

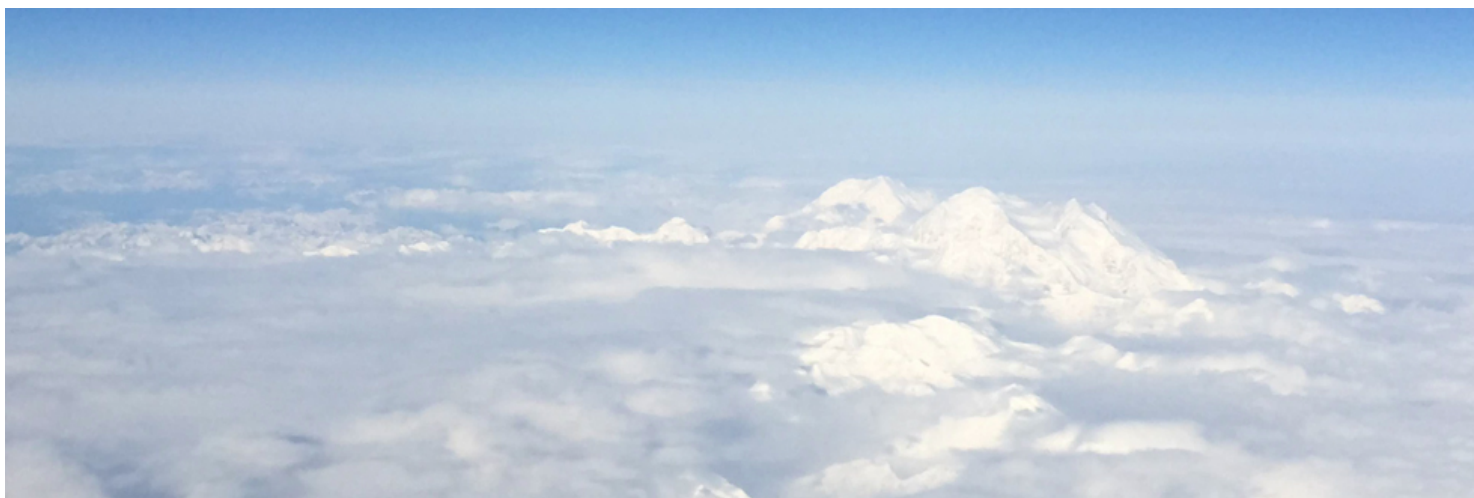
Field Guides Tour Report

ALASKA I - PART TWO (NOME, SEWARD & BARROW) 2015

Jun 5, 2015 to Jun 15, 2015

Chris Benesh & Tom Johnson

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



Our only good views of Denali on this half of the tour came from the air as we passed over the famous mountain on our way to the North Slope. Photo by guide Tom Johnson.

Our Nome, Seward, and Barrow adventures ran very smoothly this year, with plenty of adventure, scenery, birds, and mammals along the way. Though it rained during part of every day, we DID experience some excellent weather, and the atmospheric, er... variety helped underscore the vast beauty that is the essence of Alaska.

Our trip started in Anchorage, where some birding helped us find a flock of Hudsonian Godwits at Westchester Lagoon before we packed it in for the evening.

The next morning, we boarded our plane for Nome. After some delays in getting moved in to our hotels and finding our rental vehicles (part of the adventure), we headed out of town, where our luck improved dramatically and we were immediately surrounded by birds: scores of all three species of jaegers chasing legions of kittiwakes and other gulls along the beach, flocks of migrant ducks, geese, and shorebirds, and even an adult Gyrfalcon snuggling a young chick in a nest. We didn't even pop a flat tire - until we got back to town, that is.

After reconfiguring our transportation (thanks for your help, Kris!), an early morning start out the Kougarok Rd. led us to the land of Willow Ptarmigan and Bluethroats, those lovely Old World gems. After pauses to enjoy a Rusty Blackbird, flocks of Greater White-fronted Geese, and other wonderful arctic sights, we arrived near Coffee Dome, the arena for our search for Bristle-thighed Curlews. After a lengthy trudge across the tundra, we found breeding pairs of Whimbrel and our primary quarry, the Bristle-thighs. These range-restricted shorebirds called and paraded around in front of us, and we had a wonderful time watching them before we headed back down the road to Nome, pausing en route to scope another Gyrfalcon nest!

