

Trip Report — Alaska: The Great Land I 2026

May 30-June 12, 2026 with Micah Riegner & Sam Wilson



Our group enjoying the balmy 45 degrees in Nome!

Sam and I had another great tour in *The Great Land*. Nome was our first destination this year, then we did Seward then Utqiagvik (Barrow). We took the morning flight to Nome and upon arrival we headed straight to the Nome River Mouth where we had close encounters with Aleutian Terns in courtship mode. We briefly saw a Red-necked Stint, but it mysteriously disappeared before we could get everyone on it. A Sanderling in breeding plumage with brick red flares on the head and neck was cool to see. After lunch we went out Safety Sound and saw our first of many Willow Ptarmigans and Long-tailed Jaegers.

Our first full day in Nome we drove the Teller Road into the high rocky tundra. Before we even got out of town, we saw Fox and American Tree Sparrows, Gray-cheeked Thrush, and Blackpoll, Orange-crowned and Wilson's warblers. Further out, we saw Short-eared Owls, a single Bar-tailed Godwit, and some Hudsonian Whimbrels. Our original plan was to do a hike in the tundra, but it was super foggy, so we drove on. We made it out to Woolly Lagoon and set up a picnic lunch alongside Rock Ptarmigans and displaying American Golden Plovers. An American Pipit was busy collecting food to feed its young. The fog cleared, so after our picnic lunch we backtracked to the *Mile 34* and saw a Buff-breasted Sandpiper, several Surfbirds, Northern Wheatears and some close Lapland Longspurs. We came back to Nome and saw some Muskox along the road then did some sea watching in the evening. A couple distant Steller's Eiders and an Emperor Goose flew by. Our second day in Nome, we birded the Kougarak Road. Again, it was super foggy, but then it cleared up as we drove further inland. We saw a number of Arctic Warblers in the willows along the road—they were several days ahead of their normal arrival date. We reached Coffee Dome and met up with the Wings group, who were already on their way up to see the Bristle-thighed Curlews. They found a pair while we still getting out of the vans, so we hustled up the mountain to join them. Great views! We headed back and did a picnic along the Pilgrim River and at the bridge we saw a Say's Phoebe on one of the trusses. We continued back and saw a distant Golden Eagle on one of the slopes and a Northern Shrike hunting from a telephone wire.



We enjoyed several close Aleutian Terns along the Nome River, noting their short tails and white foreheads to tell them apart from the more common Arctic Terns. Photo by guide Micah Riegner.

Our final day in Nome (so we thought!), we went out the Council Road, which traverses Safety Sound. Just past Cape Nome we saw a flock of White-winged Scoters, so we scoped them and found a Stejneger's Scoter mixed in with them! It had a more pronounced knob on the bill, and it was a richer black overall. It also sat more upright compared to the White-wings. We followed the flock about a half mile as the tide took them along the break wall. Other birders swarmed as the word got out. At the bridge we saw a few Sabine's Gulls and some Red Phalaropes mixed in with all the Red-necked Phalaropes. Near the *Last Train To Nowhere* we saw an Eastern Yellow Wagtail. We then did our picnic lunch at a pullout a bit further on, before stopping to scope a Gyrfalcon, a beautiful gray morph adult.



Our charter boat approaching Aialik Glacier, where we'd see Kittlitz's Murrelets and Black Oystercatchers. Photo by tour participant Chuck Estes.

Before leaving for the Nome airport, we made another visit to the Nome River where there were Red Knots and Bar-tailed Godwits in good light. We got checked in at the airport, but it wasn't long before they announced that the flight was canceled due to weather station issues. Sam and I scrambled to get us rebooked and with the help from Karen in our office, we found lodging at various sites in town. We were lucky there was availability for all of us! At first, it was looking like we'd be stuck another 2 days, but then Sam managed to rebook us on a makeup flight for the following day. Yippee! After leaving our bags back in town, we had a quick lunch, then birded out Safety Sound, reaching mile 28 where we saw Emperor Geese at a distance. Sabine's Gulls were out at the bridge again, along with Pacific Loons. An Ermine zipped across the road, disappearing into the rocks below. The following day was mostly a travel day because we had to get to Anchorage, then from

Anchorage down to Seward, but we squeezed a bit of birding around Nome before our flight. We reached Anchorage and hit the ground running. First, Sam and I picked up the vans, then we snagged a takeout dinner to eat on the road, and we were off to Seward. Along the Turnagain Arm we saw some distant Dall Sheep on the hills and there were loads of Bald Eagles along the shoreline. We reached our hotel in Seward right around 10:00 pm and went straight to bed. Long day.



