

Adak, Alaska (14 – 18 May 2019)

High Lonesome Bird Tours

C: Documents / Avian Alaska / Alaska HLT Adak 2019



Introduction and Daily Notes

Located approximately 1200 air miles from Anchorage in the western Aleutian Islands, Adak offers incredible scenery and unusual birds, and indeed, it did produce some notable birds and great memories. This nearly abandoned military outpost afforded us some basic but very comfortable accommodations and nice meals at a local eatery. After our introductory session in Anchorage, we dined at Orso, one of the best restaurants in Anchorage where we enjoyed fresh seafood and other delicacies. Then we birded at Westchester Lagoon to provide an introduction to the bird life in Alaska and to get mentally prepared for the following few days on our adventure.

The following morning we had breakfast at Piper's and then headed to Potter Marsh to seek out some regional specialties and to look for the drake Falcated Duck which had been frequenting the area for some time. We missed seeing the duck, but had a nice assortment of waterfowl and waterbirds while exploring the southern end of the marsh. Of note were singing warblers on territory and four Rusty Blackbirds, a local and uncommon breeder. We returned to the hotel and then departed to the airport for our afternoon flight to Adak. The flight was

uneventful, but the views of the Aleutians were spectacular as we approached Adak. After landing, we got coordinated, picked up the rental vehicle and then made our way to our accommodations which were only a few blocks away. After getting settled, we headed out to Clam Lagoon for some afternoon birding followed by dinner at the Blue Bird Cafe. Notable birds for the afternoon were 21 “Common” Teal (*Anas crecca crecca*), Eurasian Wigeon, as well as Kittlitz’s and Marbled murrelets.

The following morning after some tea and coffee with a quick snack, we explored Contractor’s Marsh before breakfast. We were treated with at least 8 snipe, with 7 Wilson’s and one Common snipe (id’ed by aerial display and photos). We also had spectacular views of the beautiful and distinctive subspecies of Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch (*Leucosticte tephrocotis griseonucha*) which is found from Komandorskiye in the Russian Far East to the Aleutian and Kodiak islands. After a hot breakfast, we headed to Sweeper Cove and found Rock Sandpipers and Common and King eiders (flyby). After lunch, we headed out to Clam Lagoon, but before we reached the water itself we found an eagle that seemed to be “different” while flying over the bay. And indeed it was... a third-year White-tailed Eagle! Not able to obtain photos, we observed the bird for several minutes before it continued on to the southeast and made mental notes for documentation. The Lagoon was active with birds, but it was windy and difficult birding using a scope, so we chose to go back to town and look for the eagle to get some diagnostic photos. Then we noticed the low rear tire... a birder’s nightmare. We made some arrangements for a replacement vehicle the following day (no spare on the rig) and then had dinner and birded in the local area, finding a Yellow-billed Loon in the harbor.

Not having gotten the replacement vehicle yet, we still decided to “carefully” head out to Candlestick Bridge to view Ancient Murrelet, Rock Ptarmigan, and Aleutian Terns and also to look again for Arctic Loon. Back for breakfast and then made arrangements for a vehicle swap after lunch. We drove out the rough road to the distant LORAN station to do some ocean-viewing (target was Laysan Albatross). We missed the albatross but were very satisfied with 10+ Whiskered Auklets in the bay and a beautiful Bar-tailed Godwit along the beach. The afternoon was spent in the local area at the Airport Ponds and along the harbor to see what else we could find.

The following morning we went back to Contractor’s Marsh (a consistent rarity hot-spot) and got to see and hear displaying Common Snipe in direct comparison with Wilson’s Snipe. What a great way to learn the differences! Then back for breakfast and another round of birding near the airport and harbor before we had to finalize packing and check-out. One last look near Clam Lagoon yielded another Bar-tailed Godwit and 7 gorgeous Rock Sandpipers. The 2.5 hour flight back to Anchorage was uneventful and we concluded a great trip to Adak in the late evening.

