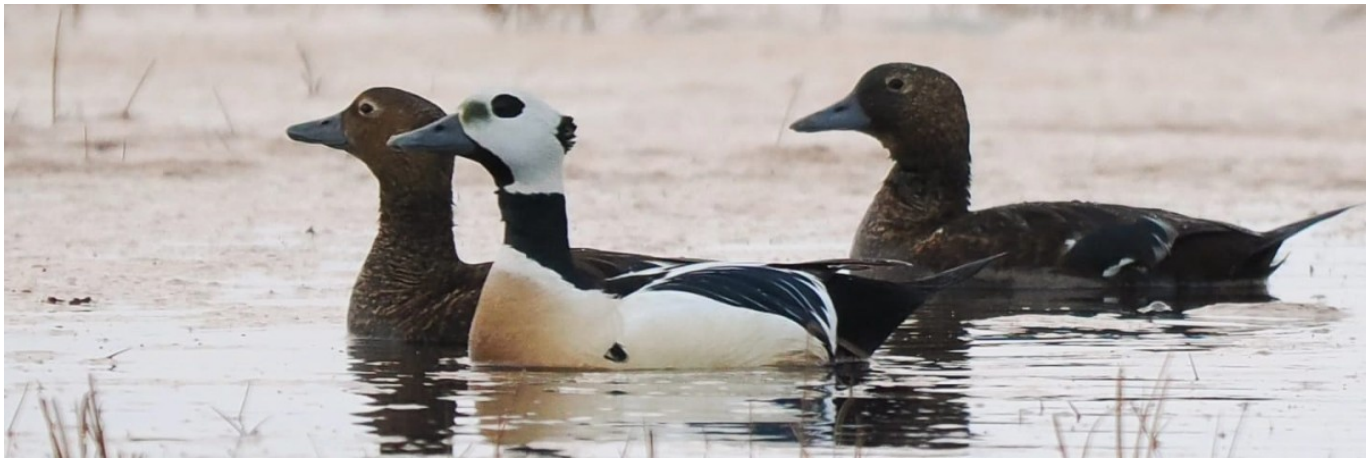
Eagle-Eye Tours



Alaska Birding Tour June 2024

Link: Alaska Birding Tour June 2024

Day 1 - June 4

Our inaugural Alaska Birding tour kicked off in Anchorage with dinner and an opening circle. After dinner, we did some light birding just behind our hotel where we got looks at ***Pacific Loon***, ***Red-necked Grebe, Bonaparte's Gull,*** and some distant views of ***Barrow's Goldeneye***. We also had a flyover of a ***Bohemian Waxwing***!



Red-necked Grebe © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz

Day 2 - June 5

Today was the first full day of birding on our tour, with our first stop at Kincaid Park to look for the ***Spruce Grouse***. Despite the light rain, we got great looks at this charismatic grouse, during the breeding season they became quite bold and fearless, which allowed for great photos and videos on our phones! On the walk back to the vans we spotted a ***Black-billed Magpie,*** a pair of ***Black-capped Chickadees,*** and a ***Red-breasted Nuthatch*** foraging amongst the Sitka Spruce needles. We also were treated to the beautiful rising song of the ***Swainson's Thrush***. We continued our day birding along our drive to Seward. At the Potter Marsh Boardwalk, we saw our first ***Bald Eagle***, ***Solitary Sandpiper***, ***Sandhill Crane***, and a flock of ~50 ***Violet-green Swallows*** foraging overhead. We heard the calls of ***Wilson's Snipe*** and ***Alder Flycatcher*** but couldn't get eyes on them. Afterward, we stopped at Beluga Point to look for mammals, and although the rarely seen Belugas were present we did get to see ~20 ***Dall's Sheep*** foraging on vegetation on the hills above us. For lunch, we stopped off in Girdwood where the spaceship "whirrr" of the ***Varied Thrush*** provided breadcrumbs for us to track down these gorgeous residents of the Coastal Rainforest. We had ***Northern Waterthrush***, **Yellow,** and ***Wilson's Warbler among the willows and alders***! Down the road at Tern Lake, we got great looks at ***Arctic Tern***, ***Short-billed Gull, Golden-crowned Sparrow,*** and a ***Common Loon*** sitting on a nest! After checking into our hotel in Seward we returned to a local home with an awesome feeder setup. Here we observed an awesome assortment of birds, that are generally more challenging to see on the tour. Highlights here included the ***Rufous Hummingbird***, a long-distance migrant that spends its winters as far south as Mexico and migrates 4,000 miles one way to Alaska! Other great birds here included ***Boreal Chickadee, Pine Grosbeak, Red Crossbill.*** Side-by-side views of **Downy** and **Hairy Woodpecker** were also great to compare their differences. After dinner, we hit the harbor and picked up ***Wandering Tattler, Harlequin Ducks, Black-legged Kittiwakes, Glaucous-winged Gull,*** and ***Marbled Murrelet***!