One of the many alcids we saw during our Seward boat trip: Ancient Murrelet. Photo by guide Micah Riegner.

Our charter boat trip on the Kenai Fjords couldn't have gone better. We had nice overcast weather with no rain, and more importantly, no wind. Early on, we picked up Marbled Murrelets, Pelagic Cormorants and Humpback Whales in Resurrection Bay, then out at the Chiswell Islands, we saw Common and the less numerous Thick-billed Murres, hundreds of Black-legged Kittiwakes, a pair of Ancient Murrelets, both Horned and Tufted Puffins, and a pair of

Parakeet Auklets. Steller's Sealions were hauled out on the rocks too. The highlight though was a pod of 15+ Orcas slowly cruising along. We entered Aialik Bay and encountered another pod of Orcas, so we watched them for a while. Reaching Aialik Glacier, we located several Kittlitz's Murrelets, Black Oystercatchers and some Barrow's Goldeneyes, then we made our way back to Seward. Before leaving Aialik Bay, we stopped at a huge raft of Rhinoceros Auklets with kittiwakes and gulls mixed in. We reached Seward tired but exhilarated, and had dinner at Ray's Waterfront, one of the best restaurants in all of Alaska. We then birded near the Seward Airport and found a Wandering Tattler and some Hudsonian Whimbrels out on the mudflats.



Once back in Anchorage, we tracked down this male Spruce Grouse. Sam took us to a secret spot of his and within 12 minutes the bird showed up! Photo by guide Micah Riegner.

On our way back to Anchorage, we made a number of stops, first at Lowell Point where we saw Rufous Hummingbird and Townsend's Warbler, then

we drove over to Two Lakes Park where we saw American Dipper, Pacific Wren, Sooty Fox Sparrow, and Chestnut-backed Chickadee. We had lunch at a cute café in Girdwood, then checked out Ruth Arcand Park and saw several Three-toed Woodpeckers, some of which were super close. After that, Sam took us to his secret Spruce Grouse spot. We parked off the side of the road and walked into the forest and exactly 12 minutes later, there was a male Spruce Grouse in full view right in front of us! Incredible. We saw Alder flycatcher there too. Then we were off to Utqiagvik.

Our time there was both frustrating and rewarding. It was frustrating because the tundra was still iced over due to a delayed spring, so there were no eiders out on the lakes where we typically see them. It was rewarding because we saw a bunch of other cool Arctic birds and wildlife. Our time was spent birding the three main access roads. Along the Cake Eater Road, we saw huge numbers of Dunlin, Red and Red-necked Phalaropes, a close Red-necked Stint, and Black-bellied Plovers. Along the Nunavak Road, we saw a male Snowy Owl, several Pomarine Jaegers, Sabine's Gulls foraging in shallow pools, and some flyover King Eiders and Yellow-billed Loons. Along Stevenson Street, which leads to the Naval Arctic Research Lab and then Point Barrow, we saw found the Red-throated Pipit that had been reported there, Gray-cheeked Thrushes, a female Willow Ptarmigan and Ruddy Turnstones. Right before leaving on the final day, a Yellow-billed Loon landed in a small pool right off the side of the road. It was just spectacular to watch it so close! Then not too long after that we saw a Polar Bear out on the ice feeding on some kind of carcass—a nice way to wrap up our time in the Arctic.



Our group on an after-dinner outing in Seward. Photo by tour participant Chuck Estes.

Our final day of birding, we ran around Anchorage to clean up on some species we had yet to see. Among the highlights of that day were American Porcupine up in a tree, a flyby American Goshawk, Boreal Chickadees, Brown Creeper and a Moose walking along a lake. We stopped at Westchester Lagoon in the afternoon to coincide with the high tide. Unfortunately, there were no Hudsonian Godwits visible, but we saw some close Sandhill Cranes, another Alder Flycatcher and an Osprey getting mobbed by Arctic Terns. We had dinner back at the hotel, wrapping up a fantastic time in Alaska.

