



Smith's Longspur (Craig Robson)

ALASKA

29 MAY/1 – 14/17 JUNE 2018

LEADERS CRAIG ROBSON and GUY DUTSON

Another amazing adventure to The Last Frontier, saw us almost reach the magic 200 species, falling just one short. For the first time, we saw all three species of ptarmigan, and mammal write-ins included Walrus, Beluga and Fin Whale. So many good birds this year, but a special mention should go to Spruce Grouse, Spectacled, Steller's and King Eiders, Gyrfalcon, Hudsonian Godwit, Black Turnstone, Surfbird, Rock Sandpiper, Bristle-thighed Curlew, Red-legged Kittiwake, Aleutian Tern, Marbled, Kittlitz's, and Ancient Murrelets, Para-

keet, Least, Crested and Rhinoceros Auklets, Tufted Puffin, Snowy Owl, Northern Hawk-Owl, American Three-toed and Black-backed Woodpeckers, Varied Thrush, and Smith's Longspur. Eurasian rarities were full-on this time, particularly on St Paul. We found our own Eurasian Hobby, Little Stint and Common Sandpiper, and also enjoyed Tufted Duck, White-tailed Eagle, Common Greenshank, Common Cuckoo, Siberian Rubythroat, Eyebrowed Thrush, and Olive-backed Pipit.

We also logged no fewer than 33 species of mammal, the cream of the crop being an enormous male Walrus, and a totally unexpected Beluga. But let's not forget Brown Bear, Sea and North American Otters, Humpback, Fin and Killer Whales, Eurasian Elk (Moose), Reindeer (Caribou) and the hulking great Muskox. We were blessed with good weather again and, apart from a couple of hiccups that we soon overcame, we enjoyed generally smooth-running logistics.



Male Barrow's Goldeneye (Einar Kongshaug)

We all gathered together late on the first evening at the Coast International Inn in Anchorage, ready for the pre-tour extension to St Paul in the Pribilof Islands. Before our flight the following lunchtime, we had time for an early morning walk around the shore of Lake Spenard & Hood. A lovely male Barrow's Goldeneye showed nicely, as well as Red-breasted Nuthatch, Lincoln's Sparrow and an unexpected male Rusty Blackbird. At the airport, we were greeted with the sad news that our flight to St Paul had been cancelled, and that we might not be able to get there at all - what a nightmare! Fortunately, later on in the day, we heard that a special flight would be arranged for the following morning, and we already had seats. The remainder of the day was spent birding around nearby Westchester Lagoon, the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail, and Earthquake Park. The mudflats here are a great place to view Hudsonian Godwit and Surf-bird, and we found both quite easily, although the latter were somewhat distant. Some rather confident Sandhill Cranes and a Short-billed Dowitcher were also on show, as were numerous breeding Red-necked Grebes, Bald Eagle, Grey and

Semipalmated Plovers, 'Hudsonian' Whimbrel, Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs, Orange-crowned Warbler, and a nice Hermit Thrush. Our first of many Moose (or Eurasian Elk) was seen with a calf at close range.

Before going back to the airport for a second time, we had a quick look around Kincadee Park. Highlights here were Western Wood Pewee, Boreal Chickadee, Golden- and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, numerous Swainson's Thrushes, and American Yellow and Wilson's Warblers.



Red-legged Kittiwake at St Paul (Craig Robson)

Around mid-day, with a good weather forecast, we embarked on our direct flight to St Paul Island. As we neared St Paul, the anticipation rose and we arrived safely through the low cloud to typically grey and cool conditions. With the cancellation of our flight on the previous day, we only had the equivalent of one whole day left, and a lot to pack-in. Thanks to our three expert guides: Philip Chaon, Claudia Cavazos and Sulli Gibson, we did unbelievably well, and could hardly have hoped for more. They really gave us fantastic service, which helped make our trip to St Paul an unforgettable experience. For the remainder of the first afternoon we decided to visit various locations around the island. Our arrival just happened to coincide with one of the spring's best fall-outs (or falls) of east Asian migrants. One of the first birds that we spotted was a Eurasian Hobby (a real mega in these parts!), and it was followed by a Common Cuckoo, Siberian Rubythroat, Eyebrowed Thrush, no fewer than nine Olive-backed Pipits, and several Bramblings. A continuing pair of Tufted Ducks and an immature White-tailed Eagle completed the Eurasian bird list. We turned our

attention to the resident specialities. At one of the island's many lakes, we found a flock of a dozen diminutive 'Aleutian' Cackling Geese, and we also made some initial visits to coastal habitats. Looking offshore we managed to locate small numbers of King Eiders along with the usual good numbers of lovely Harlequin Ducks, and very good numbers of Red-faced Cormorants.



