



Field Guides Tour Report

Alaska I - Part Two (Nome, Seward & Barrow) 2016

Jun 2, 2016 to Jun 12, 2016

Chris Benesh & Pepe Rojas

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



Lovely scenery at Tern Lake on our way to Seward. (Photo by participants David & Judy Smith)

Part two of this year's Alaska tour saw us begin with a visit to Seward, where we ventured out on the waters of Resurrection Bay and up into Aialik Bay, ending up with a nice view of Aialik Glacier. Despite the rainy weather, we were able to pick up most of our target birds along the way and had several exciting mammal sightings, too. Then it was on to Barrow, where we had a wonderful time enjoying eiders, loons, swans, breeding shorebirds, and jaegers. We finished up the tour with a visit to Nome, my personal favorite. What a time we had there, with some wonderful shorebirding and exciting encounters with some wonderful mammals, along with a mix of arctic and Old World species such as Bluethroat, Northern Wheatear, and Eastern Yellow Wagtail.

Thanks to all of you for making this tour such a blast. Pepe and I had a wonderful time sharing the Alaska experience with you. Until we see you again, we wish you the best in birding!

--Chris

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*)

SNOW GOOSE (*Chen caerulescens*) – We had a flock of nine birds in Barrow.

BRANT (BLACK) (*Branta bernicla nigricans*) – Seen daily in Barrow and Nome.

CACKLING GOOSE (TAVERNER'S) (*Branta hutchinsii taverneri*) – These are the geese present around Nome, being the largest of the Cackling subspecies.

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*)

TRUMPETER SWAN (*Cygnus buccinator*) – We eventually tracked down this species near Seward.
TUNDRA SWAN (WHISTLING) (*Cygnus columbianus columbianus*) – Our best views were probably in Barrow.
GADWALL (*Anas strepera*)
AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*)
MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*)
NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*)
NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – Very common in northern wetlands such as Nome and Barrow.
GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN) (*Anas crecca carolinensis*)
REDHEAD (*Aythya americana*) – There were three of these at Westchester Lagoon in Anchorage.
GREATER SCAUP (*Aythya marila*) – Nice comparisons with the next species at Westchester.
LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*)
STELLER'S EIDER (*Polysticta stelleri*) – Not a big year for these, but we did manage to see a total of six during our time in Barrow. One of the highly sought prizes of the North Slope.
SPECTACLED EIDER (*Somateria fischeri*) – We did have some terrific views of this species this year in Barrow.
KING EIDER (*Somateria spectabilis*) – Well seen in Barrow.
COMMON EIDER (PACIFIC) (*Somateria mollissima v-nigrum*) – Our best views were of the many along the coast in Nome, though we also had a flock or two in Barrow fly past.
HARLEQUIN DUCK (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) – We bumped into this species in Nome near the cape.
SURF SCOTER (*Melanitta perspicillata*) – We did have a big flock of about 40 birds on the Seward boat trip.
WHITE-WINGED SCOTER (NORTH AMERICAN) (*Melanitta fusca deglandi*)
BLACK SCOTER (*Melanitta americana*) – mixed rafts of scoters were present along the coast in Nome.
LONG-TAILED DUCK (*Clangula hyemalis*) – Wonderful to see so many of these in the north country.
BARROW'S GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala islandica*) – We did have this species at our first stop at Westchester.
COMMON MERGANSER (*Mergus merganser*) – We did come across a single bird near Seward.
RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*) – Fairly common along the coast in Nome.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

WILLOW PTARMIGAN (*Lagopus lagopus*) – Well seen in Nome on a few occasions. A bigger surprise was the single bird we spotted in Barrow.
ROCK PTARMIGAN (*Lagopus muta*) – We had a great study of a couple of birds along the Kougarok Road in Nome.