Sam and I would like to thank Karen in our office for her essential support, especially when we were stuck in Nome. We'd like to thank our wonderful Seward crew who took such great care of us on our boat day, and we'd like to thank you all for joining us up in Alaska... we look forward to more birding together!



Arctic Warblers had arrived in Nome in good numbers. We saw this one along the Kougarok Road. Photo by guide Micah Riegner.

Mammals

Snowshoe Hare (*Lepus americanus*) We saw a few near Nome.

Alaskan Hare (*Lepus othus*) The large hares that were along the Kougarok Road.

Arctic Ground Squirrel (*Urocitellus parryi*) Plentiful. We saw some close ones in Nome.

North American Red Squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) Somehow we missed seeing them, but we did hear one at Goose Lake.

North American Beaver (*Castor canadensis*) Terrific views along the Kougarok Road.

North American Porcupine (*Erethizon dorsatum*) We saw one up in a tree near Anchorage.

Killer Whale (*Orcinus orca*) There were at least 15 in a pod out at Chiswell

Islands

Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) Seen on our Seward boat trip.

Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) We had a couple close encounters in Nome.

Polar Bear (*Ursus maritimus*) About half the group saw one the night we went out after dinner, then the rest of the group caught up the following day when we saw one on the ice eating a carcass.

Ermine (*Mustela erminea*) One zipped across the road in Nome.

Sea Otter (*Enhydra lutris*) We had fun watching these on our Seward boat trip.

Steller Sea Lion (*Eumetopias jubatus*) Several were out at the Chiswell Islands.

Harbor Seal (*Phoca vitulina*) Seen mostly around Seward.

Moose (*Alces alces*) We saw one along the side of a lake in Anchorage.

Mountain Goat (*Oreamnos americanus*) We had tremendous views of a mom with her tiny baby that was about the size of a rabbit during our Seward boat trip.

Muskox (*Ovibos moschatus*) We had regular encounters with these tremendous tundra goats outside of Nome.

Butterflies

Northern Marble (*Euchloe creusa*) We saw one on the Kougarok Road, Nome.

Red-disked Alpine (*Erebia discoidalis*) One was flying around during our picnic along the Kougarok Road.

You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/540093>

You can download a combined PDF of this page and the eBird report at this link: <https://fieldguides.com/triplists/aka26aTRIPLIST.pdf>

