SPOTTED SEAL** (*Phoca largha*) – First we saw two, then five, then dozens hauled out on the pack ice off the coast road at Barrow. They looked rather like overstuffed sausages -- at least until they lifted their heads and looked around!

**MOOSE** (*Alces alces*) – We saw several of these ungainly looking animals along the Kougarak road, typically pushing their way through the short willows (and sometimes appearing completely swallowed up by them). Most were shedding heavily.

**MOUNTAIN GOAT** (*Oreamnos americanus*) – Seen daily on the Seward leg of the trip, including a female with a small kid on a precariously steep section of cliff along the edge of Resurrection Bay.

**MUSKOX** (*Ovibos moschatus*) – A big herd dozed along the roadside just outside of Nome, allowing great views. They were shedding copious amounts of fur which several locals (and Cher) were collecting; the soft underfur can garner a significant number of dollars per pound!

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## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

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**Totals for the tour: 153 bird taxa and 17 mammal taxa**