



Field Guides Tour Report

Alaska I - Part Two (Nome, Seward & Barrow) 2019

Jun 6, 2019 to Jun 16, 2019
Chris Benesh & Doug Gochfeld

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



The group relishing the appearance of Bristle-thighed Curlew out on the tundra near Coffee Dome. Photo by guide Doug Gochfeld.

Picking up from the action of Part One, Part Two of the Alaska Tour provided a wonderful set of memories. We started off by flying to Nome, my personal favorite spot in Alaska, where we had time to explore each of the three major roads leading away from town. Nome is memorable in so many ways. It is like a bit of the old West, dusky road and a bit rough along the edges. But it brings together a wonderful assemblage of birds, from a handful of Old World breeders from Asia, tundra nesting shorebirds, a few pelagic species, and some crazy migrants. Throw in some awesome Muskox and there is a lot to brag about. Then it came time for us to leave Nome, and well, Nome wasn't ready for us to leave. A low cloud ceiling kept our plane from landing so we had to wing it for the next few hours. Long story short, there were some elevated blood pressures, a few more sprouted gray hairs, and in the end, all of us on the late evening flight back to Anchorage so we could pick up our vans, repack, and head down to Seward for a short night before our pelagic trip the next morning. In truth, it worked remarkably well.

Our trip with Jason and Tanya had to be one of the finest days out on the waters of the Kenai. Our trip took us out to the Chiswell Islands, where we saw a nice variety of seabirds as well as Humpbacks and Killer Whales and Sea Otters. Then we headed up into Aialik Bay toward the glacier, where we had some great views of Kittlitz's Murrelet as well as some terrific calving from the glacier. The following morning, we spent some time birding in Seward, visiting Ava's wonderful feeders and the Bear Lake area, where we had our wonderful encounter with a Dipper family, as well as a few more forest species. Then it was back to Anchorage with a stop at Potter Marsh to look over the ducks.

Our final flights took us to Utqiagvik, the town formerly known as Barrow. Always a fascinating place, Utqiagvik was memorable in giving us a chance to see various shorebirds breeding and displaying over the tundra, to enjoy a full complement of eiders, and to look out over the waters of the Chukchi Sea, watching loons and eiders fly past, see the blows of Gray Whales in the distance, and even chunks of ice packed with Walrus!

Thanks to all of you coming along and making the tour such a success. Thanks for the great spotting and good camaraderie. And thanks for all of the great photos you sent in! Oh so many, I couldn't pack them all in but they were fantastic! From Doug and I, safe travels! We look forward to visiting with you again in the future. -- 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).

SNOW GOOSE (*Anser caerulescens*)

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE (*Anser albifrons*) – Well seen up on the North Slope where they commonly breed.

BRANT (BLACK) (*Branta bernicla nigricans*)

CAKCLING GOOSE (*Branta hutchinsii*) – Doug and I did our best to ignore the white-cheeked geese, but for the record, ones around Nome are considered to be *taverneri*, a large member of the Cackling Goose complex.

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*)

TRUMPETER SWAN (*Cygnus buccinator*) – We studied a pair at Tern Lake and another pair was at Potter Marsh.

TUNDRA SWAN (WHISTLING) (*Cygnus columbianus columbianus*) – This was the common nesting swan in the tundra of the North Slope.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Spatula clypeata*)

GADWALL (*Mareca strepera*)

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Mareca americana*)

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – One can really see why this species is called Northern.

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

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*) – A few of these were at Potter Marsh.

GREATER SCAUP (*Aythya marila*)

LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*)

STELLER'S EIDER (*Polysticta stelleri*) – The small tundra ponds around Utqiagvik hosted a few of these small, monotypic eiders. Always a relief after the first ones are sighted!

SPECTACLED EIDER (*Somateria fischeri*) – We first encountered this species in Nome, a wonderful male that was hanging out on the beach there.

KING EIDER (*Somateria spectabilis*) – Utqiagvik was the place to really appreciate this stunning species with several nice views of males.

COMMON EIDER (PACIFIC) (*Somateria mollissima v-nigrum*) – Quite a few of these were around Nome where they are the most common eider species. There were also a fair number seen just offshore in Utqiagvik.