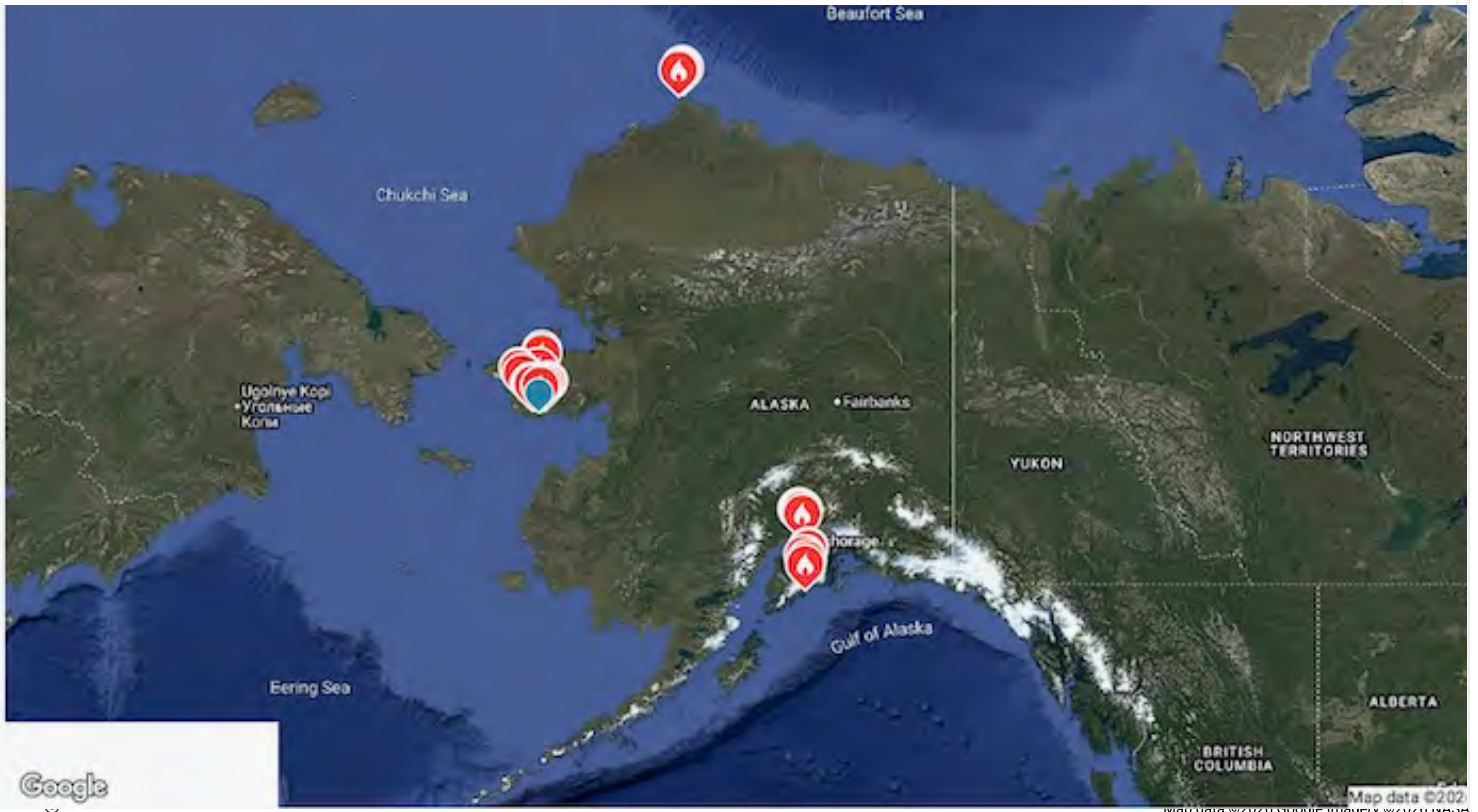
-- Micah



Field Guides Birding Tours --ALASKA: THE GREAT LAND , 2026 (with guides Micah Riegner and Sam Wilson)



30 May – 11 Jun 2026 (13 days) Link-only



Alaska, United States

Anchorage Municipality | Kenai Peninsula Borough | Nome Census Area | North Slope Borough

Micah Riegner



For a narrative summary of this tour, including a Field Guides photo gallery and additional media for this trip report, visit:...

161

Species Observed

61

Checklists

1

Species with Photos

LIFERS 1 1

Species Observed

[Show all details](#)

3	Emperor Goose	<i>Anser canagicus</i>	▶  1
16	Snow Goose	<i>Anser caerulescens</i>	▶  5
686	Greater White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>	▶  8
666	Brant	<i>Branta bernicla</i>	▶  12
4	Cackling Goose	<i>Branta hutchinsii</i>	▶  2
7	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	▶  1
4	Trumpeter Swan	<i>Cygnus buccinator</i>	▶  2
639	Tundra Swan	<i>Cygnus columbianus</i>	▶  12
19	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	▶  7
7	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	▶  3
21	American Wigeon	<i>Mareca americana</i>	▶  9
24	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	▶  3
114	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	▶  14
29	Green-winged Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	▶  9
2	Ring-necked Duck	<i>Aythya collaris</i>	▶  1
4	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	▶  2
90	Greater Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>	▶  13
3	Lesser Scaup	<i>Aythya affinis</i>	▶  2
1	Steller's Eider	<i>Polysticta stelleri</i>	▶  1
144	King Eider	<i>Somateria spectabilis</i>	▶  5
132	Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	▶  8
24	Harlequin Duck	<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>	▶  2
8	Surf Scoter	<i>Melanitta perspicillata</i>	▶  2
24	White-winged Scoter	<i>Melanitta deglandi</i>	▶  5
1	Stejneger's Scoter	<i>Melanitta stejnegeri</i> 	▶   1
13	Black Scoter	<i>Melanitta americana</i>	▶  3
363	Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	▶  12
1	Bufflehead	<i>Bucephala albeola</i>	▶  1
1	Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	▶  1
11	Barrow's Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala islandica</i>	▶  3