Gaviidae (Loons)

RED-THROATED LOON (*Gavia stellata*) – A familiar welcome sight in Nome in some of the smaller ponds there.
ARCTIC LOON (*Gavia arctica*) – This one was frustrating this year, as it took off very soon after we stopped to view it, and most had their best looks of it in flight.
PACIFIC LOON (*Gavia pacifica*) – Stunning to see these in breeding plumage, looking silky smooth.
COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*) – A breeding plumaged bird along the coast in Nome was a surprise.
YELLOW-BILLED LOON (*Gavia adamsii*) – We had a single bird fly past us in Barrow.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

RED-NECKED GREBE (*Podiceps grisegena*)

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

SOOTY SHEARWATER (*Ardenna grisea*) – Dark shearwaters seen on our boat trip were either this species and/or the next.
SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATER (*Ardenna tenuirostris*)

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*)
RED-FACED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax urile*) – Some decent flight views on the Seward boat trip, though conditions made viewing tricky.
PELAGIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*)

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – We had a nice eagle along the Kougarok Road.
NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*)
BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – This iconic species was well seen in Anchorage and Seward.
ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK (*Buteo lagopus*) – We had one of these in the Nome area, being a bird of open tundra.

Gruidae (Cranes)

SANDHILL CRANE (*Grus canadensis*)

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

BLACK OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus bachmani*) – We had two calling birds on our boat trip.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

AMERICAN GOLDEN-PLOVER (*Pluvialis dominica*) – Our best views were in Barrow, but also seen in the Nome area.
PACIFIC GOLDEN-PLOVER (*Pluvialis fulva*) – This species, on the other hand, was only seen in the Nome area on part two.
SEMPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*)

WANDERING TATTLER (*Tringa incana*)

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*)

BRISTLE-THIGHED CURLEW (*Numenius tahitiensis*) – One of the big highlights of the trip this year was connecting with this species along the Kougarak Road where we saw two. A bigger surprise was not seeing Whimbrel there.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa lapponica*) – We did have a decent study of this species in Nome, though not a lot were around this year.

BLACK TURNSTONE (*Arenaria melanocephala*) – A nice showing of this species along the coast near Safety Sound.

RED KNOT (*Calidris canutus*) – We did track down this species in the rocky tundra along the Teller Road. Nice to see it on its breeding grounds.

SURFBIRD (*Calidris virgata*) – I counted twenty-five of these along the coast in Nome, an exceptional number. Sadly, it may well have meant that they were not breeding on nearby mountains this year.

RED-NECKED STINT (*Calidris ruficollis*) – We did see a distant bird on the mudflats outside of Nome.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*) – A few of these were also in the mix of shorebirds at Safety Sound.

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*)

BAIRD'S SANDPIPER (*Calidris bairdii*) – Well seen on Barrow on this trip, this species breeds along the North Slope in gravel rich tundra.

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*)

PECTORAL SANDPIPER (*Calidris melanotos*) – One of the most impressive things about a visit to Barrow is witnessing the amazing display of Pectoral Sandpipers over the tundra.

SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER (*Calidris pusilla*)

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*)

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – Some nice studies of this high arctic breeder at Barrow.

WILSON'S SNIPE (*Gallinago delicata*)

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus lobatus*)

RED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) – Barrow is surely one of the best places to see this species with so many occupying tiny roadside ponds in the tundra.

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)

POMARINE JAEGER (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) – Another classic Barrow bird is the Pomarine Jaeger. We saw some impressive numbers this year.

PARASITIC JAEGER (*Stercorarius parasiticus*)

LONG-TAILED JAEGER (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) – Just as Barrow is the place for Pomarines, Nome is the place for Long-tailed. Nearly every encounter was mesmerizing.

Alcidae (Auks, Murres, and Puffins)

COMMON MURRE (*Uria aalge*) – Seen on our Seward boat trip.

PIGEON GUILLEMOT (*Cepphus columba*) – The Seward boat trip provided some great viewing opportunities.

MARbled MURRELET (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*) – That same Seward boat trip provided great opportunities to see this species up close and personal.