Least Auklet (Craig Robson)

On the following morning we focused more intently on the breeding seabirds. At this time of year, they are just arriving and finding their space on the cliffs. We spent many hours on various cliff tops, marvelling at the antics of the cormorants, auks, fulmars and kittiwakes. Pride of place probably went to the rare Red-legged Kittiwakes, but how could we forget the massing swarms of tiny Least Auklets and the superbly endowed Parakeet and Crested Auklets, let alone the superb Tufted Puffins. We also got close to some busy ledges bustling with Northern Fulmars (present in a variety of morphs), Thick-billed Murres (or Brünnich's Guillemots), and Horned Puffins. 'Pribilof' Wren (the endemic *alascensis* subspecies of Pacific Wren) is going through a recent upturn in fortunes, thanks to some mild winters, and we found a number quite easily this time. During our many wanderings we were constantly surrounded by delightful Lapland Longspurs and Snow Buntings, as well as the impressive chunky local form of Grey-crowned Rosy Finch, the only common passerines on the island. Rock Sandpipers were abundant and displaying everywhere, and other shorebirds here included Pacific Golden Plover, our first Bar-tailed Godwit, both Red-necked and particularly Red Phalaropes, and a vagrant Common Greenshank. A good variety of waterfowl included both Eurasian and American Wigeon, Eurasian Teal, and many fabulous Long-tailed Ducks. Other interesting birds were both Glaucous and Glaucous-winged Gulls, our first Sabine's Gulls, American Robin, Eastern Yellow Wagtail, and Buff-bellied Pipit.

Scruffy Arctic Foxes, which were seen all over the island, are well known seabird nest predators, and can creep down the less steep cliffs. Northern Fur-Seals were also returning to their breeding grounds, and we had many great views of the rather aggressive males proudly defending their beaches and territories.

Leaving St Paul behind, we flew back to Anchorage, overnighted at our nearby hotel, and then returned the following morning for the flight to Nome.



Parakeet Auklets on their nesting cliffs at St Paul (Craig Robson)

We had three full days to explore the three major routes that lead out of town - into quite different wilderness areas. The Council Road was the route that received most of our attention, as it passes alongside Safety Sound, one of Alaska's most famous birding hotspots. With action on both sides of the road (the sea on one side, the lagoons on the other), it was often slow going as we paused to check through the great numbers of birds present. Out to sea, we had some nice Black, Surf and White-winged Scoters, a few King Eiders, and many Harlequin Ducks, and Pelagic Cormorants. Along the beaches we found two small colonies of lovely Aleutian Terns that were starting to display and organise themselves, as well as the much commoner Arctic Terns. There were some major mammal highlights this year too - a Beluga swimming close inshore, an incredible male Walrus that some of us were keen to 'twitch', and some good close-ups of Muskox. Although native here, the latter was extirpated by the 1920s. In 1930, 34 were captured in east Greenland and released in Alaska, and all of the animals in the state today are descended from them. At Safety Bridge, we lucked-in on our first Spectacled Eider of the tour (handy for those not taking the Barrow extension), had much closer views of Surf-bird, and also found a vagrant Common Sandpiper. On and around the main lagoon, great numbers of waterfowl included Pacific and Red-throated Loons, a single Common Loon (or

Great Northern Diver), scores of Whistling Swans and Brant Geese (or Black Brants), our only two Snow Geese of the tour, lots of Common Eiders, and many Sandhill Cranes. Highlights amongst the waders were Pacific Golden and Semipalmated Plovers, breeding Semipalmated Sandpipers, staging Western Sandpipers, a couple of nice Black Turnstones, a few Sanderlings, Red Knot, and our first Pectoral Sandpipers. Glaucous Gulls were breeding in good numbers too, there were quite a few Vega Gulls, and a single Sabine's Gull. Scanning the craggy bluffs, we found a few Rough-legged Buzzards (or Hawks), including one on a nest, while the streams held our first Wandering Tattler.