18	Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	▶ 1
48	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	▶ 10
22	Willow Ptarmigan	<i>Lagopus lagopus</i>	▶ 9
8	Rock Ptarmigan	<i>Lagopus muta</i>	▶ 2
1	Spruce Grouse	<i>Canachites canadensis</i>	▶ 1
4	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i> *	▶ 1
1	Rufous Hummingbird	<i>Selasphorus rufus</i>	▶ 1
13	Sandhill Crane	<i>Antigone canadensis</i>	▶ 6
3	Black Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus bachmani</i>	▶ 2
2	Black-bellied Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	▶ 1
18	American Golden-Plover	<i>Pluvialis dominica</i>	▶ 6
11	Pacific Golden-Plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>	▶ 8
27	Semipalmated Plover	<i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>	▶ 14
2	Bristle-thighed Curlew	<i>Numenius tahitiensis</i>	▶ 1
4	Hudsonian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius hudsonicus</i>	▶ 3
13	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	▶ 5
7	Long-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>	▶ 6
16	Wilson's Snipe	<i>Gallinago delicata</i>	▶ 12
270	Red Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i>	▶ 8
358	Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>	▶ 17
5	Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>	▶ 3
1	Wandering Tattler	<i>Tringa incana</i>	▶ 1
1	Lesser Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>	▶ 1
6	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	▶ 3
2	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	▶ 1
4	Surfbird	<i>Calidris virgata</i>	▶ 1
2	Red-necked Stint	<i>Calidris ruficollis</i>	▶ 2
1	Buff-breasted Sandpiper	<i>Calidris subruficollis</i>	▶ 1
3	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	▶ 2
623	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	▶ 10

1	Baird's Sandpiper	<i>Calidris bairdii</i>	▶  1
4	Least Sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>	▶  3
38	Pectoral Sandpiper	<i>Calidris melanotos</i>	▶  9
177	Western Sandpiper	<i>Calidris mauri</i>	▶  13
167	Semipalmated Sandpiper	<i>Calidris pusilla</i>	▶  11
14	Long-tailed Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius longicaudus</i>	▶  10
20	Parasitic Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	▶  11
8	Pomarine Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>	▶  4
1750	Rhinoceros Auklet	<i>Cerorhinca monocerata</i>	▶  1
39	Tufted Puffin	<i>Fratercula cirrhata</i>	▶  2
41	Horned Puffin	<i>Fratercula corniculata</i>	▶  4
2	Parakeet Auklet	<i>Aethia psittacula</i>	▶  1
8	Kittlitz's Murrelet	<i>Brachyramphus brevirostris</i>	▶  1
34	Marbled Murrelet	<i>Brachyramphus marmoratus</i>	▶  4
26	Pigeon Guillemot	<i>Cephus columba</i>	▶  4
9	Thick-billed Murre	<i>Uria lomvia</i>	▶  2
445	Common Murre	<i>Uria aalge</i>	▶  4
7	Ancient Murrelet	<i>Synthliboramphus antiquus</i>	▶  3
5270	Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	▶  10
14	Sabine's Gull	<i>Xema sabini</i>	▶  5
3	Bonaparte's Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus philadelphia</i>	▶  2
141	Short-billed Gull	<i>Larus brachyrhynchus</i>	▶  13
668	Glaucous Gull	<i>Larus hyperboreus</i>	▶  18
1929	Glaucous-winged Gull	<i>Larus glaucescens</i>	▶  6
16	Aleutian Tern	<i>Onychoprion aleuticus</i>	▶  4
130	Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	▶  16
1	Horned Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	▶  1
25	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>	▶  4
53	Red-throated Loon	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	▶  12
22	Pacific Loon	<i>Gavia pacifica</i>	▶  8