HARLEQUIN DUCK (*Histrionicus histrionicus*)

SURF SCOTER (*Melanitta perspicillata*)

WHITE-WINGED SCOTER (NORTH AMERICAN) (*Melanitta deglandi deglandi*)

BLACK SCOTER (*Melanitta americana*)

LONG-TAILED DUCK (*Clangula hyemalis*)

COMMON GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala clangula*) – A couple at Tern Lake were notable.

COMMON MERGANSER (*Mergus merganser*)

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*)

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies).

WILLOW PTARMIGAN (*Lagopus lagopus*) – It was a really good year for this species in the Nome area with quite a few seen.

ROCK PTARMIGAN (*Lagopus muta*) – We saw a single male along the Kougarak Road that showed really well for us, looking quite a bit like dirty snow. Compared with Willow, these Rocks retain their winter feathering later into the Spring.

Podicipedidae (Grebes).

RED-NECKED GREBE (*Podiceps grisegena*) – Wonderful to see this species nesting at Potter Marsh.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves).

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [I]

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds).

RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD (*Selasphorus rufus*) – A couple of these were hanging out around Ava's feeders in Seward. This is the northernmost breeding hummingbird.

Gruidae (Cranes).

SANDHILL CRANE (*Antigone canadensis*)

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers).

BLACK OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus bachmani*) – Doug worked his magic on Xena and Cubert, who came flying in and circling the boat a couple of times. This was Tanya's first sighting of the season.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings).

AMERICAN GOLDEN-PLOVER (*Pluvialis dominica*) – Well seen near Coffee Dome and again a few times on the tundra at Utqiagvik.

PACIFIC GOLDEN-PLOVER (*Pluvialis fulva*) – Well seen in the Nome area especially on the Teller Road. Results of study conducted on Lesser Golden-Plover in western Alaska were responsible for the splitting of *fulva* and *dominica* forms into the two species we know today. Pacifics favor the lower, coastal tundra zones.

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies).

BRISTLE-THIGHED CURLEW (*Numenius tahitiensis*) – What was certainly a highlight of the trip, we had a wonderful encounter with at least three of these near Coffee Dome.

WHIMBREL (HUDSONIAN) (*Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*)

BAR-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa lapponica*)

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*)

BLACK TURNSTONE (*Arenaria melanocephala*)

RED KNOT (*Calidris canutus*) – Out along the Teller Road we had a nice encounter with one 6JH that had been banded at this site 9 years earlier.

SURFBIRD (*Calidris virgata*) – Some nice studies of this species along the coast feeding along the shoreline.

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*)

ROCK SANDPIPER (*Calidris ptilocnemis*) – After some searching we came across one of these in the rocky tundra along the Teller Road.

BAIRD'S SANDPIPER (*Calidris bairdii*) – We had some good luck with this long winged sandpiper up in Utqiagvik where this species nests in gravelly areas.

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*)

BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER (*Calidris subruficollis*) – A late night outing by a few of the group was rewarded with an encounter with some displaying birds.

PECTORAL SANDPIPER (*Calidris melanotos*) – Quite a spectacle to see this species in full display, chest puffed out and booming as its flies low over the tundra. Wow!

SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER (*Calidris pusilla*)

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*)

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*) – Seen while searching Potter Marsh for ducks.

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – A few of these were seen in the wet tundra at Utqiagvik.

WILSON'S SNIPE (*Gallinago delicata*)

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus lobatus*)

RED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) – One of the real treats of visiting the North Slope is seeing all of the Red Phalaropes in breeding plumage!

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*)

WANDERING TATTLER (*Tringa incana*) – Seen along gravel-lined streams near Nome. Another was seen on the Kenai boat trip.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*)

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)

POMARINE JAEGER (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) – Utqiagvik was the place to see this largest of jaegers. There was even a dark morph bird dubbed Darth Jaeger.

PARASITIC JAEGER (*Stercorarius parasiticus*)

LONG-TAILED JAEGER (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) – There is no place like Nome...for seeing lots of wonderful Long-tailed Jaegers. They were a daily treat for us there.