Avian Species

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis parvipes*. Common local breeder in the greater Anchorage area, we had several pair establishing nesting territories at Westchester Lagoon on the first day of the trip as well as up to 6-7 pair at Potter Marsh.

Gadwall *Mareca strepera*. Fairly common and local breeder in Anchorage, we had several pair at Westchester Lagoon as well as at Potter Marsh.

Eurasian Wigeon *Mareca penelope*. Uncommon but regular spring and summer visitor to Adak, we recorded this species on four days in Adak, with a high count of six on 16 May 2019.

American Wigeon *Mareca americana*. Fairly common in the Anchorage area, we saw up to six at Westchester Lagoon and Potter Marsh early in the tour.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*. Common in Anchorage and also at several locations in Adak.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*. Fairly common in Anchorage, we recorded them at Westchester Lagoon as well as at Potter Marsh. Up to six individuals were seen at Clam Lagoon in Adak on several days.

Eurasian Green-winged Teal (“Common Teal”) *Anas crecca crecca*. Not yet officially split by the American Ornithological Society, this distinctive form has been recognized as a distinct species by the British Ornithological Union as well as the International Ornithological Council. We viewed up to 40 daily while in Adak.

American Green-winged Teal *Anas crecca carolinensis*. The “North American” form of this complex, we viewed several in the Anchorage area and one while at Clam Lagoon at Adak.

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*. Fairly common migrant and breeder to south-central and central Alaska, we viewed up to eight while in Anchorage and also the same number on Adak daily.

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*. Uncommon but regular migrant and breeder to central and southern Alaska, we recorded up to twelve at Potter Marsh and four daily while in Adak.

King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*. Uncommon migrant to Adak, we caught sight of two fly-bys at the harbor near town on one day.

Common Eider *Somateria mollissima*. Fairly common migrant to the area, we recorded up to 60 individuals daily while in Adak.

Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus*. Fairly common in the Adak area in the spring, we recorded up to 25 daily in appropriate habitat. The Latin name means “of or connected to the theater,” referring to the males’ showy plumage pattern.

Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola*. Uncommon at Adak, we found up to four daily at a small pond on the way out to Clam Lagoon.

Barrow's Goldeneye *Bucephala islandica*. Regular but uncommon in the spring, two were seen at Lake Hood near the hotel while in Anchorage.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*. Fairly common to common migrant and summer visitor, we recorded up to 30 daily while at Adak, mainly from Seawatch but also from the area within Clam Lagoon.



Rock Ptarmigan *Lagopus muta*. Uncommon but regular on Adak, we found four on one day and all enjoyed some very nice views of this special bird.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*. Fairly common migrant and summer breeder to the greater Anchorage area, we found up to 12 individuals on the two days that we visited Westchester Lagoon and Potter Marsh before departing for Adak.



Sandhill Crane *Antigone canadensis*. Common migrant and fairly common breeder to the greater Anchorage area, we observed up to six on each of the two days we birded at Potter Marsh and Westchester Lagoon.

Black Oystercatcher *Haematopus bachmani*. Fairly common (but declining) species within the Aleutian Islands as well as along the South and Southeastern portions of Alaska, we got good but distant views of eight birds along the coast while at Adak... while we were still in search of an Arctic Loon!

Pacific Golden-Plover *Pluvialis fulva*. Uncommon but regular migrant on the Aleutians and in the Bering Sea region, we found one female at Contractor's Marsh in a light misty rain on the morning of our departure.

Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*. Common migrant and breeder throughout Alaska, we found up to six daily while at Adak and several more while at Potter Marsh.

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*. Fairly common migrant and breeder to most of interior Alaska, we found up to four while at Westchester Lagoon and Potter Marsh.

Hudsonian Godwit *Limosa haemastica*. Uncommon but regular breeder to the Cook Inlet to the north of Anchorage, we found two on the mudflats to the west of Westchester Lagoon on the first evening after our Meet & Greet.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*. Uncommon but regular migrant to the Aleutians on the way to and from breeding and wintering areas, we had one male along the beach to the north of town while on Adak.