Part of the group watching Bristle-thighed Curlew near Nome (Craig Robson)

Our second full days birding began with an early start and a lengthy drive along the remote Kougarok Road, in search of this regions' most notorious breeding bird, the threatened Bristle-thighed Curlew. An early start was essential as, once at the site, we had to slowly work our way up onto a hill-top via some difficult hummocky ground on what is essentially moorland, and not dissimilar to parts of the English or Scottish uplands. This is a busy time of year for tour groups, but fortunately we were the only ones present at dawn and, after only a relatively short walk, we soon located our quarry. Over the next hour or so, we were able to get excellent views of one particular individual. American Golden Plover was also breeding in the area, and American Tree Sparrow proved very confiding. Slowly working back down the highway towards town, after our exploits at the curlew site, we enjoyed American Cliff Swallows, and scrub-dwelling passerines such as Blackpoll Warbler, Northern Waterthrush, Grey-cheeked Thrush and Red Fox and Golden-crowned Sparrows, and Bluethroat - already setting up breeding territories in its very limited North American range.

On our third day, we drove all the way to Teller. Passing some interesting areas of Tundra along the way, we observed Rock and Willow Ptarmigan at very close range, and found stunning Grey Plovers and Ruddy Turnstones on their breeding grounds. There were yet more herds of Muskox, some with small young.

Other good birds in the Nome area included a couple of rather distant Gyrfalcons, 'Taverner's' Canada Geese, multiple Northern Harriers, all three species of Jaeger, Short-eared Owl, Barn Swallow, Northern Wheatear, Buff-bellied Pipit, White (or East Siberian) Wagtail, and both Arctic (or Hoary) and Common Redpolls.



Locals eye-up the Walrus at Cape Nome (Craig Robson)

Returning to Anchorage and overnighing once more, we picked up new rental vehicles, and on the following morning embarked on the drive down to Seward. We started off in a forested area on the outskirts of town, where we found the likes of Hairy Woodpecker, Black-capped and Boreal Chickadees, both kinglets, stunning Varied Thrushes, Pine Siskin, Dark-eyed Junco, and Myrtle and Townsend's Warblers. Near Beluga Point, we scoped 17 Thinhorn (or Dall) Sheep from some convenient laybys. Further along, Tern Lake had nesting pairs of Common Loon and elegant Trumpeter Swans. A dog-leg to Bear Creek was another good call, as we had fantastic views of American Dippers feeding their hungry fledglings, as well as our only Brown Creeper of the trip. We checked-in at our hotel before enjoying an excellent lunch at one of Seward's finest restaurants.

In the afternoon we made our way down to Lowell Point. Pigeon Guillemots showed very well close inshore, along with good numbers of Harlequin Ducks and Surf Scoters, and a flock of Barrow's Goldeneyes. At the point itself, we enjoyed the antics of a displaying male Rufous Hummingbird (how can this tiny bird survive this close to the Arctic Circle!?), as well as rather tame Northwestern Crows, Sooty Fox Sparrow, and the strange local form of Song Sparrow.

Very early the following morning we explored a forest trail near Seward, where we were very fortunate to spot a male Spruce Grouse standing completely in the open. A mainland race (*stevensoni*) Pacific Wren also delighted us, as did the superb Varied Thrushes and our first Chestnut-backed Chickadees. Just offshore, we found the Marbled Murrelets that we had expected to see on the previous evening, and a Belted Kingfisher showed briefly.



A cracking Sooty Fox Sparrow near Seward (Craig Robson)

The main reason for our visit to Seward was to explore the Kenai Fjords, and we boarded our vessel after breakfast for a full day cruise to the awesome Northwestern Glacier. Stunning scenery, relatively fine weather, and the fact that we pretty much had the boat to ourselves, meant that we spent much of the nine hours on deck. Seabirds were once more the main focus of our attentions, with three particular targets: Kittlitz's and Ancient Murrelets and Rhinoceros Auklet. Kittlitz's was surprisingly hard work this year, but our efforts paid off with good views of a pair close to the glaciers, while groups of Rhinoceros Auklets were passed at close range on the approaches. Ancient Murrelet was very cleverly detected by our captain, who steered us very close to the birds before they took flight - at least 12 in total. Another main avian highlight was Black Oystercatcher, of which we logged eight this year. In the Chiswell Islands we also saw all three species of cormorant, flocks of murrets and both puffins, and a nice raft of Parakeet Auklets. Oceanic mammals were abundant. We had lots of surface-feeding Humpback Whales, both meat-eating and fish-eating pods of Killer Whales, as well as groups of Dall's Porpoise, a colony of Northern Sea-Lions, ice-rafting Har-

bour Seals, and feeding Sea Otters. Surprises included a handful of Fin Whales (a tour write-in) and North American (or River) Otter.