Our second full day involved an exploration of the Teller Rd., where we surveyed some rocky, upland tundra and found Rock Ptarmigan, Northern Wheatear, and a few species of stone-loving shorebirds. On the return trip, we had some great looks at bizarre Muskox near town. We left enough time for an afternoon jaunt out along the Council Rd., and we were in for a few wonderful surprises. In addition to some great views of Eastern Yellow Wagtail, we lucked into an immature Ivory Gull and also saw two Emperor Geese feeding on an island in Safety Sound - WOW! The jaeger show along the beach was truly remarkable, with all three species showing off nicely for us. This was a very rare event for Nome in spring, and we made sure to admire these pirates closely. Our return flight to Anchorage gave us time for dinner and a good night of sleep.

The Seward leg of our journey began with Varied Thrush in Anchorage and some lovely White-winged Crossbills and Pine Grosbeaks just outside of Seward - oh, and plenty of rain. We took a break in the afternoon to dry out and prepare for the next day's boat trip.

After a nice opportunity to sleep in, we boarded a boat to venture into Kenai Fjords National Park. In addition to the awesome sight and thundering rumble of the Northwestern Glacier, we found Fin and Humpback Whales (among other marine mammals), an astonishing 10 species of alcids (including Parakeet Auklet, Ancient Murrelet, and Kittlitz's Murrelet), Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel, and Sooty and Short-tailed Shearwaters.

Our return drive to Anchorage went smoothly, interrupted only by American Dipper, Rufous Hummingbird, Trumpeter Swan, Common Loon, and Barrow's Goldeneye - good interruptions for sure.

Fortunately, the Anchorage to Barrow flight involved a stop in Deadhorse/ Prudhoe Bay, so the flight path took us right past Denali as it poked through

the clouds. Upon arriving in Barrow and after checking into our hotel, we headed out into the tundra for an afternoon of birding none of us will ever forget. Spectacled, Steller's, and King Eiders, a flyover Yellow-billed Loon, courting Red-necked Stints, tons of breeding plumaged Red and Red-necked Phalaropes, a Snowy Owl, Sabine's Gull, and, oh yes - TWO ADULT ROSS'S GULLS that flew right past us in their pink-bodied, ring-necked splendor. Wow!

Though we found all of our Barrow targets on the first afternoon, the second day was perfect for savoring the shorebirds in their breeding plumage, enjoying more eiders and gulls, and we even stumbled upon a migrant Arctic Warbler, perhaps the northernmost ever for North America, while scoping Black Guillemots and a Semipalmated Plover out on Point Barrow. This was all the more sweet as we had missed this late spring migrant in Nome - they simply hadn't shown up yet.

Before leaving Barrow, we had time to study a shorebird that had caught Chris's eye - a super rare Common Ringed Plover, perhaps from Eurasia or maybe one of the very few that breed in North America. After a delay due to fog, our flight arrived back in Anchorage with enough time to enjoy a lovely final dinner near the airport. Barb and Ann kindly gave a lovely reading of a poem that they composed to document our trip, which was a perfect way to end our adventure. With their permission, I've reproduced it at the end of the trip list.

Thanks to everyone for making this adventure so special. I'm still pinching myself over the luck of seeing both Ivory and Ross's Gulls on a June tour in Alaska, in addition to everything else that we discovered along the way. Chris and I had a great time, appreciated your flexibility, and look forward to traveling with you again in the future.

Cheers, and good birding!

-- Tom Johnson

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*) – We found these tundra-nesting geese in Nome and Barrow.

EMPEROR GOOSE (*Chen canagica*) – We were lucky to see two of these local and beautiful geese feeding along Safety Sound near Nome.

BRANT (BLACK) (*Branta bernicla nigricans*) – We found these dark Brant during each of the three phases of this tour. Flocks were migrating along the coast in Nome; two flocks passed overhead during our boat trip out of Seward; and singles dotted the tundra in Barrow.

CAKCLING GOOSE (*Branta hutchinsii*) – These were the small, white-cheeked geese that we observed in Nome. The Cackling/ Canada Goose complex is a messy group, taxonomically; these were likely Taverner's Cackling Geese, though I won't bet the rent that the final word has been written on white-cheeked goose subspecies in Alaska.

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) – The white-cheeked geese that we saw in the greater Anchorage area were Canadas. [N]

TRUMPETER SWAN (*Cygnus buccinator*) – One was at the back of Tern Lake; we had nice scope views. [N]

TUNDRA SWAN (WHISTLING) (*Cygnus columbianus columbianus*) – Lots were in Nome (we estimated 100 along the Council Rd.), and we also saw a few in Barrow.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*) – Several were along the Coastal Trail in Anchorage; a pair was seen daily in Barrow, too.

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*) – Common in Anchorage and Nome. [N]

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Seen in small numbers at widespread freshwater locations. [N]

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*) – Common at many freshwater sites.

