



Field Guides Tour Report

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

Jun 13, 2019 to Jun 23, 2019

Tom Johnson & Cory Gregory

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



This male Willow Ptarmigan showed off his breeding display over the tundra in Nome. Photo by leader Tom Johnson.

We're back from our annual adventure around Alaska, North America's wilderness playground, and there's plenty to report this spring - as always! The birding was truly superb, with a selected highlights list of Bristle-thighed Curlew, Bluethroat, White & Eastern Yellow wagtails, Aleutian Terns, Arctic Loon, Kittlitz's Murrelet, Hudsonian Godwit, Spectacled and Steller's eiders, Yellow-billed Loon, Sabine's Gull, and Little Stint. Though these marquee species were certainly welcome, I think most of us were excited just to visit places where we could see shorebirds doing breeding things in breeding plumage! Mammals were also top notch, with gripping sightings of Killer Whales, Moose, and Harbor, Spotted, Ringed, and Bearded seals, too! For more information on particular species, please read below the introduction for an annotated list of birds & mammals.

Fair skies and warm weather (really warm!) dominated our excellent visits to Nome, Seward, and Utqiagvik (formerly Barrow) this spring. We encountered 80°F days in Nome, and the mercury even reached 70°F on our first afternoon in Utqiagvik – this is an almost unbelievable temperature in this far northern place where temperatures usually hover in the 30s in mid-June. Despite the warmth, we managed to avoid any issues from hatches of biting insects, and the days were very, very pleasant. The thermometer was a sobering reminder that we are currently bearing witness to a rapidly changing climate, with Alaska directly in the crucible.

First, we left Anchorage and flew to Nome for three nights. In Nome, we had plenty of time to bird on the three major roads out of town: the Council Road leading to Safety Sound and beyond, the Kougark Road leading to the mystical hilly land of the Bristle-thighed Curlew, and the Nome-Teller Highway leading to, well, Teller (but we didn't go that far, opting to spend our time along the road's river valleys and rocky tundra habitats). We made the most out of our time in Nome with early morning departures and optional after-dinner outings to the Nome River Mouth and Safety Sound (with nap breaks strategically sprinkled into the afternoons). Quite memorable to me were the surprise Arctic Loon that snuck up behind us on the ocean adjacent to Safety Sound, the very showy pairs of Eastern Yellow Wagtails on the Teller Highway, the masses of nesting Aleutian Terns at the Nome River Mouth, displaying Bluethroats, the sneaky Bristle-thighed Curlew that we nearly tripped over, and the rare and surprising Kittlitz's Murrelets that Cory picked out offshore from town on our glassy calm final morning. Nesting Gyrfalcons, Rough-legged Hawks, and Golden Eagles weren't too shabby, either! Nome is probably my favorite non-Cape May birding destination in North America, and I was pleased that it was in its full glory during this spring's visit.

On to Seward! We returned by air to Anchorage, picked up our vans, and drove south along Turnagain Arm and then through the mountains to reach beautiful Seward. This town, nestled along the rugged, spruce-lined shore of Resurrection Bay, was our home for two nights. Our main motivation for visiting Seward is the chartered boat trip that we take into Kenai Fjords National Park. Once again, Captain Tanya Shober took us around Cape Aialik to the Chiswell Islands and eventually the Aialik Glacier, helping us find a special assortment of marine birds and mammals including 9 species of Alcid (highlight species: Kittlitz's & Marbled murrelets, Parakeet Auklets, Rhinoceros Auklets, and Ancient Murrelets), Black Oystercatchers, Killer Whales up close (REALLY close), Humpback Whales, Sea Otters, and plenty of Steller's Sea Lions. Guest leader Andrew Dreelin from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology joined us for our boat trip to help point out key species, and he also kept our eBird lists for the day (not a simple task on long boat trips!). On our return trip from Seward to Anchorage, we visited birdfeeders and birded along a transect through forest habitats, finding Red and White-winged crossbills, Pine Grosbeak, Rufous Hummingbird, American Dipper, Trumpeter Swan, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Varied Thrush, and more.

The final stage of this tour requires a flight north from Anchorage over the vast interior of Alaska and the impressive Brooks Range, that enormous Arctic mountain chain that cuts east-west across the northern part of The Great Land. This air journey allows us to visit the coast of Utqiagvik (formerly called Barrow), the northernmost city in the United States of America. Here the icy sea meets the tundra and the animals are largely different from those found in other parts of Alaska. The native Alaskan community hunts whales and seals, but birders come here primarily to seek Arctic-breeding