KITTLITZ'S MURRELET (*Brachyramphus brevirostris*) – This is one of the most highly sought after species on Alaska tour, being very difficult to see anywhere else. We were fortunate to see several of these during our visit to Aialik Glacier on our Seward boat trip.

ANCIENT MURRELET (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*) – While we did have the species on the boat trip, the views were not the best due to the sea conditions at the time.

RHINOCEROS AUKLET (*Cerorhinca monocerata*) – We did bump into a small number of these on our boat trip.

HORNED PUFFIN (*Fratercula corniculata*) – The Seward boat trip also provided great looks at both species of puffin.

TUFTED PUFFIN (*Fratercula cirrhata*)

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE (*Rissa tridactyla*)

SABINE'S GULL (*Xema sabini*) – We did bump into this species in Barrow and Nome, with the best looks being those at Safety Sound.

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

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

GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL (*Larus glaucescens*) – This was the species of gull that was particularly common around Seward and the Kenai fjords.

GLAUCOUS GULL (*Larus hyperboreus*) – Quite a few these were in Nome, and it represented virtually all of the gulls seen in Barrow.

ALEUTIAN TERN (*Onychoprion aleuticus*) – This is another one of the most range restricted birds in the world. We had some nice looks at some in the Nome area where they breed in small numbers.

ARCTIC TERN (*Sterna paradisaea*)

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [I]

Strigidae (Owls)

SNOWY OWL (*Bubo scandiacus*) – Another desired bird in the North country is the Snowy Owl. We managed to see a couple of these in Barrow.

SHORT-EARED OWL (*Asio flammeus*) – This species was super common this year in the Nome area, providing for some great photographic opportunities.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD (*Selasphorus rufus*) – Some good looks at the species in the private yard in Seward.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – We had a single bird on the drive down to Seward.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*)

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*)

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*)

GYRFALCON (*Falco rusticolus*) – We had a nice encounter with a pair of birds far out on the Council Rd. near Nome.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – We saw a really big adult bird sitting on the road on our full day in Nome.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

EASTERN PHOEBE (*Sayornis phoebe*) – This was actually one of the more extraordinary birds that we saw on the trip. There are about six records of the species in Alaska, but this was the first nesting attempt way out on the Seward Peninsula. Its normal range is far to the southeast, barely poking into the Yukon Territory.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

GRAY JAY (*Perisoreus canadensis*)

STELLER'S JAY (*Cyanocitta stelleri*)

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE (*Pica hudsonia*)

NORTHWESTERN CROW (*Corvus caurinus*) – We did run into the species around Seward. Not certain how long this will remain a good species.

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*)

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW (*Tachycineta thalassina*)

BANK SWALLOW (*Riparia riparia*)

CLIFF SWALLOW (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*)

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

CHESTNUT-BACKED CHICKADEE (*Poecile rufescens*)

BOREAL CHICKADEE (*Poecile hudsonicus*)

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*)

Certhiidae (Treecreepers)

BROWN CREEPER (*Certhia americana*) [*]

Cinclidae (Dippers)

AMERICAN DIPPER (*Cinclus mexicanus*) – A terrific experience with the family group of these near the salmon weir just outside of Seward.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus satrapa*)

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*)

Phylloscopidae (Leaf Warblers)

ARCTIC WARBLER (*Phylloscopus borealis*) – Thankfully the species had arrived on its breeding grounds in Nome. This is the only breeding species of this old world family in North America.

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

BLUETHROAT (*Luscinia svecica*) – Well it wasn't easy, but we did manage track down a Bluethroat, easily one of the most exciting birds of the trip.

NORTHERN WHEATEAR (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) – Thankfully on the last day of the trip he managed to track down the species in the rocky tundra near the Teller Road.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

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

HERMIT THRUSH (*Catharus guttatus*)

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*)

VARIED THRUSH (*Ixoreus naevius*) – A few were seen and heard around Seward.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [I]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

EASTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL (*Motacilla tschutschensis*) – This is another species that barely gets into North America, and we had some nice looks outside of Nome.