Rock Sandpiper *Calidris ptilocnemis cousei*. Fairly common permanent resident in the Aleutian Islands and adjacent Alaska Peninsula, we caught up to two birds in the old ship harbor and an additional seven individuals along the beach while in Adak.



Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago gallinago*. Rare but regular spring migrant (breeder?) to the middle and western Aleutian Islands, we saw and heard at least one individual (probably two) while at Contractor's Marsh on Adak. See the attached photos from Aaron Lang.



Photo courtesy of Aaron Lang



Photo courtesy of Aaron Lang

Wilson's Snipe *Gallinago delicata*. Fairly common migrant and breeder to the central Aleutians as well as most of mainland Alaska, we found up to seven daily while on Adak as well as several

in the Anchorage area. Note the difference in the tail feather pattern on this species versus Common Snipe (previous), which makes for a slightly higher-pitched “winnow” rather than the Common’s lower-pitched “winnow.”



Photo courtesy of Aaron Lang



Photo courtesy of Aaron Lang

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*. Common migrant and breeder in much of Alaska, we found several each day while in Adak.

Parasitic Jaeger *Stercorarius parasiticus*. Fairly common migrant and breeder in coastal habitats throughout Alaska, we recorded up to three individuals each day while in Adak.

Common Murre *Uria aalge*. Common resident in the Aleutian Islands, we found several daily while in Adak.

Pigeon Guillemot *Cepphus columba*. Common to abundant resident in the Aleutians, we found up to 30 daily while in Adak.

Marbled Murrelet *Brachyramphus marmoratus*. Fairly common resident in the Aleutians, we found up to four at Clam Lagoon on several days. Apparently this species also nests on rocky talus slopes (as does the following species) while its relatives also nest high in the canopy of old-growth forests in the Pacific Northwest and coastal Alaska.

Kittlitz’s Murrelet *Brachyramphus brevirostris*. Fairly common resident in the Aleutians, particularly where rocky talus slopes



offer preferred nesting habitat, we found up to six on several occasions while at Adak.

Ancient Murrelet *Synthliboramphus antiquus*. While common as a resident within the Aleutians, we found it a challenge to observe. One located at Candlestick Bridge near the entrance to Clam Lagoon afforded distant but diagnostic views.

Whiskered Auklet *Aethia pygmaea*. A target for North American birders, this locally common resident in the central Aleutians can be a challenge to locate. We observed ten individuals while scoping the bay near the LORAN station on one day.

Crested Auklet *Aethia cristatella*. Locally a common resident and breeder in the central Aleutians, we found 23 individuals on one day while at Adak.

Tufted Puffin *Fratercula cirrhata*. Common summer resident and breeder to the central Aleutians and Bering Sea, we found up to 23 birds while scoping the coastal area near the LORAN station at Adak.

Bonaparte's Gull *Chroicocephalus philadelphia*. Fairly common to common migrant, we found six while at Westchester Lagoon at the beginning of the trip.

Mew Gull *Larus canus*. Common summer resident and breeder to southern and central Alaska, we recorded up to 75 while birding at Westchester Lagoon and Potter Marsh.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus smithsonianus*. Locally a fairly common summer resident to most of central and southern Alaska, we found several daily while visiting Westchester Lagoon and Potter Marsh.



Glaucous-winged Gull *Larus glaucescens*. Common permanent resident in the Aleutians and southern Alaska, we found them daily while at Adak, with up to 15 seen on several occasions.

Aleutian Tern *Onychoprion aleuticus*. Locally an uncommon summer breeder, which can also be tricky to find, we recorded seven on one morning near Clam Lagoon while at Adak.

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*. Common to abundant summer breeder to Alaska, we found up to 35 while visiting Westchester Lagoon and Potter Marsh in the Anchorage area and also two while in Adak.