Before leaving the Seward area for the drive back to Anchorage, we explored various sites close to town. There were some closer views of breeding Trumpeter Swans, our first Ring-necked Ducks, Rufous Hummingbird, Belted Kingfisher, Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, our first Alder Flycatcher, more Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Hermit Thrush, a much-wanted pair of Pine Grosbeaks, two unexpected male Red Crossbills, and better views of Pine Siskin.



A smart male Black-backed Woodpecker (Craig Robson)

The next day involved a long drive, with some important stops, on our way up to Denali National Park and Preserve, and there were some great highlights along the way. Our first port of call was an area of boreal forest which had recently been ravaged by fire. Fire is not all-bad in this habitat, and the aftermath was proving very popular with the surrounding woodpecker population. Our main target was the scarce Black-backed Woodpecker, but our first couple woodpeckers were American Three-toed, another goodie! Eventually, we got onto a Black-backed, and we ended getting stunning close views. Other good birds were Western Wood Pewee, Alder Flycatcher, our first Grey Jays, another Boreal Chickadee, and Northern Waterthrush. Next, we explored the road towards Hatcher Pass. Our efforts to add White-tailed Ptarmigan to the trip list finally paid off this year, with point-blank walk-away views of a male in breeding plumage. Golden Eagle, Golden-crowned Sparrow, and a number of Hoary Marmots were among the other highlights in this still snow-bound

area, while Red-tailed (or Harlan's) Hawk was found lower down the valley, as was a brilliant North American Porcupine. We continued on, pausing at a well-known viewpoint to get our first looks at Mt McKinlay, but it was unfortunately obscured by clouds, as is often the case. Nearby, before reaching our accommodation, a Turkey Vulture was noted floating over the tree-tops right by the road - and it turned-out to be one of the most northerly records ever and only about the fifth for Alaska!



Male White-tailed Ptarmigan (Craig Robson)

At Denali, some of us chose to take a bus ride deep into the national park, while the rest of the group explored surrounding areas. The late spring unfortunately meant some lingering poor weather, which somewhat hampered the experience for those taking the bus rides. However, there were still many highlights within the park, mainly among the mammals, with the expected Brown Bears, Reindeer (or Caribou) and Thinhorn Sheep topped by a Canada Lynx that was seen by a couple of the group members. Bird highlights included a nesting pair of Gyrfalcons and a Northern Hawk-Owl for some. Outside the park, the highlights were another fantastic Northern Hawk-Owl, Western Osprey, and White-winged Scoters and Horned Grebe on a small lake. At our lodge, there was breeding American Three-toed Woodpecker and a neat Great Horned Owl.

Early the next day we headed off along the very scenic Denali Highway passing miles and miles of spruce-dominated Taiga, and some of the vastest and richest wetland areas to be seen on the whole tour, all with a spectacular mountainous backdrop. There were quite a few bird highlights, and the scenery was simply stunning. The previous day's Northern Hawk-Owl was re-found for all to enjoy, and the roadside lakes held Trumpeter and Tundra Swans, Ring-necked Duck, a stunning male Surf Scoter with the White-winged's, our

first Buffleheads, more Barrow's Goldeneyes, both mergansers, and Common Loon. The few mammals, included our only Collared Pika of the tour.

After checking in to our cabins at the Tangle River, we embarked on our customary trek out to the Smith's Longspur habitat. No sooner had we reached the area, than a very wintery squall cast a very wet shadow over proceedings. Furthermore, the longspurs were nowhere to be found in their normal area; things looked very grim indeed. Widening the search another 500m, Craig eventually tracked-down a male, albeit initially rather damp! The bad weather passed through, and we were able to enjoy very nice views of this cracking bird, before plodding back to our vehicles.

After overnighting at the Tangle River Inn, we headed back to Anchorage, with a few shortish birding stops along the way, and arrived back at the Coast International Inn by the early evening. Yet another Northern Hawk-Owl and two lovely fledged juvenile Great Horned Owls were the highlights en route.



Northern Hawk-Owl....always a stunner (Craig Robson)

The following morning saw us back at the airport, this time for the final leg of our epic journey to Barrow, in the Arctic Circle. Stopping first at wonderfully named Deadhorse (Prudhoe Bay), we arrived late morning, picked up our vehicles, and began our exploration of the tundra and coast. We had a couple of days to explore this amazing place and even with 24-hour daylight, it was hardly long enough!! The vast pack-ice still hugged the coastline, and it was a relatively late spring, but large areas of water were already 'open' inland.