shorebirds and waterfowl. We were shocked by the warm air temperature and the vast amount of open water along the shoreline here (more than I've seen here before in early-mid June), but it became clear that the open water made for great seawatching. Setting up our scopes on the beach across from the Top of the World Hotel, we were able to see migrating and commuting Yellow-billed Loons, Brant, Long-tailed Ducks, Thick-billed Murres, and all four species of eiders. This was just an aperitif for the action we enjoyed on the coastal tundra, where we took in up-close views of Spectacled, Steller's, and King eiders, nesting Sabine's Gulls, a territorial Little Stint, breeding Pomarine and Parasitic jaegers, and pure white Snowy Owls. The breeding displays and fights of the Pectoral Sandpipers and Red Phalaropes also punctuated this fascinating landscape. Seals were surprisingly easy to see from shore this year in Utqiagvik, with both Ringed (many) and Bearded (just three of these big guys) seals on offer on the nearshore ice. Once we soaked in as much of the birdlife of Utqiagvik, we made sure to visit the Inupiat Heritage Center to learn about the human history and culture of the area. **A quick note on the name of this place - In October 2016, the city of Barrow held a vote, with voters deciding to officially change the name of the city to "Utqiagvik," an Inupiat word meaning roughly "the place where we gathered wild roots." We choose to honor the official native name of this place, but do note that many people, including many native residents, still call the place "Barrow." **

Returning to Anchorage after such a thrilling experience in the true Arctic was bittersweet, but there was more birding left to do! In Anchorage, we made our final attempt at Potter Marsh to see the oft-hidden Falcated Duck that had performed so nicely for us on our Part 1 tour (no luck this time), and then put a bow on the birding with a lovely group of Hudsonian Godwits in the scope at Westchester Lagoon. One final dinner at the Flying Machine Restaurant helped us toast our favorite birds and beasts, and then we parted ways for the trip home.

Cory and I would like to offer thanks to all of the members of our group for helping to make this a memorable experience! Karen Turner anchored the logistics of our operation from the Austin office and deserves much applause for her efforts. We also thank Andrew Dreelin for his help on the Seward boat trip.

Until next time!

Tom

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 saw a few in Nome, but they were downright common on the tundra around Utqiagvik.

BRANT (BLACK) (*Branta bernicla nigricans*) – We saw a few flocks near the coast in Nome, but many more were in Utqiagvik. There we found plenty on the tundra but also large flocks migrating northeast along the coast.

CAKCLING GOOSE (*Branta hutchinsii*) – We found some of the large breeding birds in Nome (usually referred to as "Taverner's" Cackling Goose), but we also saw a flock of 13 presumed "minima" Cackling Geese, rare in Nome and scarcely larger than the American Wigeon they were standing alongside.

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) – The population of odd, medium-sized white-cheeked geese in the Anchorage area has long been treated as "parvipes" Canada Goose (also called "Lesser Canada Goose"), but there are some issues with that treatment. In any case, we saw plenty of these "Anchorage Geese." [N]

TRUMPETER SWAN (*Cygnus buccinator*) – Several pairs of these big swans swam on marshes and lakes in the Anchorage area, and also along our route between Anchorage and Seward.

TUNDRA SWAN (WHISTLING) (*Cygnus columbianus columbianus*) – Some were on the tundra at Utqiagvik, but we saw hundreds along Safety Sound near Nome.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Spatula clypeata*) – Common and widespread; seen on almost every day of the tour.

GADWALL (*Mareca strepera*) – Fairly common on marshes and lakes in the Anchorage area. [N]

EURASIAN WIGEON (*Mareca penelope*) – Two red-headed males were with a large flock of American Wigeon on Safety Sound near Nome. We were able to identify another individual with pale cheeks and messy sides as a hybrid Eurasian x American Wigeon.

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Mareca americana*) – Common around Anchorage and Nome. [N]

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Quite common in the Anchorage-Seward corridor; two were also seen along the Kougark Road near Nome. [N]

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – These elegant ducks were common at nearly all freshwater wetlands we visited on the tour - in Anchorage, Seward, Nome, and Utqiagvik.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN) (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) – Common around Anchorage and Nome, and we also saw one in Utqiagvik.

CANVASBACK (*Aythya valisineria*) – We found groups of up to 15 birds, a good count, at Safety Sound near Nome.

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*) – A few individuals were at Potter Marsh in Anchorage.

GREATER SCAUP (*Aythya marila*) – This is the "normal" scaup at Nome, and we also saw plenty in Anchorage in comparison with Lesser Scaup. The side-by-side looks of the two species at Westchester Lagoon were particularly instructive.

LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*) – These small scaup are fairly common around Anchorage, and we were happy to compare them to Greater Scaup there.

STELLER'S EIDER (*Polysticta stelleri*) – Several pairs of these fine, small eiders were in flooded tundra and ponds near the coast at Utqiagvik. This is one of our primary dream birds on the North Slope, and as usual, we saw them very well. One of my favorite moments from a late evening outing at Utqiagvik was watching a pair of these special ducks settling in to sleep on a tundra mound as an incredibly thick fog blew in off the ocean and obscured our view beyond about 20 feet!

SPECTACLED EIDER (*Somateria fischeri*) – This is my favorite duck, and one of my favorite birds period! Though they initially played hard to get, we started off our second morning with a few males paddling around and then climbing onto a chunk of floating ice just offshore from our hotel in

Utqiagvik. Later, we saw more of these Spectacular Eiders swimming in the ice near Point Barrow, and then had a wonderful experience with a close male-female pair in a tundra pond.