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – Common at many sites - hundreds were in Barrow. [N]

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN) (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) – Common at most freshwater locations visited.

CANVASBACK (*Aythya valisineria*) – At least 3 were in a mixed flock of divers at Safety Sound near Nome.

REDHEAD (*Aythya americana*) – Two were in a mixed *Aythya* flock in Safety Sound near Nome.

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*) – We saw a pair in a roadside ditch near Potter Marsh - the light was perfect for a good look at the male's ring, rarely seen in the field.

GREATER SCAUP (*Aythya marila*) – This was the common scaup of the tour.

LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*) – Two were at Westchester Lagoon at the beginning of the tour.

STELLER'S EIDER (*Polysticta stelleri*) – We had lovely views of these stunners in Barrow. Our one-day high count was 6 individuals. Most were in pairs.

SPECTACLED EIDER (*Somateria fischeri*) – This was voted the group's favorite bird of the tour, and with great reason. This threatened species put in some wonderful appearances along the roads outside of Barrow. It felt surreal to watch the single male that was dabbling at close range in the roadside pool.

KING EIDER (*Somateria spectabilis*) – Fairly common in Barrow - a female on a pond in town was the first bird we stopped to look at after leaving the airport. We saw over 25 Kings and Queens on our first afternoon in Barrow.

COMMON EIDER (PACIFIC) (*Somateria mollissima v-nigrum*) – This distinctive subspecies of Common Eider was a regular sight in Nome. Males have an outrageous carrot orange bill.

HARLEQUIN DUCK (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) – We saw small numbers on a few occasions on rivers near Nome.

SURF SCOTER (*Melanitta perspicillata*) – We saw this seaduck at Nome and in Seward, where a flock of 24 was a nice sighting.

WHITE-WINGED SCOTER (NORTH AMERICAN) (*Melanitta fusca deglandi*) – Fairly common offshore at Nome. We scoped these hard in search of males of the Siberian subspecies (species?), but came up empty on that front.

BLACK SCOTER (*Melanitta americana*) – Common in flocks offshore (beyond the gold mining boats) at Nome.

LONG-TAILED DUCK (*Clangula hyemalis*) – While we saw some at Nome, the biggest numbers were at Barrow.

COMMON GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala clangula*) – Four were at the Coastal Trail in Anchorage on our first day.

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala islandica*) – One was at Tern Lake between Anchorage and Seward.

COMMON MERGANSER (*Mergus merganser*) – We saw a few females on the Kenai Peninsula.

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*) – Found small numbers daily in Nome.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

WILLOW PTARMIGAN (*Lagopus lagopus*) – A few posed nicely (even aggressively!) for us on the Kougarok Rd. and Teller Rd. outside of Nome.

ROCK PTARMIGAN (*Lagopus muta*) – A male flew in overhead off the Teller Rd. outside of Nome. Later, we refound him sitting atop a small mound of rocks - King of the Hill!

Gaviidae (Loons)

RED-THROATED LOON (*Gavia stellata*) – Quite common at Nome; fewer sightings at Barrow. [N]

PACIFIC LOON (*Gavia pacifica*) – Common at Nome and Barrow, with a few non-breeders on our Seward boat trip.

COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*) – Two were at Tern Lake, a known breeding site for the species. Not a very common loon on this tour!

YELLOW-BILLED LOON (*Gavia adamsii*) – Two offshore at Nome gave us reasonable scope views. We also had a few close flybys of these monsters at Barrow.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

RED-NECKED GREBE (*Podiceps grisegena*) – Common in the Anchorage area; we saw a few in Nome and also at Tern Lake on the way back from Seward.

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

SOOTY SHEARWATER (*Puffinus griseus*) – Fairly common this year in less protected waters on the Seward boat trip. However, Sooty was outnumbered this time by Short-tailed Shearwater, surprisingly.

SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATER (*Puffinus tenuirostris*) – At least 20 were mixed in with Sooty Shearwaters on our boat trip out of Seward. The short bills and diffusely pale underwings helped us pick them out, though they apparently (and surprisingly) outnumbered Sooty Shearwater this time. Most were in heavy wing molt, but one was very shiny and fresh.

Hydrobatidae (Storm-Petrels)

FORK-TAILED STORM-PETREL (*Oceanodroma furcata*) – One was seen briefly from the bow during the return boat trip out of Seward.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Common around Seward - we had 40 on our boat trip.

RED-FACED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax urile*) – One flew past us during the boat trip out of Seward, giving some on the trip brief views. [N]

PELAGIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*) – Fairly common in the Seward area on the boat trip; we also saw this species regularly in Nome. [N]

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – Great views overhead on the Kougarok Rd.