Displaying Pectoral Sandpipers were beginning to boom their way across the tundra, and there were already Pomarine Jaegers searching for lemmings. Lemming numbers were still not at their highest but we nevertheless found at least four Snowy Owls, including one on a nest, and there were several Short-eared Owls hunting mid-day. The many thawing pools and lakes held lots of Pacific Loons, a single superb Yellow-billed Loon, Greater White-fronted Geese, numerous lovely Long-tailed Ducks and twirling Red and Red-necked Phalaropes, and we soon tracked-down all three rarer species of eider - King, Steller's and Spectacled at fairly close range. Steller's were particularly common this year, with at least 50 noted. Other shorebird highlights included some tame Long-billed Dowitchers and perhaps best of all, our first Buff-breasted Sandpiper for many years. Two stunning breeding-plumaged Red-necked Stint were also good, and we also bumped-into yet another rarity, in the form of a Little Stint. The commonest passerines at Barrow were Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting, the latter nicknamed 'Barrow Sparrow'. A good number of Ringed Seals were scoped out on the pack-ice.



A rare sight at Barrow; Buff-breasted Sandpiper (Craig Robson)

Back in Anchorage for the last time, at our now all too familiar home-from-home, the Coast International Inn, we said our goodbyes and drank a toast to a very exciting trip. It really had been another highly successful adventure across this vast land of unparalleled natural beauty, where true wilderness still reigns supreme. This has to be one of the most exciting birding and mammal watching destinations on the North American continent if not anywhere in the world?!



Yellow-billed Loon and Snowy Owl at Barrow (Einar Kongshaug)



Dawn near Paxson (Craig Robson), and a well-clad group at Barrow [extension absentees inset!] (Einar Kongshaug)

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

BIRDS

Total of bird species recorded 199.

Brant Goose (Black Brant) *Branta [bernicla] nigricans* Mostly at Nome (250+) and Barrow (30-40).

Canada Goose (Lesser C G) *Branta [canadensis] parvipes* Supposedly the common form around Anchorage.

Cackling Goose (Aleutian C G) *Branta [hutchinsii] leucopareia* Flock of 12 of this rare form seen well at St Paul.



'Aleutian' Cackling Geese at St Paul (Einar Kongshaug)

Cackling Goose (Taverner's C G) *Branta [hutchinsii] taverneri* The common form at Nome.

Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens* Just two at Nome.

Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*

Trumpeter Swan *Cygnus buccinator* Two breeding pairs near Seward. Several more along the Denali Highway etc.

Tundra Swan (Whistling S) *Cygnus columbianus* Scattered sightings but 100+ at Safety Sound.

Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata*

Gadwall *Mareca strepera*

Eurasian Wigeon *Mareca penelope* A pair at St Paul.

American Wigeon *Mareca americana*

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca* At least two at St Paul, and a number of possible hybrids with the next species.

Green-winged Teal *Anas carolinensis*

Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris* Three near Seward and five along the Denali Highway.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* A pair at St Paul.

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila* The commonest scaup, and one of the most frequently recorded species on the tour.

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*

Steller's Eider *Polysticta stelleri* At least 50 at Barrow, including displaying birds.

Spectacled Eider *Somateria fischeri* One at Safety Sound and then at least seven at Barrow.

King Eider *Somateria spectabilis* Widespread sightings; St Paul, Nome and Barrow.

Common Eider *Somateria mollissima* 80+ in the Nome area and 40+ at Barrow. The form seen is *v-nigra*.



Spectacled Eider (Einar Kongshaug) and King Eider (Craig Robson) at Barrow

Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus* Common on this tour.

Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata* Multiple widespread sightings this time.

White-winged Scoter *Melanitta deglandi* Also frequent and widespread this year.



Rock Ptarmigan (top) and Willow Ptarmigan near Nome (Craig Robson)

Black Scoter *Melanitta americana*

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis* A lovely sight (and sound), especially in the Arctic tundra.

Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola* Just ten along the Denali Highway.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* A dozen at Nome.

Barrow's Goldeneye *Bucephala islandica* Small numbers at scattered sites, and some great views.

Common Merganser *Mergus merganser*

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*

Spruce Grouse *Falcapennis canadensis* An excellent male predawn near Seward.