4	Common Loon	<i>Gavia immer</i>	▶  4
5	Yellow-billed Loon	<i>Gavia adamsii</i>	▶  3
2	Red-faced Cormorant	<i>Urile urile</i>	▶  2
36	Pelagic Cormorant	<i>Urile pelagicus</i>	▶  6
4	Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Nannopterum auritum</i>	▶  2
1	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	▶  1
2	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	▶  2
1	American Goshawk	<i>Astur atricapillus</i>	▶  1
11	Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	▶  4
1	Rough-legged Hawk	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>	▶  1
1	Snowy Owl	<i>Bubo scandiacus</i>	▶  1
6	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	▶  5
2	Belted Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>	▶  2
6	American Three-toed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides dorsalis</i>	▶  2
1	Downy Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates pubescens</i>	▶  1
2	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	▶  2
1	Gyr Falcon	<i>Falco rusticolus</i> Sensitive	▶  1
3	Alder Flycatcher	<i>Empidonax alnorum</i>	▶  2
2	Say's Phoebe	<i>Sayornis saya</i>	▶  2
1	Northern Shrike	<i>Lanius borealis</i>	▶  1
2	Steller's Jay	<i>Cyanocitta stelleri</i>	▶  2
6	Black-billed Magpie	<i>Pica hudsonia</i>	▶  3
4	American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	▶  3
11	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	▶  9
11	Black-capped Chickadee	<i>Poecile atricapillus</i>	▶  4
2	Chestnut-backed Chickadee	<i>Poecile rufescens</i>	▶  1
3	Boreal Chickadee	<i>Poecile hudsonicus</i>	▶  1
3	Bank Swallow	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	▶  2
77	Tree Swallow	<i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>	▶  10
1	Violet-green Swallow	<i>Tachycineta thalassina</i>	▶  1

2	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	▶  1
16	Cliff Swallow	<i>Petrochelidon pyrrhonota</i>	▶  1
3	Arctic Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus borealis</i>	▶  2
7	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	<i>Corthylio calendula</i>	▶  4
4	Golden-crowned Kinglet	<i>Regulus satrapa</i>	▶  2
8	Red-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta canadensis</i>	▶  3
1	Brown Creeper	<i>Certhia americana</i>	▶  1
2	Pacific Wren	<i>Troglodytes pacificus</i>	▶  2
1	American Dipper	<i>Cinclus mexicanus</i>	▶  1
4	European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> *	▶  1
9	Varied Thrush	<i>Ixoreus naevius</i>	▶  5
14	Gray-cheeked Thrush	<i>Catharus minimus</i>	▶  10
4	Swainson's Thrush	<i>Catharus ustulatus</i>	▶  2
9	Hermit Thrush	<i>Catharus guttatus</i>	▶  5
17	American Robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>	▶  10
4	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>	▶  3
3	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	▶  1
5	Eastern Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla tschutschensis</i>	▶  3
4	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	▶  2
1	Red-throated Pipit	<i>Anthus cervinus</i> ✓	▶  1
2	American Pipit	<i>Anthus rubescens</i>	▶  2
29	Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>	▶  11
4	Pine Siskin	<i>Spinus pinus</i>	▶  2
95	Lapland Longspur	<i>Calcarius lapponicus</i>	▶  13
66	Snow Bunting	<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>	▶  9
5	American Tree Sparrow	<i>Spizelloides arborea</i>	▶  4
7	Fox Sparrow	<i>Passerella iliaca</i>	▶  6
7	Dark-eyed Junco	<i>Junco hyemalis</i>	▶  3
15	White-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>	▶  12
8	Golden-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia atricapilla</i>	▶  5

17	Savannah Sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>	▶  8
2	Song Sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>	▶  2
4	Lincoln's Sparrow	<i>Melospiza lincolnii</i>	▶  2
1	Rusty Blackbird	<i>Euphagus carolinus</i>	▶  1
14	Northern Waterthrush	<i>Parkesia noveboracensis</i>	▶  8
14	Orange-crowned Warbler	<i>Leiothlypis celata</i>	▶  11
6	Northern Yellow Warbler	<i>Setophaga aestiva</i>	▶  4
1	Blackpoll Warbler	<i>Setophaga striata</i>	▶  1
5	Yellow-rumped Warbler	<i>Setophaga coronata</i>	▶  5
2	Townsend's Warbler	<i>Setophaga townsendi</i>	▶  1
12	Wilson's Warbler	<i>Cardellina pusilla</i>	▶  9

HYBRIDS

20	American Herring x Glaucous-winged Gull (hybrid)	<i>Larus smithsonianus x glaucescens</i>	▶  1
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ADDITIONAL TAXA

10	eider sp.	<i>Polysticta/Somateria sp.</i>	▶  1
2	White-winged/Stejneger's Scoter	<i>Melanitta deglandi/stejnegeri</i>	▶  1
300	Thick-billed/Common Murre	<i>Uria lomvia/aalge</i>	▶  1
2	loon sp.	<i>Gavia sp.</i>	▶  1