Spruce Grouse © Phil Chaon



Bald Eagle © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz

Day 3 - June 6

After breakfast next door, we walked to the harbor and checked in for our full-day wildlife cruise into Kenai Fjords National Park. We got nearly every avian target and were treated to incredible views of ***Orca***, ***Fin,*** and ***Humpback Whales***! We even dropped a marine microphone into the water to hear the sounds and calls of Orca Whales underwater! A treat for everyone! Birds on this tour are heavily slated to a group of birds in the puffin family called Alcids. Species in this family we observed included; ***Common Murre, Marbled Murrelet, Kitzlitz's Murrelet, Ancient Murrelet, Pigeon Guillemot***, ***Rhinoceros Auklet,*** and ***Parakeet Auklet***. Speaking of puffins we had great looks at ***Horned*** and ***Tufted Puffin***! Other great birds we observed included the ***Red-faced Cormorant***, ***Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel***, and maybe the rarest bird we saw today was a ***Manx Shearwater***, a state-level rarity that Phil identified with ease and excitement! We enjoyed lunch at Northwestern Glacier, a large tidewater glacier whose icy waters provided great looks at ***Harbor Seals*** hauled out on the ice. Here we also got even better looks at ***Kitzlitz's Murrelet.*** During our chilly lunch, we reveled in the magic of seeing a glacier calve in front of our eyes! On the way back we got to check out a rocky outcropping where massive ***Stellar's Sea Lions*** rest and keep themselves warm until they head into the frigid waters to feed. We returned to Resurrection Bay in Seward around 4:30 PM and everyone was giddy from the insanely productive day we had on the water. Our adventure was truly knockout, Kenai Fjords was absolutely on today! After dinner in town, we went over our daily checklist and hit the hay!



Tufted Puffin © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz



Orca © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz



Surf Scoter and Rhinocerous Auklets © Phil Chaon

Day 4 - June 7

Today was our last day in Seward so we took advantage of the morning. Our first stop was to check out the Bear Creek Weir where migrating ***Sockeye Salmon*** filled the river and were seen jumping over the small waterfall at the weir. Here we also got great looks at singing ***Townsend's Warblers***, ***Golden-crowned Kinglet,*** and North America's only aquatic songbird - the ***American Dipper***. We hadn't spotted Pacific Wren so we headed back through town to try for at Lowell Point. On the way, we spotted some close ***Harlequin Ducks*** and ***Marbled Murrelets***, but unfortunately, the Wren illuded us! Afterward, we began our drive to Anchorage, our first birding stop on the Seward Highway was Tern Lake. We got our first views of ***Golden-crowned Sparrow*** and ***Northern Waterthrush*** singing from the Alders along the road. On the lake, we enjoyed views of ***Barrow's Goldeneye*** and ***Arctic Tern***. Following our picnic lunch we drove for a few hours until arriving back in Anchorage.