Alcidae (Auks, Murres, and Puffins)

COMMON MURRE (*Uria aalge*) – Lots seen on our boat trip out on the Kenai Fjords.

THICK-BILLED MURRE (*Uria lomvia*) – We managed to pick out a few Thick-billed Murres both on the water and on the cliffs around the Chiswells.

BLACK GUILLEMOT (*Cepphus grylle*) – One in the harbor in Nome was a bit of a surprise, and they were quite plentiful in Utqiagvik with all of the open water there.

PIGEON GUILLEMOT (*Cepphus columba*) – Well seen on the Kenai boat trip, this species differing from Black Guillemot in having a mostly dusky underwing.

MARbled MURRELET (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*)

KITTLITZ'S MURRELET (*Brachyramphus brevirostris*) – The waters at the upper end of Aialik Bay once again proved to be the place to see this species well.

ANCIENT MURRELET (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*) – We were fortunate to bump into some on our Kenai boat trip, though they were on the flighty side.

PARAKEET AUKLET (*Aethia psittacula*) – There was a nice gathering of birds in Cecil's Cove in the Chiswells where a small number of these breed.

RHINOCEROS AUKLET (*Cerorhinca monocerata*) – This large alcid shares genetic affinities with the puffins.

HORNED PUFFIN (*Fratercula corniculata*) – Good numbers were seen on the Kenai boat trip. This is the smaller of the two Pacific puffin species.

TUFTED PUFFIN (*Fratercula cirrhata*) – The largest and darkest of the puffins, we saw this species mainly on the Kenai boat trip including a bunch of nesting birds buzzing around the Chiswells.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE (*Rissa tridactyla*) – Noisy, cliff nesting species that we saw at each of our primary destinations on part two.

SABINE'S GULL (*Xema sabini*) – We were fortunate with this species this year, seeing it at the Nome river mouth and wonderfully well in Utqiagvik. Sadly, a rare nesting attempt near Freshwater Lake found us watching some photographers getting too close to the nest.

BLACK-HEADED GULL (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) – An adult showed up at the Nome River mouth during our visit there.

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

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

HERRING GULL (VEGA) (*Larus argentatus vegae*)

ICELAND GULL (THAYER'S) (*Larus glaucoides thayeri*) – We had a single bird on the Counsel Road that fit this species.

SLATY-BACKED GULL (*Larus schistisagus*) – We had a good second cycle bird (mostly immature but with dark back feathering) in Utqiagvik.

GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL (*Larus glaucescens*)

GLAUCOUS GULL (*Larus hyperboreus*)

ALEUTIAN TERN (*Onychoprion aleuticus*) – It was an exceptional showing for this species this year near Nome where many were concentrated around the Nome River mouth. A treat to see this distinctive species so well. Of interest, a small number of these were recently found wintering in coastal Australia.

ARCTIC TERN (*Sterna paradisaea*)

Gaviidae (Loons)

RED-THROATED LOON (*Gavia stellata*) – Nome is a terrific area for loons and we had some really terrific views of this species, many seeing them for the first time with their namesake red throats.

ARCTIC LOON (*Gavia arctica*) – After a good deal of searching, we did eventually locate a pair of birds swimming offshore along the Counsel Road. This species is a rare breeder in North America with most records coming from the Bering Sea.

PACIFIC LOON (*Gavia pacifica*) – The most memorable views were those of a close pair along the Gaswell Road near Utqiagvik.

COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*) – Including the Nome area where this species is still considered uncommon.

YELLOW-BILLED LOON (*Gavia adamsii*) – We saw a fair number of these in flight while seawatching in Utqiagvik.

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

NORTHERN FULMAR (*Fulmarus glacialis*) – Doug spotted one offshore while seawatching at Utqiagvik.

SOOTY SHEARWATER (*Ardenna grisea*) – A single bird was seen on the Kenai boat trip near the Chiswells.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

PELAGIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*)

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*)

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – A lone bird was on the Teller Road out of Nome.

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus hudsonius*)

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK (*Buteo lagopus*) – A couple of these were seen in the backcountry near Nome.