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*) – One was at Nome.

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – We saw lots of eagles between Anchorage and Seward. [N]

ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK (*Buteo lagopus*) – These large, hovering Buteos were along the Kougarok and Teller Roads outside of Nome.

Gruidae (Cranes)

SANDHILL CRANE (*Grus canadensis*) – A few cranes were around Anchorage, but larger numbers greeted us in the Nome area.

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

BLACK OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus bachmani*) – Two were on a rocky outcropping in Resurrection Bay during our Seward boat trip.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

AMERICAN GOLDEN-PLOVER (*Pluvialis dominica*) – These golden-plovers were in both Nome in Barrow; in Nome, we had to take care to separate them from Pacific Golden-Plovers which breed in the area. One was on a nest near Coffee Dome. [N]

PACIFIC GOLDEN-PLOVER (*Pluvialis fulva*) – These handsome plovers were running around on the tundra at several locations around Nome, including on the Kougarok Rd. and near the Nome River mouth.

COMMON RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius hiaticula*) – Chris Benesh picked this rare Eurasian vagrant out in a pond along Cake Eater Rd. in Barrow - we returned in the morning before our flight and were able to hear the bird call and photograph it nicely, locking down the identification. This individual's bold white "eyebrow", wide black chestband, small bill, and mellow call helped to nail the ID. While the species is regular on Bering Sea islands in western Alaska, it is truly a mega rarity on the North Slope.

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – We saw small numbers of these "American Ringed Plovers" in Nome and Barrow.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*) – Two were feeding along the edge of the Coastal Trail in Anchorage during our search for the vagrant Terek Sandpiper at the beginning of the tour.

WHIMBREL (AMERICAN) (*Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*) – We saw a few in Nome on the Kougarok and Teller Roads. A few were on territory in the same area as the Bristle-thighed Curlews adjacent to Coffee Dome. [N]

BRISTLE-THIGHED CURLEW (*Numenius tahitiensis*) – It took a lot of tromping around the lumpy tundra across from Coffee Dome in the Nome area, but we finally had great looks and got to hear a pair of these rare and range-restricted curlews. Spectacular! [N]

HUDSONIAN GODWIT (*Limosa haemastica*) – Seeing 17 of these fine shorebirds arriving to roost at high tide was a fine prize for an evening vigil near Westchester Lagoon at the beginning of the tour.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa lapponica*) – Rather common around Nome, including 35 on the Council Rd. on our first afternoon/ evening in the area. These are of the baueri subspecies that crosses the Pacific Ocean during fall migration.

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*) – We saw just a few in Nome and Barrow

RED KNOT (*Calidris canutus*) – One was poking around a rocky outcropping off the Teller Road near Nome. We had great comparisons between this bird and a Rock Sandpiper. This is the subspecies *roselaari*.

SURFBIRD (*Calidris virgata*) – A flock of 8 feeding on the beach adjacent to Safety Sound near Nome was a nice surprise.

RED-NECKED STINT (*Calidris ruficollis*) – At least three of these Asian sandpipers were along the Cake Eater Rd. in Barrow. Our first birding outing in Barrow was highlighted by a bright male lifting his wings and calling in an obvious display to a nearby female. Lovely (and rare)!

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*) – We saw good numbers as migrants on mudflats in Nome, and also found them sprinkled across the tundra in Barrow. [N]

ROCK SANDPIPER (*Calidris pilocnemis*) – We saw a breeder in the rocky tundra along the Teller Rd. in the Nome area. This is the subspecies *tschuktschorum*, smaller and darker than the *pilocnemis* birds that some in the group saw during the first part of the tour on St. Paul Island in the Pribilofs.

BAIRD'S SANDPIPER (*Calidris bairdii*) – A few of these long-winged sandpipers paraded around the edges of pools in Barrow. Our maximum daily count was 3.

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*) – A few in Nome were the only ones of the trip.

PECTORAL SANDPIPER (*Calidris melanotos*) – Very common in Barrow, where we got to see their slow-motion display flights, accompanied by that otherworldly hooting song. Max. daily count of 120 in Barrow. Stupendous! [N]

SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER (*Calidris pusilla*) – A few were in Nome, but these peeps were quite common in Barrow. [N]

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*) – Common in Nome; one in Barrow.

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*) – This was the dowitcher with the Hudsonian Godwits in Anchorage on our first evening.

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – We saw these dowitchers in Barrow, where ID is relatively easy as Short-billed Dows don't breed there.