Arctic Tern © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz



American Dipper © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz

With plenty of daylight left we explored Westchester Lagoon. Waterfowl present included ***Northern Shoveler***, ***Greater Scaup***, ***American Wigeon***, and ***Redhead***. We counted twelve ***Red-necked Grebes*** on the lagoon, with several already incubating eggs on nests! We walked around a bit and saw a family of ***Sandhill Cranes*** with two young chicks. The large group of resting gulls on the exposed mudflats suddenly flushed up and began to fly around. In just a few moments, we keyed into

an adult ***Bald Eagle*** approaching the shore. The ***Sandhill Crane*** parents crowded together to protect their young chicks from the eagle which made a close swoop at them. The protective parents did a good job shielding their young from the powerful talons of the eagle. The eagle flew off without giving it another try. We enjoyed dinner back at our lodging then went over our daily checklist and turned in for the night.



Sandhill Crane © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz

Day 5- June 8

With an afternoon flight to Barrow/Utqiagvik, we had the better part of the day to look for more birds around Anchorage. We headed out of town to bird at a forested park, looking for new birds. Although the American Three-toed Woodpecker alluded to our best efforts, we did get great looks at a flock of ***White-winged Crossbills***, and ***Black-capped*** and ***Boreal Chickadees***. After a nice morning of birding, we had lunch at the hotel and then took the shuttle to the airport to head up to Utqiagvik**!** We had a seamless flight to the United States' farthest north town. Upon arrival, we had a nice sunny welcome, and just out of the airport, we got our first of what would be many views of the ***Snow Bunting***. After checking into the hotel we loaded up into the vans and checked out some of the lagoons nearby. Our first stop yielded views of our first eider species - the stunning ***King Eider***! Here we also got looks at ***Lapland Longspur***, ***Long-tailed Duck.*** Some of the awesome shorebirds in beautiful breeding plumage included ***Semipalmated Sandpiper***, ***Semipalmated Plover***, ***Dunlin***, ***Pectoral Sandpipe***r, and both ***Red*** and ***Red-necked Phalarope***. Our next stop provided great looks at ***White-rumped Sandpiper***, ***Long-tailed Jaeger,*** and a large flock of ***Common Eiders***! ***Northern Pintails*** and ***Greater White-fronted Goose*** were also present. We wrapped up our day with dinner and checklists at the hotel.



King Eiders © Phil Chaon



Common Eider © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz

Day 6 - June 9

Our first full day in Barrow was filled with more incredible sights and sounds! The majority of ponds around us were still largely frozen. Only a few small pools along the road were thawed enough to welcome migrants. Just the day before the loons, eiders, and, shorebirds had arrived. Although

winter’s grip was longer than normal this year, we got fantastic looks at ***Steller’s***, ***Spectacled,*** and more ***King Eider***! Flying above the tundra we got our first of many looks at ***Parasitic*** and ***Pomarine Jaegers***! After lunch, we loaded back into the vans and headed south out of town. During our road cruising we got to observe our first Siberian vagrants - the ***Red-necked Stint*** and even rarer **Curlew Sandpipers** These off-course shorebirds generally breed in in northern Russia but got a bit turned around and ended up here. Other great sightings included ***Wilson’s Snipe*** and ***Stilt Sandpiper.*** The lineup of expected breeding shorebirds was fantastic, with sightings of, ***Red*** and ***Red-necked Phalarope, Sanderling, Dunlin, Pectoral Sandpiper, and Semipalmated Sandpiper***. We closed out our day with a visit to the local feeders to see if we could get better looks at ***Hoary Redpolls*** and ***Snow Buntings***, luckily they were quite easy to spot feeding on the diverse setup of small stations at the private residence.