Strigidae (Owls)

SNOWY OWL (*Bubo scandiacus*) – One seen in the distance in Utqiagvik with a second seen by those that went out for the after dinner outing. We got the lowdown on this species from Denver Holt.

SHORT-EARED OWL (*Asio flammeus*) – Not a great year for this species, but we did see a couple in the Nome area.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Dryobates pubescens*)

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Dryobates villosus*)

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – A couple of these were briefly seen at Tern Lake on the Kenai Peninsula.

GYRFALCON (*Falco rusticolus*) – Nice scope views of an active nest on the Kougarok Road.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

ALDER FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax alnorum*)

Laniidae (Shrikes)

NORTHERN SHRIKE (*Lanius borealis*) – Thanks to a hot radio tip from Brian and Kevin of VENT, we were treated to scope views of one out of Nome.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

STELLER'S JAY (*Cyanocitta stelleri*)

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE (*Pica hudsonia*)

NORTHWESTERN CROW (*Corvus caurinus*) – A small number of these were seen around Seward and as far up as Girdwood for a few.

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*)

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW (*Tachycineta thalassina*)

BANK SWALLOW (*Riparia riparia*)

CLIFF SWALLOW (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*)

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

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

CHESTNUT-BACKED CHICKADEE (*Poecile rufescens*) – Seen in the Sitka spruce woods around Seward.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*)

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

PACIFIC WREN (*Troglodytes pacificus*) [*]

Cinclidae (Dippers)

AMERICAN DIPPER (*Cinclus mexicanus*) – Terrific views of this family group just outside of Seward. Dippers are such remarkable birds!

Regulidae (Kinglets).

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus satrapa*) – A few of these high pitched songsters were seen near Seward.

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*)

Phylloscopidae (Leaf Warblers).

ARCTIC WARBLER (*Phylloscopus borealis*) – The only member of this Old World genus to breed in North America, we saw and heard quite a few of them around Nome. It was also interesting to see a bit of active migration, with birds appearing right along the beach, having just flown across the Bering Sea.

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers).

BLUETHROAT (*Luscinia svecica*)

NORTHERN WHEATEAR (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) – After a bit of searching we had some great looks at these along the Teller Road. Another Old World species that just trickles into North America.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies).

VARIED THRUSH (*Ixoreus naevius*) – Best seen for most at Ava's.

GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH (*Catharus minimus*) – It is hard to believe how common this species is around Nome.

HERMIT THRUSH (*Catharus guttatus*)

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*)

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits).

EASTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL (*Motacilla tschutschensis*) – This species is one that seems to be far rarer than it was 25 years ago. We did manage to see a few of them in the end, but not without some effort.

WHITE WAGTAIL (*Motacilla alba*) – Nice looks at one or two in the harbor in Nome. Ones we saw were of the subspecies *ocularis*.

AMERICAN PIPIT (*Anthus rubescens*)

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies).

PINE GROSBEAK (*Pinicola enucleator*) – A nice opportunity to study this species well at Ava's feeders in Seward.

COMMON REDPOLL (*Acanthis flammea*)

HOARY REDPOLL (*Acanthis hornemanni*) – Our best looks were perhaps those in Utqiagvik, though there were some around Nome too.

RED CROSSBILL (*Loxia curvirostra*) – There were some hanging out at Ava's feeders though they were a bit on the shy side.

PINE SISKIN (*Spinus pinus*)

Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings).

LAPLAND LONGSPUR (*Calcarius lapponicus*) – Fairly plentiful around Nome and Utqiagvik. This species has one of the more wonderful, mesmerizing flight displays.

SNOW BUNTING (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) – A familiar friend around Utqiagvik.

Passerellidae (New World Sparrows).

AMERICAN TREE SPARROW (*Spizelloides arborea*)

FOX SPARROW (SOOTY) (*Passerella iliaca sinuosa*) – Our best views were right at Ava's feeders in Seward. Fox Sparrows exhibit quite a bit of variation when taken as a whole. Coastal birds are the darkest, least patterned of the populations.