WILSON'S SNIPE (*Gallinago delicata*) – Reasonably common in Nome.

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus lobatus*) – Quite common in Nome and Barrow; we even saw some from our boat trip out of Seward.

RED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) – While we saw one as a migrant in Nome, we were all awed by the abundance of these handsome shorebirds at Barrow. Our max. daily count of 205 was mostly comprised of paired-up birds along roadsides.

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)

POMARINE JAEGER (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) – While we saw good numbers as expected in a good year at Barrow, the show of over 100 at Nome was truly amazing! They were clearly attracted to the huge flocks of kittiwakes and other gulls feeding on a run of small fish near the beach.

PARASITIC JAEGER (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) – We saw good numbers in Nome (max. count of 25) and Barrow (max. count of 15).

LONG-TAILED JAEGER (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) – These beautiful, slim jaegers were amazingly common in Nome during our visit. Our first afternoon on the Council Rd. yielded 110, mostly in one flock walking around on dry tundra near Cape Nome.

Alcidae (Auks, Murres, and Puffins)

COMMON MURRE (*Uria aalge*) – Very common in Resurrection Bay near Seward; a few at Nome as well. [N]

THICK-BILLED MURRE (*Uria lomvia*) – We identified one near Nome, but saw 16 on ledges in nesting colonies in Resurrection Bay near Seward. [N]

BLACK GUILLEMOT (*Cepphus grylle*) – Two were in a small pool on Point Barrow. This is the Arctic-breeding subspecies *mandtii*.

PIGEON GUILLEMOT (*Cepphus columba*) – Ours were all near the harbor in Seward, where we found 6 during the boat trip.

MARbled MURRELET (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*) – About 30 were on the water during our boat trip out of Seward.

KITTLITZ'S MURRELET (*Brachyramphus brevirostris*) – We found 10 of these highly specialized auks during our Resurrection Bay boat trip out of Seward. They were all near glacial moraines in protected bays near Northwestern Glacier, and we identified them by their pale white-golden appearance and stubby bills.

ANCIENT MURRELET (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*) – A few small flocks totalling 12 individuals flushed in front of the boat during our trip out of Seward.

PARAKEET AUKLET (*Aethia psittacula*) – We saw 4 of these chunky auklets on the Seward boat trip.

RHINOCEROS AUKLET (*Cerorhinca monocerata*) – About 65 of these close relatives of the puffins were on the water during our Seward boat trip, mostly in the vicinity of the Northwestern Glacier.

HORNED PUFFIN (*Fratercula corniculata*) – Very common on the Seward boat trip. [N]

TUFTED PUFFIN (*Fratercula cirrhata*) – Slightly more common than Horned Puffin on our Seward boat trip. [N]

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE (*Rissa tridactyla*) – Common in Nome and Seward. In Nome, 2000+ of these gulls were feeding on a run of small fish in against the beach, mostly near Cape Nome and Safety Sound. [N]

IVORY GULL (*Pagophila eburnea*) – One of the most unexpected finds of the tour was the immature Ivory Gull that we found on the beach near Safety Sound. It was initially spotted sitting with kittiwakes before it flew up and headed away from us down the beach.

SABINE'S GULL (*Xema sabini*) – Quite a few were mixed in with the gull flocks in Nome (max. count 35); we also had some close views in Barrow.

BONAPARTE'S GULL (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*) – A flock of 50 was near the outflow of Chester Creek in Anchorage; we also saw a few during our Seward boat trip.

ROSS'S GULL (*Rhodostethia rosea*) – Well this was a surprise! As we were about to drive away from a goose-watching stop on the Cake Eater Rd., two small gulls with, wait - PINK! bodies flew toward us and crossed the road in front of the lead vehicle. After some colorful language and a scramble to exit to vehicles, we watched these two stunning breeding plumage adults fly past us and away across the tundra. This species is very rarely encountered at this season, and we were super lucky to find them.

MEW GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus canus brachyrhynchus*) – Common in Anchorage and Nome. [N]

HERRING GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*) – Both American and Siberian Herring Gulls are found in Nome; we saw several immatures with standard brownish tones to the upperparts and fully dark tail bands that fit the standard American Herring phenotype. Several others were too far to be identified with any certainty.

HERRING GULL (VEGA) (*Larus argentatus vegae*) – We saw two immatures with nice white-based tails and well-patterned, cold-toned upperparts -

typical of this Siberian form of Herring Gull (a potential split).

SLATY-BACKED GULL (*Larus schistisagus*) – We scoped an adult in the mouth of the Nome River; this Asian species is regular at Nome but still quite rare in most of Alaska.

GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL (*Larus glaucescens*) – Very common in the Seward area. Many large gulls around Anchorage appear to be hybrids between this species and Herring Gull (aka "Cook Inlet hybrids").

GLAUCOUS GULL (*Larus hyperboreus*) – Very common in Nome and Barrow. In Barrow, the species concentrates around a landfill, and we had our max. count of 900 there. [N]

ALEUTIAN TERN (*Onychoprion aleuticus*) – These rare and poorly known terns nest in Nome, and we saw them well there as they courted at a breeding colony near town. Others were seen at Safety Sound. [N]

ARCTIC TERN (*Sterna paradisaea*) – Very common in Nome and the Anchorage area; we also saw them regularly in Barrow, but there wasn't much open water for them there. [N]

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Common in Anchorage. [I]

Strigidae (Owls)

SNOWY OWL (*Bubo scandiacus*) – We saw two individuals at different spots in Barrow. One was a very white, unmarked bird that was likely an adult male. The Inupiat name for Barrow is Ukpeaġvik, meaning "the place where we hunt Snowy Owls".

SHORT-EARED OWL (*Asio flammeus*) – We saw several of these floppy-flying owls over the tundra in Nome.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRD (*Selasphorus rufus*) – Two were sporadically attending feeders at a home near Seward.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*) – We saw these small Picoides around Anchorage and Seward.

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*) – A family group entertained us around the feeders at Seward.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – One flew over Chris's van near Anchorage on our return from Seward.

GYRFALCON (*Falco rusticolus*) – We saw these magnificent falcons with chicks at nests near Nome. Wow! [N]

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – One or two strafed over the tundra near Barrow on our second day there.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

ALDER FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax alnorum*) – We briefly heard these Empids calling "free-beer" near Seward. [*]

Laniidae (Shrikes)

NORTHERN SHRIKE (*Lanius excubitor*) – Chris spotted one perched on driftwood near Safety Sound outside of Nome. We also saw and even heard one singing at our lunch spot on the Kougark Rd.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

STELLER'S JAY (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) – We had some excellent looks at these Pacific race birds near Seward.

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE (*Pica hudsonia*) – Fairly common in the Anchorage area.

NORTHWESTERN CROW (*Corvus caurinus*) – We saw a few of these small crows between Girdwood and Seward. One had a grossly long, decurved bill - this is part of an unfortunate trend that has been detected in the area in recent years.

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*) – We found low numbers at most of the sites we visited on the tour. [N]

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – We saw these regularly around Nome and Anchorage. [N]

VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW (*Tachycineta thalassina*) – Anchorage area.

BANK SWALLOW (*Riparia riparia*) – Anchorage and Nome.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – One at Barrow was quite notable, though we couldn't identify it to subspecies group.

CLIFF SWALLOW (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) – We only saw a few - two at Westchester Lagoon near Anchorage, and two in Nome. [N]

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE (*Poecile atricapillus*) – Several between Anchorage and Seward.

CHESTNUT-BACKED CHICKADEE (*Poecile rufescens*) – Two posted nicely for us along Bear Lake Rd. in Seward.

BOREAL CHICKADEE (*Poecile hudsonicus*) – We found several of these skulky chickadees between Anchorage and Seward. Nice views!

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*) – One was at Hillside Park in Anchorage; another was in Seward.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

PACIFIC WREN (*Troglodytes pacificus*) – We heard one singing at Bear Lake Rd. in Seward. It has been reported that birds on the Kenai Peninsula belong to an undescribed subspecies of Pacific Wren - we'll have to wait for a taxonomy update on that one!

Cinclidae (Dippers)

AMERICAN DIPPER (*Cinclus mexicanus*) – Great looks of a sleepy-looking individual perched near the Bear Lake salmon weir. [N]

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus satrapa*) – Good looks in the conifers along Bear Lake Rd.

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*) – We heard the maniacal songs of this tiny bird near Seward, but didn't spot one. [*]

Phylloscopidae (Leaf-Warblers)

ARCTIC WARBLER (*Phylloscopus borealis*) – This bird was VERY exciting. We had missed the species in Nome as they hadn't arrived by the time we departed there; however, while we were scoping Black Guillemots and a Semipalmated Plover on the bare rock cobble of Point Barrow, Chris almost went into orbit when he spotted this little *Phylloscopus* warbler hopping on the ground. We got some close views of this bird as it hunted flies - it was clearly a grounded migrant. This is very likely the most northerly record of the species for North America. [N]

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

BLUETHROAT (*Luscinia svecica*) – Though skies were cloudy and drizzly, we had phenomenal looks at these lovely songbirds singing and doing flight displays near Nome.