KING EIDER (*Somateria spectabilis*) – Dozens were sprinkled in with larger flocks of Common Eiders migrating northeast along the coast at Utqiagvik, but our best views were of unpaired males and pairs on tundra ponds just inland from the coast at Utqiagvik.

COMMON EIDER (PACIFIC) (*Somateria mollissima v-nigrum*) – We saw plenty of these distinctive Common Eiders (the males have a bright orange bill) at Nome, and then saw hundreds more as they migrated past us along the coast at Utqiagvik.

HARLEQUIN DUCK (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) – These beautiful ducks of rocky coastlines and fast-flowing rivers were at several places around Nome. We even paced a few with our vans as they flew up the Nome River, clocking the ducks at around 37 mph shortly after takeoff.

SURF SCOTER (*Melanitta perspicillata*) – Several dozen (primarily males) non-breeders were in flocks on the sea at Kenai Fjords.

WHITE-WINGED SCOTER (NORTH AMERICAN) (*Melanitta deglandi deglandi*) – The flocks we saw in Nome totaled over 30 individuals, and we saw 4 more fly by in Utqiagvik. White-winged Scoter has now been split by the AOS NACC; though we studied the birds in Nome carefully, we couldn't pick out the "new" Stejneger's Scoter from Asia this time - all of our critically identified birds were American *deglandi* "White-winged Scoters."

BLACK SCOTER (*Melanitta americana*) – Small numbers were sprinkled around the Nome area.

LONG-TAILED DUCK (*Clangula hyemalis*) – We found a handful in Nome, and then they were quite common at Utqiagvik. We saw several big flocks migrating past, and also found them resting on floating chunks of ice just offshore.

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala islandica*) – An obliging female gave us some great views at our lunch spot between Anchorage and Seward. As is frequently the case in Alaska in June, this female had a blackish bill, inviting confusion with Common Goldeneye and defying most field guide illustrations.

COMMON MERGANSER (*Mergus merganser*) – Twice we found females towing large groups of very cute chicks - one at the Bear Lake weir near Seward had 6 chicks, and another at Summit Lake had 20 (!). [N]

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*) – Very common at Nome; we also saw a flock of 4 fly past at Utqiagvik.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies).

WILLOW PTARMIGAN (*Lagopus lagopus*) – We found at least 6 birds on the Kougarak Road and Teller Highway at Nome, mostly males that were camped out along the side of the road.

Podicipedidae (Grebes).

RED-NECKED GREBE (*Podiceps grisegena*) – Common in the Anchorage area, with a few at Nome and one offshore at Utqiagvik (my first here).

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves).

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Plenty around Anchorage. [I]

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds).

RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRD (*Selasphorus rufus*) – At least two birds visited Ava's feeders outside of Seward.

Gruidae (Cranes).

SANDHILL CRANE (*Antigone canadensis*) – Common around Anchorage and Nome. This is the small northerly subspecies *canadensis*.

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers).

BLACK OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus bachmani*) – Several sightings of up to 6 noisy, whistling birds along the rocky shores of Kenai Fjords NP.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings).

AMERICAN GOLDEN-PLOVER (*Pluvialis dominica*) – Close, lovely views of breeding birds on the tundra at Nome and Utqiagvik. [N]

PACIFIC GOLDEN-PLOVER (*Pluvialis fulva*) – These white-flanked beauties with the long legs were fairly common along coastal tundra at Nome.

SEMPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – These were the ringed plovers that we found commonly at Nome, and also in smaller numbers at Utqiagvik. [N]

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*) – Quite a rarity this far north, one made a surprising flyby at the Nome River Mouth one evening.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies).

BRISTLE-THIGHED CURLEW (*Numenius tahitiensis*) – This one was special! This species was named (*tahitiensis*) for its South Pacific wintering grounds, but on this tour, we seek it in its relatively small breeding range in western Alaska. We hiked up a tussock tundra-covered hill outside of Nome and eventually found one adult wandering around quietly, flanked by a noisy pair of Whimbrel. The squashed head shape, well-spangled upperparts, buffy rump, and even the flared leg feathers were all on display at various points. [N]

WHIMBREL (HUDSONIAN) (*Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*) – We found these widespread curlews on breeding territories along the Kougarak Road outside of Nome. [N]

BAR-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa lapponica*) – A pair fed at the Nome River Mouth on most of our visits, and we also found a few more birds feeding on tundra along the Teller Highway. This race of Bar-tailed Godwit migrates across the Pacific Ocean to winter in Australia and New Zealand.

HUDSONIAN GODWIT (*Limosa haemastica*) – Four adult birds rested on the island in Westchester Lagoon during our visit there on our final afternoon of birding. In fact, this was the final new species addition to our bird list. These fine shorebirds nest across Cook Inlet from Anchorage.

BLACK TURNSTONE (*Arenaria melanocephala*) – One of these pied shorebirds strolled along the beachfront at the Nome River Mouth.