Steller's Eider © Phil Chaon



Curlew Sandpiper © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz

Day 7 - June 10

After hearing that ***Polar Bears*** had been seen in the days before our arrival we made sure to stop at the point south of town and scan for a whale carcass and bears feeding on it. From our lookout, we found not one, not two, but ***four Polar Bears*** about ¾ a mile away feeding on large Bowhead whale carcass!! The Iñupiat people harvest ***Bowhead Whales*** and ***Sea Lions*** which is essential in their ability to thrive in the harrowing weather of the Arctic winter can routinely get as -90°F in the winter. Subsistence whaling has been a major part of Iñupiaq culture for thousands of years. While we marveled at the magic of these bears, male ***Lapland Larkspurs***, donning their vibrant black, yellow, and orange breeding plumes, howevered and sang over the tundra. Next, we birded the Middle Salt Lagoon, where spotted the gorgeous ***Black Guillemot***, a highlight for many. Barrow is the best place to see this species and particular subspecies. Nearly identical to the Pigeon Guillemot this arctic breeder has white instead of black underwings, a key feature to identifying it. This active pair was seen and photographed swimming around together and examining the new rock-stacked habitat by the new road culvert which looked similar to the cracks they generally nest among. However, to our excitement, the pair swam across the pond to provide even better looks! We all got some great views and awesome photos! Our next awesome sighting was a beautiful adult male ***Snowy Owl***! We spotted it sitting out on the tundra ~½ mile away. Our patience paid off and we got to hike out on the tundra to enjoy some closer viewing! From the scope, he flew out to catch a Brown LKemming and begin feeding on it! The regal white of this incredible hunter was a remarkable sight to see!



Polar Bears © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz



Black Guillemot © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz



Snowy Owl © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz

Day 8 - June 11

Our next morning in Nome provided us the opportunity to enjoy more looks at ***King Eider, Steller's Eider, Pacific Loon***, and ***Red-throated Loons*** and a ***Willow Ptarmigan*** spotted in a snow-covered hummock not far from the road was sweet! ***Glaucous Gulls***, ***Sabine's Gull*** and ***Harlequin Ducks*** were also welcome sights! The abundant ***Greater-white Fronted Geese*** were a great last bird photographed before heading back to the hotel for lunch and our departure. We arrived back in Anchorage a few hours later and enjoyed a chill dinner and an early night before our tomorrow AM flight to Nome!



Sabine's Gull © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz

Day 9 - June 12

Upon arrival in Nome we immediately noticed how much more thawed out the habitat was, not to mention was a whole 10° warmer! On our way to the hotel, we got our first looks at the remarkable-looking ***Muskoxen***! These large mammals are often considered living relics of the Ice Age, with a prehistoric lineage tracing back thousands of years back to the last ice age. Muskox used to roam alongside ***Woolly Mammoths*** and ***Sabre-toothed Cats*** during the Pleistocene epoch. Their insanely warm fur is collected off the tundra by native peoples and spun into one of the warmest wools on the planet. After checking into our rooms, our lunch was accompanied by an awesome view of the Bering Sea. Down by the Nome Rivermouth we got looks at a small group of ***Aleutian Terns*** and spotted a ***Bar-tailed Godwit*** flying over the island. Lots of ***Red-throated Loon*** pairs filled nearly all the small ponds we viewed. We also spotted a **Black Turnstone** and four ***Red-breasted Mergansers***! After a brief visit, we motored down Council Road, with stops to view ***White-winged Scoter, Black Scoter, Common Eider, Cackling Goose, Common Goldeneye, Sandhill Crane, Horned Puffin,*** and ***Common Murre***. Emanating from the roadside Alders we heard the magical flute song of the ***Gray-cheeked Thrush***. Several ***Common Redpolls*** were seen, and brief looks at ***Eastern-Yellow Wagtails*** were also a treat! ***Willow Ptarmigan*** were also abundant along the road, with three males seen well on their territories. We enjoyed a delicious dinner at a local restaurant and returned home to complete our checklists and turn in for the night!