NORTHERN WHEATEAR (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) – A pair popped out of the rock pile near where we saw Red Knot, Rock Sandpiper, and Rock Ptarmigan along the Teller Rd. out of Nome. [N]

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH (*Catharus minimus*) – Very common in Nome (35 in one half-day), and we even heard an overshoot migrant singing in Barrow.

SWAINSON'S THRUSH (*Catharus ustulatus*) – We found these buff-spectacled thrushes in Hillside Park in Anchorage, and even managed some good views.

HERMIT THRUSH (*Catharus guttatus*) – Great looks along the small stream below the Bear Lake salmon weir.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*) – Uncommon to common in the Anchorage-Seward stretch as well as in Nome.

VARIED THRUSH (*Ixoreus naevius*) – Great treetop views of a male in Hillside Park, Anchorage.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – A few were in Anchorage. [I]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

EASTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL (*Motacilla tschutschensis*) – After some frustrating flyby views, we had one sit up for us just outside of town in Nome.

AMERICAN PIPIT (*Anthus rubescens*) – Small numbers in Nome; one flushed off the road in Barrow as well.

Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings)

LAPLAND LONGSPUR (*Calcarius lapponicus*) – Very common in Nome and Barrow. [N]

SNOW BUNTING (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) – One was along the Teller Rd. in Nome; abundant in Barrow, where they were nesting just outside our hotel. [N]

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) – We heard lots in and around Nome, but only saw a few that were teed up on trees.

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*) – We found several singing in the Anchorage-Seward stretch as well as in Nome.

YELLOW WARBLER (*Setophaga petechia*) – Common in Nome.

BLACKPOLL WARBLER (*Setophaga striata*) – Several were singing from taller vegetation outside of Nome; one vehicle had reasonable looks of a singing male. [*]

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (*Setophaga coronata*) – Small numbers in the Anchorage-Seward area.

TOWNSEND'S WARBLER (*Setophaga townsendi*) – Good views in Hillside Park and again near Seward.

WILSON'S WARBLER (*Cardellina pusilla*) – Heard frequently in Nome and also near Anchorage & Seward.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

AMERICAN TREE SPARROW (*Spizella arborea*) – Our best views were at one of the Bluethroat spots on the Kougark Rd. outside of Nome.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – Common in Nome and Barrow; one in a road cut among huge conifers near Seward seemed out of place.

FOX SPARROW (SOOTY) (*Passerella iliaca sinuosa*) – This was the Fox Sparrow we saw near Seward, including at Bear Lake Rd.

FOX SPARROW (RED) (*Passerella iliaca zaboria*) – The Fox Sparrows we saw in Nome were from this subspecies group.

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*) – The large, dark Song Sparrow we saw at the feeders outside of Seward almost looked like a Fox Sparrow!

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (GAMBEL'S) (*Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*) – Fairly common in Nome, and we had one at the feeders in Barrow, too.

GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*) – Common in Nome, where we had some amazing views of a singing bird on the Teller Rd. Also one near Seward.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (SLATE-COLORED) (*Junco hyemalis hyemalis*) – The breeding juncos we found between Anchorage and Seward were from this group.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (OREGON) (*Junco hyemalis oreganus*) – One of these North Slope rarities put in an appearance at some residential bird feeders in Barrow. This subspecies group is a LONG way out of range in Barrow; this bird was probably an overshooting migrant.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RUSTY BLACKBIRD (*Euphagus carolinus*) – We had some good views of a feeding male in a riverbed on the Kougark Rd. outside of Nome.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

PINE GROSBEAK (*Pinicola enucleator*) – We were very satisfied in Seward with a splendid encounter with a pair on the ground at Bear Lake Rd. and a feeding station covered with over a dozen more of these monster finches.

WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL (*Loxia leucoptera*) – A family group, including recently fledged young, fed on the ground in the rain near the Bear Lake salmon weir - lovely close views. We also had some flyovers and poor views at Hillside Park in Anchorage. [N]

COMMON REDPOLL (*Acanthis flammea*) – Fairly common around Anchorage; we saw small numbers in Nome and Barrow as well.

HOARY REDPOLL (*Acanthis hornemanni*) – Fairly common in Nome; most of the redpolls we saw in Barrow looked to be Hoaries. Recent genetic evidence shows that there is very little divergence between Hoary and Common Redpolls despite ecological/ morphological distinctions.

PINE SISKIN (*Spinus pinus*) – Abundant in the Anchorage-Seward area, where there was apparently a good cone crop.

MAMMALS

ARCTIC GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus parryi*) – Brief views in Nome.