SURFBIRD (*Calidris virgata*) – Awesome! Four breeding plumaged individuals fed along the ocean beach near Safety Sound. These shorebirds are typically confiding, and indeed, we watched them from just about 15 feet away.

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*) – A few of these black-bellied sandpipers were in Nome, but we saw plenty more in Utqiagvik. [N]

BAIRD'S SANDPIPER (*Calidris bairdii*) – We found one of these long-winged sandpipers on a few occasions in a pond in Utqiagvik.

LITTLE STINT (*Calidris minuta*) – Yowza! This bright orange male accompanied several Semipalmated Sandpipers in a pond at Utqiagvik. After our tour, we learned that a pair of Little Stints (surely involving the male we found) had nested on tundra nearby. Though the nest did not fledge young, this was a very rare nesting attempt in North America for this Eurasian species. [N]

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*) – At least one flew around and called at Potter Marsh on our final afternoon of birding.

PECTORAL SANDPIPER (*Calidris melanotos*) – Most birders think of this sandpiper as relatively drab and unexciting; however, we know the truth! More than merely a "giant Least Sandpiper," this species engages in fascinating breeding behavior on the tundra at Utqiagvik. We saw the males

displaying, hooting while floating in slow flight low over the ground with their air sacs distended. Pretty wild! [N]

SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER (*Calidris pusilla*) – This small peep is a common breeder at Nome and in Utqiagvik. We saw many of them doing their aerial wind-up toy display and even found a nest near the roadside in Utqiagvik. [N]

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*) – Fairly common around Nome, with counts of up to 40 birds at the Nome River Mouth. We also saw one with the Little Stint in Utqiagvik.

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*) – A few breeding individuals flew around Potter Marsh while we sought the invisible Falcated Duck. [N]

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – These bright orange, dark-backed dowitchers fed at the roadsides and displayed overhead at Utqiagvik.

WILSON'S SNIPE (*Gallinago delicata*) – Breeders showed off best at Nome, where we found them perched on trees, roadside wires, and even rooftops!

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus lobatus*) – These lovely shorebirds were common in tundra ponds at Nome and Utqiagvik. [N]

RED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) – Wow! Do you remember that interaction between the competing females and the single, bewildered male at Utqiagvik? Seeing this spectacular shorebird engaged in active breeding chases was extra special. [N]

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*) – We found these well-spotted tail-bobbers along the edge of a few rivers at Nome.

WANDERING TATTLER (*Tringa incana*) – We studied two individuals at length along the Council Road out of Nome (and one rather white-bellied individual provided an instructive ID challenge!). Another accompanied us at dinner in Seward one evening. The other restaurant patrons must have been a bit confused.

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – Just two were in comparison with a Lesser Yellowlegs at Westchester Lagoon - we could easily see the longer, slightly upswept bills and well-barred flanks of the Greater.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*) – These compact Tringa sandpipers were at Westchester Lagoon and Potter Marsh in Anchorage.

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)

POMARINE JAEGER (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) – These big, spoon-tailed jaegers were reasonably common on the tundra at Utqiagvik this spring; we saw several nests, including one tended by a mixed light/ dark morph pair. [N]

PARASITIC JAEGER (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) – These falconesque, mid-sized jaegers patrolled the tundra and coastlines at Nome and Utqiagvik. A couple made very close flybys when we were scanning from the gravel at the Nome River Mouth. [N]

LONG-TAILED JAEGER (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) – We found these small jaegers to be pleasantly common at several sites we visited around Nome (perhaps not so pleasant if you're a vole or lemming). [N]

Alcidae (Auks, Murres, and Puffins)

COMMON MURRE (*Uria aalge*) – These alcids were common in the Kenai Fjords, with hundreds dotting the sea. We also photographed one flying past the seafront in Utqiagvik. [N]

THICK-BILLED MURRE (*Uria lomvia*) – We found small flocks of these stocky alcids passing regularly along the coast in Utqiagvik.

BLACK GUILLEMOT (*Cepphus grylle*) – One paddled around in the harbor at Nome (where uncommon), and then we saw plenty more at Utqiagvik. The open water close to shore at Utqiagvik made it much easier than normal to find this species this spring. It was peculiar to see one courting pair running around on the beach (in between spirited, looping chase flights).

PIGEON GUILLEMOT (*Cepphus columba*) – This was the guillemot that we saw commonly in nearshore waters at Seward and the Kenai Fjords.

MARbled MURRELET (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*) – Many dozens of these small, dark alcids dotted the waters of Kenai Fjords, usually in groups of 2. It was exciting to see one in a small flock of Kittlitz's Murrelets and see (in direct comparison) that the Marbled was more uniformly dark with a longer bill.

KITTLITZ'S MURRELET (*Brachyramphus brevirostris*) – This single species offers us an excellent excuse to take our chartered boat trip into the Kenai Fjords National Park. In southern Alaska, the species relies on protected water near tidewater glaciers for feeding, and nests in gravel-strewn areas high on adjacent mountains. We were pleased to find 16 of these rare and highly specialized alcids in Aialik Bay. It was exciting to see them up close at Kenai Fjords following the exciting but very distant discovery of ~9 birds offshore from the Nome River Mouth on a day with very calm water.