Day 10 - June 13

After breakfast at our hotel, we made our first stop just a few minutes away. Here we got to observe a nesting ***Northern Shrike*** and an ***American Beaver*** performing its tail-slapping territory display. Then we made our way down Teller Hwy. At a nearby pond, we got our first looks at a pair of ***Arctic Loons***, and then we spotted a ***Moose*** which crossed the road and began to feed on willow. Our next stop yielded looks at ***Bluethroat***! This beautiful male was not the most cooperative bird in the world, but all of us got to enjoy his stunning namesake features! They look even more impressive in person! Down the highway, we saw four ***Bank Swallows*** and ***Fox, Golden-crowned, White-crowned, American Tree,*** and ***Savannah Sparrows***. The song of ***Gray-cheeked thrush*** also filled the morning air, a melody that serves as the soundtrack of our time here in Nome! We lunched at a beautiful overlook which provided chances to take in the stunning alpine landscape and a magnificent ***Golden Eagle*** soaring over the adjacent valley. After lunch, we got to see nearly tons of ***Willow Ptarmigan***, a few ***Rock Ptarmigan,*** and a pair of ***Northern Wheatear***! At the Wheatear spot, we almost walked right by an impressively still and well-camouflaged ***Rock Ptarmigan***. Our cooperative subject took no issue with us taking its portrait and reveling in his amazing plumes! ***Bar-tailed Godwit***, ***American Pipit***, and ***Long-tailed Jagers*** were well seen!



Northern Wheatear © Phil Chaon



Rock Ptarmigan © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz

Day 11- June 14

The next day we drove down Kougarok Road, one of the three birding roads in Nome. Early highlights included ***Arctic Terns***, a ***Spotted Sandpiper***, a ***Merlin***, and a beautiful male ***Blackpoll Warbler***. Our main goal for the day was to trek out to the breeding location of Bristle-thighed

Curlew. Before starting up the trail, a ***Short-eared Owl*** soared over the top of the hill. What great motivation to see what else lay ahead! After ~35 minutes of hiking slowly, we detected the first signs of our target! Calling and displaying over our left shoulder was a male ***Bristle-thighed Curlew***! At the top of the hill, we saw as many as fourteen individuals displaying! We also enjoyed close looks at ***American Golden-Plover, Whimbrel,*** and the incredibly diverse vegetation of the tundra. On our way back to town got to observe a pair of ***Gyrfalcon*** which nest on a steep cliff nearly a ½ mile off the road! North America's largest falcon is an impressive raptor, whose size is on par with the Red-tailed Hawk! We also got another view of the ***Arctic Warbler***!



Bristle-thighed Curlew © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz



Blackpoll Warbler © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz



American Golden-Plover © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz

Day 12 - June 15

Our last morning in Nome was looking for any final targets including the White Wagtail which had otherwise alluded us. We were afforded one brief look near the water but flushed off when we approached from a distance. Afterward, we scanned for more birds and turned up a ***Wandering***

Tattler and a ***Bar-tailed Godwit!*** Further down the road we seawatched and spotted ***Common Eider***, ***Thick-billed Murre, Tufted,*** and ***Horned Puffin***! Near Safety Sound Bridge we got an amazing show of 150+ ***Tundra Swans*** feeding and flying! During our final lunch, a pair of stunning ***Pacific Loons*** and ***Harlequin Ducks.*** A special closing treat was spotting two ***Eurasian Wigeons***! Following a 5:30 PM flight, we enjoyed dinner at a local Mexican restaurant in Anchorage. Closing gratitudes and highlight moments were a hallmark of recapping our incredible 12-day tour in Alaska. We enjoyed a short walk back to the hotel in the warm weather and golden light of summer nights in Anchorage. We'll miss the long days of the Alaskan and summer, and can't wait to lead this same tour next year!



Pacific Loon © Benny Jacobs-Schwartz

Alaska Birding Tour 2024 species list