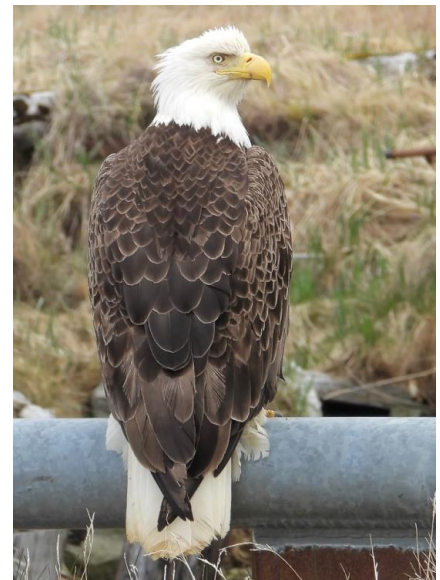
Pacific Loon *Gavia pacifica*. Common resident and breeder in the central Aleutians and southern Alaska, we found several daily while in Anchorage and up to 13 individuals on one day while in Adak.



Yellow-billed Loon *Gavia adamsii*. Uncommon migrant and winter visitor to the Aleutians, we found one second-year bird in the harbor at Adak on two different days.

Pelagic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pelagicus*. Fairly common permanent resident to the central Aleutians, we recorded up to six daily while at Adak.

Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus washingtoniensis*. Locally common resident in the Aleutian Islands, coastal Alaska, Canada and the northern United States, we hit the mother-lode while in Adak. After a caribou hunt, several carcasses were discarded near the small ship harbor and we counted a minimum of 23 eagles in the area.



White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*. Undoubtedly the bird of the trip, we observed one sub-adult soaring over the bay to the north of Adak proper on 16 May 2019. At the time of observation, we noted a light whitish/brown head, fairly broad wings with splayed primaries, and a relatively short spade-shaped tail (compared to the many Bald Eagles in the area) with dark undertail coverts. The tail itself was a dusky-white coloration (not bright white thus not a full adult) and displayed a very thin terminal band, quite different than what a sub-adult Bald Eagle would display (much broader). Of note was that the bill was a clean horn-yellow color with no indication of dusky that a third-year Bald Eagle would show. Unfortunately no photos were obtained to accompany our observation.

Belted Kingfisher *Megasceryle alcyon*. Uncommon summer visitor and breeder to southern Alaska, we found one at Potter Marsh at the beginning of the trip.

Downy Woodpecker *Picoides pubescens*. Common resident to central and southern Alaska in deciduous forests, we found two individuals in the forest near Westchester Lagoon at the beginning of the trip.

American Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides dorsalis*. Uncommon and localized resident to mature forests, we found two while walking at Kincaid Park in Anchorage at the end of the trip.

Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus luteus*. Uncommon resident to the greater Anchorage area, we found several near Potter Marsh and also at Kincaid Park.

Western Wood-Pewee *Contopus sordidulus*. Uncommon at the edge of their Anchorage range, one was heard and seen at Kincaid Park at the end of the trip.

Gray Jay *Perisoreus canadensis*. Fairly common in coniferous forests of western North America, we found three at Kincaid Park in Anchorage.

Black-billed Magpie *Pica hudsonia*. Common resident to mixed forests in southern Alaska, we found several at Westchester Lagoon, Potter Marsh and Kincaid Park.

Common Raven *Corvus corax*. Common resident to most of Alaska, we located up to 14 individuals daily while in Anchorage as well as at Adak.

Tree Swallow *Tachycineta bicolor*. Common summer breeder throughout most of Alaska, we found at least 100 individuals while at Potter Marsh at the beginning of the tour.



Black-capped Chickadee *Poecile atricapillus*. Fairly common permanent resident within forested areas in Alaska, we recorded several at both Westchester Lagoon and at Potter Marsh.

Red-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta canadensis*. Fairly common resident to forested habitats throughout most of the southern portion of Alaska, we had one calling while at Westchester Lagoon on the first evening.