ANCIENT MURRELET (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*) – Six of these beautiful gray, white, and black seabirds were paddling around in a surprising patch of inshore, protected water at Kenai Fjords NP. Tanya turned the boat around and we enjoyed some splendid views before the murrelets jumped up and buzzed off into the distance.

PARAKEET AUKLET (*Aethia psittacula*) – About 25 individuals were in a single cove at "Cecil's Place" in the Chiswell Islands, a traditional breeding site for this species near the southeastern extent of its breeding range. [N]

RHINOCEROS AUKLET (*Cerorhinca monocerata*) – We spotted over 230 of these sturdy, compact alcids in big flocks near the mouth of Aialik Bay. Some of them let us get close enough to see their tiny rhino horns.

HORNED PUFFIN (*Fratercula corniculata*) – Hundreds surrounded us during our boat trip at the Kenai Fjords. [N]

TUFTED PUFFIN (*Fratercula cirrhata*) – These big, black puffins showed off their fancy blonde ponytails around the Chiswell Islands during our boat trip. [N]

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE (*Rissa tridactyla*) – Very common around the Kenai Fjords area; we also saw smaller numbers at Nome and Utqiagvik. [N]

SABINE'S GULL (*Xema sabini*) – Two pairs of these gorgeous gulls were nesting at Utqiagvik, and we enjoyed seeing a non-incubating adult chase a Red Phalarope away from the nest on multiple occasions. [N]

BONAPARTE'S GULL (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*) – About 20 were on the Cook Inlet mudflats as seen from the Westchester Lagoon area.

MEW GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus canus brachyrhynchus*) – Very common around the Anchorage area; we saw small numbers at Nome and in Seward. Sometimes called "Short-billed Gull." [N]

HERRING GULL (*Larus argentatus*) – Just a few sightings of ratty immature birds in the Nome area - it is unclear if these were American or Asian (Vega) in origin.

SLATY-BACKED GULL (*Larus schistisagus*) – An immature bird gave us fleeting looks as it flew from the Nome dump to the Nome River Mouth; however, the lovely adult that Richard spotted in the Nome Harbor was very cooperative, perching atop a ship without a care until we had our fill and drove away!

GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL (*Larus glaucescens*) – This is the common large gull in the Seward and Kenai Fjords area. In Anchorage, hybrids between Glaucous-winged Gull and Herring Gull are very common, and we saw them repeatedly. [N]

GLAUCOUS GULL (*Larus hyperboreus*) – This is the common large gull of Nome and Utqiagvik. They can be recognized by their pure white wingtips. [N]

ALEUTIAN TERN (*Onychoprion aleuticus*) – This western Alaska specialty was particularly common around Nome this year. We saw hundreds, with the biggest numbers around the Nome River Mouth. Every time we went to the river mouth, the chirping calls of these beautiful terns filled the air, and we had some amazingly close views. Aleutian Terns show a low degree of nest side fidelity from year to year, so populations and colony locations fluctuate wildly around Nome. [N]

ARCTIC TERN (*Sterna paradisaea*) – This champion migrant is quite common around Anchorage, Seward, and Nome, and we also saw a few at Utqiagvik. They were pretty far along in their nesting season, and we saw quite a few chicks, including one camped out on top of a road-killed weasel in Anchorage (!). [N]

Gaviidae (Loons)

RED-THROATED LOON (*Gavia stellata*) – These small loons are very common around Nome. [N]

ARCTIC LOON (*Gavia arctica*) – Yip yip! This species is usually difficult to find in Nome, so we really lucked into the breeding plumaged adult that was swimming along the beach at Safety Sound. We noted the bulkier bill, darker nape, white leg patch, and more distinct white neck stripes that help to separate this species from Pacific Loon - after views like this, it's hard to believe that these two used to be lumped together as one species.

PACIFIC LOON (*Gavia pacifica*) – A few sightings of up to 8 individuals at Nome; later we saw lots at Utqiagvik. [N]

COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*) – We saw adults scattered around on lakes at Anchorage, Seward, and offshore at Nome.

YELLOW-BILLED LOON (*Gavia adamsii*) – We tallied 6 breeding plumaged adults in Utqiagvik on this visit. Though we did eventually see 2 on the water through the scope, the best sighting was of the close flyby adult that Cory spotted as it was inbound from the distance. He identified the bird, shouted so that we were all alert and looking in the right direction, and then gave us pointers on what field marks to look for as this biggest of the loons whizzed past us in great lighting conditions - textbook! I think a mutual salute passed between Cory and the loon during the flyby.

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATER (*Ardenna tenuirostris*) – The individual that we saw wheeling around at the Nome River Mouth put on a show and let us see the short bill, crooked wings, and subtle, diffuse pale underwing pattern that helps to distinguish this species from Sooty Shearwater (geography was also helpful in making this distinction!).