RED SQUIRREL (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) – Calling in the Anchorage-Seward area a few times. [*]

DALL'S PORPOISE (*Phocoenoides dalli*) – These were the small black-and-white cetaceans that we saw on the Seward boat trip.

FIN WHALE (*Balaenoptera physalus*) – An uncommon sighting out of Seward - we saw two of these huge baleen whales on our boat trip.

HUMPBACK WHALE (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) – Common on the boat trip out of Seward - great views.

SEA OTTER (*Enhydra lutris*) – Two near the Seward harbor and another eating a seabird, perhaps a murre, near Northwestern Glacier.

STELLER'S SEA LION (*Eumetopias jubatus*) – On the Seward boat trip, we visited a haulout dominated by a spectacular, roaring male.

HARBOR SEAL (*Phoca vitulina*) – Very common on the boat trip from Seward, especially on ice floes near the Northwestern Glacier.

SPOTTED SEAL (*Phoca largha*) – This was the only seal we identified for sure off Nome and Barrow, though distance and individual variation left us wondering a few times.

MOOSE (*Alces alces*) – We had a few sightings between Anchorage and Seward. Iconic!

MOUNTAIN GOAT (*Oreamnos americanus*) – We saw 6 on the Kenai Peninsula during our drive to Seward, and also found a few more during the boat trip.

MUSKOX (*Ovibos moschatus*) – Awesome! This was a daily sight for us in and around Nome. Two were quite close to the road, and we had a really excellent time watching them grazing.

DALL'S SHEEP (*Ovis dalli*) – Two were on a rocky cliff face above the road along Turnagain Arm during the drive to Seward. Remember those incredible winds?

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

The "nesting" designation means that we saw some direct evidence of nesting on this tour.

Here's Ann and Barb's poem about the group and the tour:

Thirteen, they say, is supposed to be
Unlucky as a size of group.
But not in Alaska it would seem:
We knew we'd get the scoop.
Curlew, Eider, Bluethroat, Moose -
And don't forget that Emperor Goose!

One half the group had spent a week
On islands bare and forests rainy.
The rest at Anchorage did join up
Along with one more Field Guide brainy.

A single Jaeger seen at Nome ...
But Tom grew ever feistier,
Finding dozens, hundreds more.
Now his nickname's Jaegermeister.
(Insert: Well, it's better than Ranger-bait.)

In Nome the vans just were not there.
With Ford Explorers we were stuck.
But Kris was there to drive the third.
For us that was a piece of luck.

'Twas up beside the Coffee Dome.
The winds were cold, the going rough.
But for Dan that big 600th bird
Made the hike so much less tough.

Denzil travels round the world
In his quests new birds to find.
From Australia to P-N-G.
Here Arctic birds were on his mind.

John surely loves the birds to see
But learning is his passion real.
History, culture, biology too –
We surely did admire his zeal.

Cameras abounded on our trip
To capture the birds and landscapes too.
With laptop, lenses, tripod ready,
Hugh was one who never missed a view.

Tom was another who took pride
In photos beautiful and bright.
Arctic Warbler, Eiders too –
He made them all look right.

Hennig has travelled the globe around
From desert to ice floe,
But till Seward did he find
His first Northwestern Crow.

Marian came new birds to see
But at mammal-spotting she did shine.
A goat! A sheep! And look, three moose!
They made those long drives mighty fine.

Leader Chris takes tours far and wide,
Flexibility is his key,
But a house on the road in Seward
Was something he thought he'd never see.

Ann travelled to the Arctic world
Lifers and rarities to see
But right out of her own backyard
Hopped a Chestnut-backed Chickadee.

Birding has taken Barb near and far,
By foot and plane, boat and car.
But her dream, ever since she was seven,
Was to experience the Barrow Three-Eider heaven.

Linda always travels well
With birding clothes for every season.
Even back-warmers she did bring
To ward off cold, it was her reason.

Our local guides were such a help
William, Marlow, Kyle and Cap'n Mark.
History, geology, birds and whales,
Their knowledge sure did add a spark.

Barrow, Barrow, what can we say?
A birthday warbler made my (Ann's) day.
Amazing eiders but what a delay!

Now our trip is nearly over,
Out of energy we've run.
Found the birds that we were seeking,
Well, NEARLY every one.
(Insert: Ann STILL wants to see that woodpecker!)

And so it's time to say goodbye
To friends both old and new.
We know we'll all keep birding on.
It's au revoir, but not adieu.

-poem by Ann Scarfe and Barb McLintock

Totals for the tour: 165 bird taxa and 13 mammal taxa