White-tailed Ptarmigan *Lagopus leucura* Finding a male near Hatcher Pass was a highlight of the tour.

Rock Ptarmigan *Lagopus muta* At least eight seen in the Nome area. One near Hatcher Pass.

Willow Ptarmigan (W Grouse) *Lagopus lagopus* Many sightings this year.

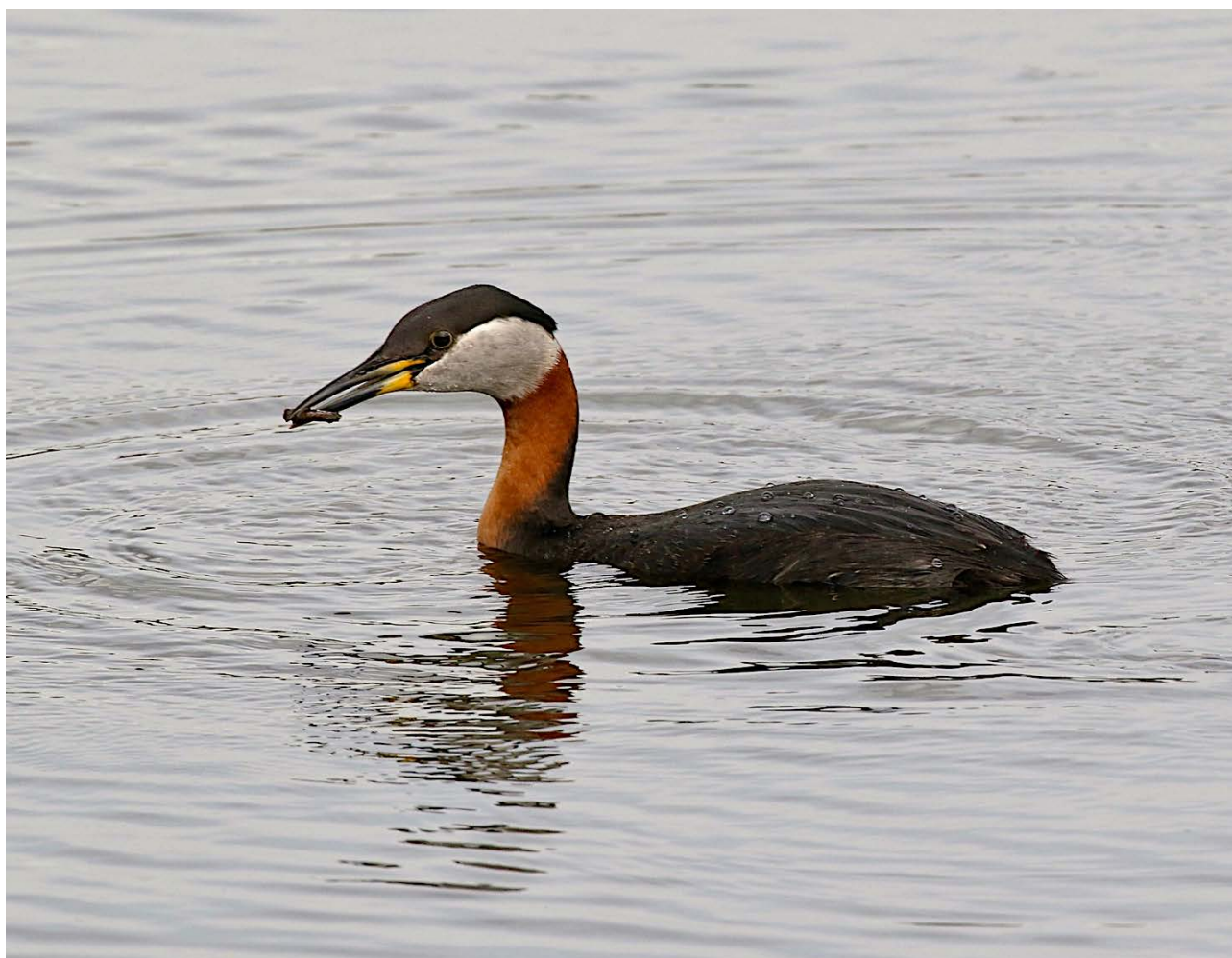
Red-throated Loon (R-t Diver) *Gavia stellata*

Pacific Loon (P Diver) *Gavia pacifica* Quite common and widespread. Probably 30+ at Barrow.