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

RED-FACED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax urile*) – We had a few quick, distant flybys during our boat trip in the Kenai Fjords NP, but they weren't camped out at known breeding sites that we visited.

PELAGIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*) – Common at breeding sites at Kenai Fjords NP, and we saw at least one more at Nome. [N]

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Common around Seward.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – A few of these huge birds showed off in flight along the Kougark Road in Nome, and we were fortunate to see an adult visiting a nest with chicks atop a towering cliff, too. [N]

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus hudsonius*) – Just a few sightings in the Nome area during this tour.

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – We found a few around Anchorage, but saw plenty between Seward and Kenai Fjords NP.

RED-TAILED HAWK (HARLAN'S) (*Buteo jamaicensis harlani*) – Scattered sightings in the Anchorage-Seward area. This is the normal breeding subspecies of Red-tailed Hawk in Alaska's boreal forest region.

ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK (*Buteo lagopus*) – We found a few in the Nome area, including a pair sitting on a stick nest near some nesting Gyrfalcons! All were light morph individuals, normal for this area.

Strigidae (Owls)

SNOWY OWL (*Bubo scandiacus*) – At least 5 individuals monitored us as we birded the tundra near Utqiagvik. It was particularly nice to study some of the very white, lightly marked adult males that rarely migrate far enough to make it down into southern Canada and the Lower 48 US.

SHORT-EARED OWL (*Asio flammeus*) – Two sightings in the Nome area - one on the Kougark Road and one on the Teller Highway.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – We found several of these familiar birds between Anchorage and Seward.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Dryobates pubescens*) – A family was in the vicinity of Ava's feeders near Seward.

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Dryobates villosus*) – We were fortunate to compare these mid-sized woodpeckers with the smaller Downy Woodpeckers at feeders in Seward.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

GYRFALCON (*Falco rusticolus*) – Awesome! We watched two active nests in the Nome area. One nest had three fuzzy chicks in it, and the other nest was unseen but was defended by an impressive and vocal gray morph adult that circled overhead.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – One was escorted off the tundra by a few jaegers as we watched from the Nunavak Road at Utqiagvik.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

ALDER FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax alnorum*) – We heard one along the Kougark Road out of Nome, but the one that teed up in front of us and sang at Westchester Lagoon in Anchorage was much nicer!

Laniidae (Shrikes)

NORTHERN SHRIKE (*Lanius borealis*) – We saw at least three birds in the Nome area - one near the harbor and two along the beginning of the Teller Highway.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

STELLER'S JAY (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) – Two of these large, black and blue jays arrived to feed at Ava's place on the outskirts of Seward.

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

NORTHWESTERN CROW (*Corvus caurinus*) – We saw these small crows at Girdwood, in Seward, and in the Kenai Fjords. Don't get too excited though - this "species" is almost certain to be lumped with American Crow in the near future.

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*) – Common and widespread.

Alaudidae (Larks)

HORNED LARK (*Eremophila alpestris*) – One sang nicely and offered scope views on a rocky ridge along the Teller Highway.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – These widespread swallows were easily seen in Nome, Anchorage, and Seward.

VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW (*Tachycineta thalassina*) – We found these beautiful swallows in the Anchorage-Seward corridor. Best views were over Potter Marsh.

BANK SWALLOW (*Riparia riparia*) – A few of these long distance migrants swirled around overhead on various occasions in Nome (where they breed).

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – An orange-bellied American bird flew past us at the Nome River Mouth, and a whitish-bellied Eurasian bird flew past us on the Gaswell Road in Utqiagvik. Overshoots from both sides of the Pacific are rare but regular here.

CLIFF SWALLOW (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) – We saw many of these lovely swallows along rivers near Nome, where they nest under bridges.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE (*Parus atricapillus*) – These widespread chickadees were attending Ava's feeders in Seward.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*) – These conifer-loving nuthatches were at Bear Lake and the Granite Creek Campground between Seward and Turnagain Arm.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

PACIFIC WREN (*Troglodytes pacificus*) – One sang enthusiastically and showed very nicely in dense forest in Seward.

Cinclidae (Dippers)

AMERICAN DIPPER (*Cinclus mexicanus*) – Three were dipping and preening at the Bear Lake salmon weir near Seward.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus satrapa*) – We found these tiny songbirds in forest on the outskirts of Seward.

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*) – Fairly common in the Seward area.

Phylloscopidae (Leaf Warblers)

ARCTIC WARBLER (*Phylloscopus borealis*) – Our tour is timed nicely to accommodate the late spring arrival of Arctic Warblers from their Old World wintering grounds. They were definitely "in" during our time in Nome, and we heard and saw them regularly. The first was particularly nice - it hopped up on top of a willow just across the road from our first displaying Bluethroat!