FOX SPARROW (RED) (*Passerella iliaca zaboria*) – Birds seen around Nome are largely Red types though toward the dark end of the spectrum.

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

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

GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*) – The lovely songs of this species were a welcome part of the Nome soundscape. Quite fancy in breeding plumage as well.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*) – Heard on our boat trip and seen at Ava's feeders. Birds here are pretty big and dark.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies).

RUSTY BLACKBIRD (*Euphagus carolinus*) – One briefly seen at the Pilgrim River in Nome and seen again at Potter Marsh in Anchorage.

Parulidae (New World Warblers).

NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) – Fairly common around Nome.

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*)

YELLOW WARBLER (*Setophaga petechia*)

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

TOWNSEND'S WARBLER (*Setophaga townsendi*) – Our only ones were in the tall Sitka spruce-Western Hemlock forest around Seward. One showed exceptionally well!

WILSON'S WARBLER (*Cardellina pusilla*)

MAMMALS

SNOWSHOE HARE (*Lepus americanus*)

ARCTIC GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus parryii*)

BEAVER (*Castor canadensis*)

TUNDRA RED-BACKED VOLE (*Clethrionomys rutilus*)

MUSKRAT (*Ondatra zibethica*)

NEARCTIC BROWN LEMMING (*Lemmus trimucronatus*) – While reportedly not a great lemming year, we did see a few pretty well at Utqiagvik.

- ORCA** (*Orcinus orca*) – One of the biggest non-avian highlights of the trip was the fantastic encounter we had with a pod of Orcas on the Kenai boat trip.
- GRAY WHALE** (*Eschrichtius robustus*) – We saw several of these in the distance with all of the open water visible during our seawatching in Utqiagvik. As much as we tried to turn any into Bowhead, we just couldn't do it.
- COMMON MINKE WHALE** (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) – We saw a whale feeding offshore east of Nome whose identity we discussed somewhat. After discussion and examination of photos, it was clear we were dealing with a Minke Whale.
- HUMPBACK WHALE** (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) – Some nice looks on our Kenai boat trip.
- RED FOX** (*Vulpes vulpes*) – A couple of these were seen in the Nome area.
- SEA OTTER** (*Enhydra lutris*) – Some terrific looks at this species on the Kenai boat trip, and quite a sight to see the large group (20ish) in Cecil's Cove that included two hauled-out animals!
- STELLER'S SEA LION** (*Eumetopias jubatus*) – A very large pinniped. We had some great views of this species hauled out on rocks in the Chiswells.
- WALRUS** (*Odobenus rosmarus*) – Though the views were distant, what a treat to see this iconic high Arctic species while seawatching at Utqiagvik. Having missed a big wave of "hundreds" just before we arrived in town, it was nice to find twenty or so before catching our plane to leave. This was the first time in 25+ visits that I had seen this species there.
- HARBOR SEAL** (*Phoca vitulina*) – Best seen on the Kenai boat trip.
- SPOTTED SEAL** (*Phoca largha*) – This was the common seal around Nome, which we saw a few of, and one of the common seals at Utqiagvik.
- RINGED SEAL** (*Phoca hispida*) – Likely some of the seals we were seeing were this species though sorting them out from Spotted is difficult under prevailing conditions.
- MOOSE** (*Alces alces*) – A few seen, but perhaps the most memorable was the one that walked out on to the highway in front of my van as we were making our late night run down to Seward.
- MOUNTAIN GOAT** (*Oreamnos americanus*) – Seen through the scope right from Ava's yard in Seward! A great pick up, having missed them both on the boat trip and at our usual spot near Tern Lake.
- MUSKOX** (*Ovibos moschatus*) – Another iconic Arctic animal; we had some really wonderful encounters with this species in the Nome area. Their presence in the Nome area has a convoluted history of introduction. A small number were brought into Alaska from Greenland to Nunivak Island in the mid 1930s. As this population grew, stock was released into other areas of Alaska, and between 1969-1981 some were brought to the Seward Peninsula where they persist today.
- DALL'S SHEEP** (*Ovis dalli*) – Seen briefly by some just outside of Anchorage.
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ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 155 bird taxa and 21 mammal taxa