AMERICAN PIPIT (*Anthus rubescens*) – We had a territorial bird near the Teller Road in that patch of rocky tundra.

Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings)

LAPLAND LONGSPUR (*Calcarius lapponicus*)

SNOW BUNTING (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) – Perhaps most memorable being a cheery, melodic addition to the Barrow landscape.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH (*Parkesia noveboracensis*)

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*)

YELLOW WARBLER (*Setophaga petechia*)

BLACKPOLL WARBLER (*Setophaga striata*) – We did bump into one of these in Nome where they are a scarce breeder.

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

TOWNSEND'S WARBLER (*Setophaga townsendi*) – The Sitka spruce forest around Seward was home to this species.

WILSON'S WARBLER (*Cardellina pusilla*)

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

AMERICAN TREE SPARROW (*Spizelloides arborea*)

FOX SPARROW (SOOTY) (*Passerella iliaca sinuosa*) – This segment of the Alaska tour provided the opportunity to compare two different subspecies of Fox Sparrow.

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

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

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

GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*) – Nome was certainly the place to see this species well.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*) – Seen in Seward.

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

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

PINE GROSBEAK (*Pinicola enucleator*) – We had some great looks at the species at Ava's amazing yard that was filled with feeders.

COMMON REDPOLL (*Acanthis flammea*) – Our best looks at this and the following species were the up close viewing we had in Barrow.

HOARY REDPOLL (*Acanthis hornemanni*) – It is worth mentioning that there is recently been some research to indicate that Hoary Redpoll may not be a distinct species. Instead, it may represent an example of how the environment can control the switching on and off of certain genes, resulting in a different appearance.

PINE SISKIN (*Spinus pinus*)

MAMMALS

SNOWSHOE HARE (*Lepus americanus*)

ALASKAN HARE (*Lepus othus*) – We had a nice sighting of a handsome hare along the Kougarok Road outside of Nome.

ARCTIC GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus parryi*)

RED SQUIRREL (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)

BEAVER (*Castor canadensis*) – A couple of these were seen along the Kougarok Road outside of Nome.

NEARCTIC BROWN LEMMING (*Lemmus trimucronatus*) – Up in Barrow.

ORCA (*Orcinus orca*) – We were fortunate to run into a pod of these on our Seward boat trip, though they were somewhat elusive.

HARBOR PORPOISE (*Phocoena phocoena*)

DALL'S PORPOISE (*Phocoenoides dalli*) – Pure magic seeing these bow riding on our boat trip.

HUMPBACK WHALE (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)

ARCTIC FOX (*Alopex lagopus*) – One seen loping in the distance out near Freshwater Lake.

BROWN (INCL. GRIZZLY) BEAR (*Ursus arctos*) – A mother and cubs that Barry spotted in the distance on the Kougarok Road.

POLAR BEAR (*Ursus maritimus*) – Pepe spotted one way out on the ice in Barrow that unfortunately chose to disappear behind a wall of ice.

STOAT (SHORT-TAILED WEASEL) (*Mustela erminea*)

SEA OTTER (*Enhydra lutris*) – Another memorable highlight from our boat trip.

STELLER'S SEA LION (*Eumetopias jubatus*)

HARBOR SEAL (*Phoca vitulina*) – Lots of these loafing around on ice near Aialik Glacier.

SPOTTED SEAL (*Phoca largha*)

RINGED SEAL (*Phoca hispida*)

MOOSE (*Alces alces*)

MOUNTAIN GOAT (*Oreamnos americanus*) – We had some great looks on our boat trip.

MUSKOX (*Ovibos moschatus*) – Looking like giant muppets, we had a couple of big herds during our time in Nome.

DALL'S SHEEP (*Ovis dalli*) – A few seen on our way Between Anchorage and Seward.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 148 bird taxa and 23 mammal taxa