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

BLUETHROAT (*Luscinia svecica*) – These wonderful little Old World flycatchers are thought to be relatively recent colonists of western Alaska. We had no trouble at all finding a few beautiful males in the river valleys outside of Nome, and managed excellent views of perched and flight-displaying birds. The mimicry in their songs is truly remarkable - we heard snippets of Arctic Warbler, Gray-cheeked Thrush, and other songbirds coming from Bluethroats.

NORTHERN WHEATEAR (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) – A few pairs of these specialty Muscicapids were working a rock-strewn slope along the Teller Highway out of Nome.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

VARIED THRUSH (*Ixoreus naevius*) – Granite Creek Campground was littered with these beauties. We also had a close view of one on the ramp leading up to Ava's feeders.

GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH (*Catharus minimus*) – The Nome area is full of Gray-cheeked Thrushes! They are quite common, audible from every well-vegetated area away from the immediate coast, and even take to perching on rooftops and utility wires here!

SWAINSON'S THRUSH (*Catharus ustulatus*) – A few folks heard and spotted this buff-spectacled thrush in the Seward area.

HERMIT THRUSH (*Catharus guttatus*) – This remarkable songster is very common in the Seward area.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*) – Plenty in Nome, Anchorage, and Seward.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Only in Anchorage. [I]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

EASTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL (*Motacilla tschutschensis*) – We hit the wagtail jackpot along the Teller Highway this year. After seeing some initially skittish birds, we found several pairs that were clearly defending riverside nesting territories. Excellent views of these noisy flying bananas.

WHITE WAGTAIL (*Motacilla alba*) – At the Nome Harbor, one bird flew over us calling; a short while later, we refound it along the rocky shoreline of the inlet and watched it bobbing around at the edge of the water. This species has been scarce in Nome in recent years, so we were fortunate to see this individual.

AMERICAN PIPIT (*Anthus rubescens*) – These rock-loving songbirds were on a dry ridge in the same habitat as Horned Lark and Snow Buntings along the Teller Highway.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies).

- PINE GROSBEAK** (*Pinicola enucleator*) – An incredibly confiding male-female pair fed on dandelions along the roadside in a campground between Anchorage and Seward. They were so close, I think we could have scooped them up in our hands.
- COMMON REDPOLL** (*Acanthis flammea*) – Fairly common in the Anchorage-Seward corridor, and we saw plenty more around Nome as well (where they come into contact with Hoary Redpolls). Recent evidence shows little in the way of genetic differences between Common and Hoary redpolls.
- HOARY REDPOLL** (*Acanthis hornemanni*) – These frosted redpolls were fairly common in areas with short vegetation in Nome (especially along the Teller Highway) and also at Utqiagvik, where we watched them attending feeders with Snow Buntings.
- RED CROSSBILL** (*Loxia curvirostra*) – A male & female giving Type 3 flight calls came in to visit the feeders at Ava's place in Seward. Numbers of these nomadic finches here vary from year to year.
- WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL** (*Loxia leucoptera*) – We heard and saw flyover individuals near Bear Lake, then found a vocal pair in spruces just a few miles farther upslope toward Moose Pass.
- PINE SISKIN** (*Spinus pinus*) – These small, streaky finches were quite common in the Seward area.

Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings).

- LAPLAND LONGSPUR** (*Calcarius lapponicus*) – The wiry, melodic songs of these songbirds filled the air of Nome and Utqiagvik. We often found males parachuting down to earth as they sang, or saw females carrying billfuls of insects to unseen chicks.
- SNOW BUNTING** (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) – A few were in high, rocky habitat along the Teller Highway near Nome, but they were downright common in Utqiagvik.

Passerellidae (New World Sparrows).

- AMERICAN TREE SPARROW** (*Spizelloides arborea*) – We encountered small numbers of these handsome, rust-capped sparrows along riparian corridors all around Nome.
- FOX SPARROW (SOOTY)** (*Passerella iliaca sinuosa*) – A few of these chunky, dark-plumaged Fox Sparrows were in the Seward area (including at Ava's feeders).
- FOX SPARROW (RED)** (*Passerella iliaca zaboria*) – These zaboria "Red" Fox Sparrows were the ones that we saw commonly in riparian areas around Nome. They show more gray in their plumage than "Red" Fox Sparrows found farther east, but are obviously paler and more colorful than the dark "Sooty" Fox Sparrows that we found at Seward.
- DARK-EYED JUNCO (SLATE-COLORED)** (*Junco hyemalis hyemalis*) – These attractive sparrows were seen a few times in the Anchorage-Seward corridor.
- WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (GAMBEL'S)** (*Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*) – This is the widespread White-crowned Sparrow subspecies that we found breeding in many locations during our tour.
- GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROW** (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*) – These lovely, mournful-sounding sparrows were fairly common along the Kougark Road and Teller Highway in the Nome area.
- SAVANNAH SPARROW** (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – Very common in open habitats in the Nome area; less common around Anchorage and Utqiagvik.
- SONG SPARROW** (*Melospiza melodia*) – A few members of the stocky, dark coastal subspecies *kenaiensis* were around Seward, including at Ava's feeders.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies).