Pacific Wren *Troglodytes pacificus*. Fairly common in the central Aleutians, we recorded four on the day that we journeyed out to the LORAN station on Adak.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet *Regulus calendula*. Common summer resident to most forested habitats within Alaska, we located two singing individuals at the south end of Potter Marsh at the beginning of the trip.

Hermit Thrush *Catharus guttatus*. Common summer resident to central and western Alaska, we found two singing males while at Potter Marsh early on the trip.

American Robin *Turdus migratorius*. Common summer resident to most of Alaska, we saw and heard up to ten singing individuals at Westchester Lagoon and Potter Marsh at the beginning of the trip.

European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*. Uncommon to rare within Alaska (except Anchorage and other communities in southern and southeastern AK), we counted nine while at Westchester Lagoon on the first evening of the trip.

American Pipit *Anthus rubescens pacificus*. Fairly common summer breeder throughout Alaska, we had several flyovers while at Westchester Lagoon and Potter Marsh.

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch *Leucosticte tephrocotis griseonucha*. Common and striking passerine on the central Aleutian Islands, we recorded up to 25 daily while in Adak.

Common Redpoll *Acanthis flammea*. Fairly common to common irruptive resident throughout the mainland portion of the state, we had one bird flying over while at Westchester Lagoon on the first evening.

Pine Siskin *Spinus pinus*. Fairly common to common resident throughout the state, we had two birds seen briefly while at Westchester Lagoon on the first evening.

Lapland Longspur *Calcarius lapponicus*. Common summer resident and breeder to non-forested habitats almost throughout the state, we enjoyed fine views of up to 20 or more daily while in Adak.

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*. Uncommon resident on Adak Island, we had one fly-over while driving out to the LORAN station on the day before departure.

Orange-crowned Warbler *Oreothlypis celata celata*. Common summer breeder to central and southern Alaska, we observed or heard at least four birds while at Westchester Lagoon and at Potter Marsh at the beginning of the trip.



Yellow Warbler *Setophaga petechia amnicola*. Common summer resident and breeder to central and southern Alaska, we found two or more while at Westchester Lagoon and Potter Marsh at the initiation of the trip.

Yellow-rumped Warbler *Setophaga coronata coronata*. Common summer resident and breeder through much of Alaska, we had several singing males and accompanying females while birding at Westchester Lagoon and also at Potter Marsh and Kincaid Park later in the trip.



Wilson's Warbler *Cardellina pusilla pileolata*. Common summer breeder to most of central and southern AK, we had great looks at singing males while birding in the Potter Marsh area at the beginning of the trip.

Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis*. Common summer breeder to most of the state, we found two singing males while at Potter Marsh on 15 May 2019.

Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia maxima*. This dark subspecies (one of the 25 currently recognized subspecies in this complex group) was seen daily while in Adak, with a high count of seven on 16 May 2019. We also recorded one "Kenai" Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia kenaiensis*) while at Westchester Lagoon and Potter Marsh.



Lincoln's Sparrow *Melospiza lincolnii lincolnii*. Common summer breeder to central and southern Alaska, we found at least ten territorial males while at Potter Marsh before our departure to Adak on 15 May 2019.

White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*. Common summer breeder throughout the state, we observed two at the south end of Potter



Marsh near the beginning of the trip.

Dark-eyed Junco *Junco hyemalis oregonus*. Common summer breeder to the southern Alaskan region, we had three singing males at Westchester Lagoon on the first evening before departure to Adak.

Rusty Blackbird *Euphagus carolinus carolinus*. Uncommon summer breeder to the greater Anchorage area, we found four birds at the south end of Potter Marsh before our departure to Adak.

Mammal Species

Sea Otter *Enhydra lutris*.

Steller's Sea Lion *Eumetopias jubatus*

Harbor Seal *Phoca vitulina*

Moose *Alces alces*

Gray Whale *Eschrichtius robustus*



View of the coast of Adak near the LORAN station