- RUSTY BLACKBIRD** (*Euphagus carolinus*) – Our best sighting was of the vocal pair that popped up along a section of wet willows along the Kougark Road near Nome.

Parulidae (New World Warblers).

- NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH** (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) – We scoped a few singing individuals on the outskirts of Nome. Some even sat on utility wires!
- ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER** (*Oreothlypis celata*) – These plain-patterned warblers were fairly common around Nome, Anchorage, and Seward.
- YELLOW WARBLER** (*Setophaga petechia*) – This widespread, sweet-voiced warbler was most common in the river corridors around Nome.
- BLACKPOLL WARBLER** (*Setophaga striata*) – Small numbers sang their very high-pitched songs along river corridors in the Nome area.
- YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (MYRTLE)** (*Setophaga coronata coronata*) – We found these widespread migrant warblers to be fairly common in the area between Anchorage and Seward.
- TOWNSEND'S WARBLER** (*Setophaga townsendi*) – This was the most striking warbler we found on the tour (color-wise at least) - they were in the massive Sitka spruces of the Seward area.
- WILSON'S WARBLER** (*Cardellina pusilla*) – These black-capped warblers were common in riparian areas in Nome and Seward.

MAMMALS

- ARCTIC GROUND SQUIRREL** (*Spermophilus parryi*) – These squirrels were along the roadsides on several occasions around Nome.
- RED SQUIRREL** (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) – This was the squirrel we found on several occasions in the conifer forests of the Seward area.
- MUSKRAT** (*Ondatra zibethica*) – One of these diligent mammals swam across Potter Marsh in Anchorage.
- NEARCTIC BROWN LEMMING** (*Lemmus trimucronatus*) – A couple of these roly poly rodents scooted around the tundra at Utqiagvik (likely providing future food for Snowy Owls and Pomarine Jaegers).
- KILLER WHALE** (*Orcinus orca*) – WOW! We only see these massive, charismatic marine mammals on about half of our trips in the Kenai Fjords. This year's boat trip was absolutely spectacular, with multiple family groups feeding and interacting around the Chiswell Islands in a rich area of life that was also full of seabirds and Humpback Whales.
- HARBOR PORPOISE** (*Phocoena phocoena*) – At least one was seen, well, porpoising (!) through the calm waters offshore from the Nome River Mouth.
- HUMBACK WHALE** (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) – Several individuals fed and surfaced repeatedly in the area of the Chiswell Islands during our Kenai Fjords boat trip. These showy whales are identifiable by their knobbed backs, very long "wings," and distinctive black-and-white flukes.

RED FOX (*Vulpes vulpes*) – One individual was along the Kougatok Road out of Nome.

COYOTE (*Canis latrans*) – The one standing in the road running through Granite Creek Campground near Moose Pass was a real surprise (and the first one that I've seen on our Alaska tours) to us. I think the animal was also surprised to see birding groups looking at it from both directions along the road!

SEA OTTER (*Enhydra lutris*) – These densely furred mammals were rolling around and feeding in the cold water near Seward and in the Kenai Fjords NP.

TELLER'S SEA LION (*Eumetopias jubatus*) – These large, tan-colored sea lions were hauled out on rocky islands in coastal areas of the Kenai Fjords NP.

HARBOR SEAL (*Phoca vitulina*) – These "true seals" were seen in great numbers near the Aialik Glacier in Kenai Fjords NP. We even got to hear one barking and yowling from the water as we admired the calving glacier.

SPOTTED SEAL (*Phoca largha*) – One individual was hauled out along the edge of the Nome harbor. This species looks very similar to Harbor Seal.

RINGED SEAL (*Phoca hispida*) – These were the small seals that we saw commonly on the ice off the coast of Utqiagvik (mostly at the base of Point Barrow). Fortunately, we could see the pale circles (the namesake "rings") marking the dark pelage. This species is one of the primary sources of food for Polar Bears.

BEARDED SEAL (*Erignathus barbatus*) – We saw three of these large, plain-patterned seals with relatively small heads and long bodies on the ice near the base of Point Barrow. These seals are typically found farther offshore than Ringed Seals, and are the favored seal for hunting by the Inupiat population in Utqiagvik.

MOOSE (*Alces alces*) – A few of these massive deer were along rivers in Nome, and we saw a few more during our drives between Anchorage and Seward.

CARIBOU (*Rangifer tarandus granti*) – A large herd of ~150 animals crossed the Kougatok Road in front of us in the vicinity of Salmon Lake.

MUSKOX (*Ovibos moschatus*) – These fascinating mammals were tending babies in large nursery groups along the Kougatok Road and the Teller Highway outside of Nome. We saw a small group gallop down a steep hill just so they could wallow in a patch of shaded, unmelted snow on a warm Nome day.

DALL'S SHEEP (*Ovis dalli*) – A few groups of these sure-footed, white sheep seemed like they were glued to the rocks above the Turnagain Arm of Cook Inlet, just south of Anchorage.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 160 bird taxa and 19 mammal taxa