Common Loon (Great Northern Diver) *Gavia immer* A few, with one on a nest at Tern Lake.

Yellow-billed Loon (White-b Diver) *Gavia adamsii* One seen well on two days at Barrow.

Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis* The variety of plumages in the Pacific birds at St Paul was interesting to see.



Red-necked Grebes breed around Anchorage (Craig Robson)

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*

Horned Grebe (Slavonian G) *Podiceps auritus* A fine breeding-plumaged individual along the Denali Highway.

Pelagic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pelagicus* Widespread in coastal areas.

Red-faced Cormorant *Phalacrocorax urile* Good views at St Paul, with 25 counted. One on the cruise.

Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus* Four in the Seward area.

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura* One floating by the roadside near Ermine Hill Trailhead, en route to Denali.

Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* Singles near Westchester Lagoon and Denali.
Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* At least six noted during our explorations of the interior.
Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonius* Widespread in suitable habitat.
White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* A young bird at St Paul had been lingering for a while.
Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*
Red-tailed Hawk (Harlan's H) *Buteo [jamaicensis] harlani* Quite a few scattered sightings this year.
Rough-legged Buzzard (R-I Hawk) *Buteo lagopus* At least seven seen in the Nome area, with one on a nest.



Sandhill Crane on the outskirts of Anchorage (Craig Robson)

Sandhill Crane *Grus canadensis* Scattered sightings, but most frequently seen near Nome (35+).
Black Oystercatcher (American B O) *Haematopus bachmani* Eight during the Kenai Fjords cruise.
Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* Three at St Paul, and a handful at Nome - where they breed in coastal areas.
American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* Great views inland from Nome and in the Barrow area.
Grey Plover (Black-bellied P) *Pluvialis squatarola* Two near Westchester Lagoon and three near Nome (plus nest).
Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus* Widespread. A nest with 4 eggs at Barrow.
Bristle-thighed Curlew *Numenius tahitiensis* Great views of two by the Kougarok Road, Nome. Another heard.
Whimbrel (Hudsonian W) *Numenius [phaeopus] hudsonicus* A few scattered sightings.
Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* One at St Paul and 5+ at Nome - where they are a bit of a speciality.
Hudsonian Godwit *Limosa haemastica* 30 at Westchester Lagoon/Tony Knowles Coastal Trail. Good scope views.
Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* One at Nome, on its breeding grounds, and ten at Barrow.
Black Turnstone *Arenaria melanocephala* Two singles seen well at Safety Sound.
Red Knot *Calidris canutus* Just one at Safety Sound.
Surfbird *Calidris virgata* Two near Anchorage and eight at Safety Sound.
Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis* Two excellent breeding-plumaged birds at Barrow.
Sanderling *Calidris alba* Ten near Nome, and 11+ at Barrow.
Dunlin *Calidris alpina* Plenty of 'Pacific' Dunlins were recorded at Nome and again at Barrow where they breed.
Rock Sandpiper *Calidris ptilocnemis* Abundant St Paul (nominated).



Red-necked and Little Stints (top) and Least Sandpiper (Craig Robson)

Little Stint *Calidris minuta* Self-found at Barrow; with Red-necked Stint.

Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla* Just two singles near Nome.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Calidris subruficollis* Great close views of one at Barrow. Long overdue.



Buff-breasted Sandpiper (Craig Robson)

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* Three near Nome, and a common breeder at Barrow. Amazing display-flight.

Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla* One of the commonest breeders at Nome and Barrow.

Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri* Good numbers near Nome, and just a few at Barrow.

Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* Just seven at Barrow.

Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus* A single bird at Westchester Lagoon, where it breeds.

Wilson's Snipe *Gallinago delicata*

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

Red Phalarope (Grey P) *Phalaropus fulicarius*

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* Ian picked one out at Safety Bridge.

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*

Wandering Tattler *Tringa incana* Scattered sightings and some good views near Nome.

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*

Black-legged Kittiwake (Pacific K) *Rissa [tridactyla] pollicaris*

Red-legged Kittiwake *Rissa brevirostris* Over 40 at St Paul, where it was just returning to its breeding cliffs.

Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini* Scattered in small numbers; St Paul, Safety Sound and Barrow.

Bonaparte's Gull *Chroicocephalus philadelphia*

Mew Gull (Short-billed G) *Larus [canus] brachyrhynchus*

Glaucous-winged Gull *Larus glaucescens* St Paul & Seward. Mostly hybrids (Cook Inlet Gull) in Anchorage area.

Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus* Very common around Nome and Barrow, where it breeds. A few St Paul.

American Herring Gull *Larus smithsonianus* A few around Anchorage and at Tangle Lakes.

Vega Gull *Larus vegae* A handful noted near Nome.



Sabine's Gull at Nome (Craig Robson)

Aleutian Tern *Onychoprion aleuticus* Only fairly small numbers near Nome (20+), but some nice views.

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*

Pomarine Jaeger (P Skua) *Stercorarius pomarinus*

Parasitic Jaeger (Arctic Skua) *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Long-tailed Jaeger (L-t Skua) *Stercorarius longicaudus*

Thick-billed Murre (Brünnich's Guillemot) *Uria lomvia*

Common Murre (C Guillemot) *Uria aalge*

Pigeon Guillemot *Cephus columba* At least 30 in the Seward area. Close views.

Marbled Murrelet *Brachyramphus marmoratus* 10-12 around Seward, and some nice views.

Kittlitz's Murrelet *Brachyramphus brevirostris* A pair during our Kenai Fjords cruise; one of the specialities here.

Ancient Murrelet *Synthliboramphus antiquus* At least 12 during our Kenai Fjords cruise; nice looks.

Parakeet Auklet *Aethia psittacula* 100+ seen brilliantly at St Paul; also good views of raft of 20 Chiswell Is, Seward.

Least Auklet *Aethia pusilla* A real little character, that was locally abundant at St Paul.



Rhinoceros Auklet (top) and Crested Auklet (Craig Robson)

Crested Auklet *Aethia cristatella* At least 35, including some on ledges at St Paul.

Rhinoceros Auklet *Cerorhinca monocerata* Around 60 seen well in the Kenai Fjords. Best ever views.

Horned Puffin *Fratercula corniculata* Great views at St Paul and during the cruise from Seward. One at Nome.

Tufted Puffin *Fratercula cirrhata* What a bird! Great views at St Paul and in the Kenai Fjords. One at Nome.



Kittlitz's Murrelet (Craig Robson)

Rock Pigeon (R Dove) (introduced) *Columba livia*

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* Our group found one at St Paul, on our first day there.

Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus* At least four at Barrow this year, and well appreciated! One on a nest.

Great Horned Owl *Bubo virginianus* Adult at our cabins near Denali; two fledglings Tolsona Wilderness Campsite

Northern Hawk-Owl *Surnia ulula* Singles noted Denali Park, Denali Highway, and south of Paxson.

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus* Small numbers near Nome and at Barrow.

Rufous Hummingbird *Selasphorus rufus* Great views near Seward (4 seen). Amazing that they survive so far north!

Belted Kingfisher *Megaceryle alcyon* A couple near Seward and one en route to Denali.

American Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides dorsalis* 2 on way to Denali; pair & chicks in nest at cabins near Denali.

Black-backed Woodpecker *Picoides arcticus* Brilliant close views of a male en route to Denali.

Downy Woodpecker *Dryobates pubescens* A good scattering of sightings this year.

Hairy Woodpecker (Eastern H W) *Leuconotopicus villosus* As the last species. Nest with chicks near Seward.

Northern Flicker (Yellow-shafted F) *Colaptes auratus* Just one briefly, en route to Denali.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* Our rarest find of the tour, at St Paul. Less than 20 records from N America.

Merlin *Falco columbarius* (NL) One along the Denali Highway.

Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus* A couple of distant birds near Nome, and a pair at a nest at Denali Park.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* One or two at Barrow. Amazing this far north.

Say's Phoebe *Sayornis saya* One near Nome and one or two at Tangle Lakes.

Western Wood Pewee *Contopus sordidulus* One near Anchorage and two en route to Denali.

Alder Flycatcher *Empidonax alnorum* Several seen - we were usually alerted by the distinctive voice.

Grey Jay (Northern G J) *Perisoreus canadensis* Occasional in the boreal forests. 23 logged this year.

Black-billed Magpie *Pica hudsonia*

Northwestern Crow *Corvus caurinus* Small numbers were seen well in and around Seward.

Northern Raven (Common R) *Corvus corax*

Black-capped Chickadee *Poecile atricapillus*

Boreal Chickadee *Poecile hudsonicus* Occasional in small numbers in the boreal forests.

Chestnut-backed Chickadee *Poecile rufescens* Six near Seward.

Horned Lark (American H L) *Eremophila alpestris* (H)

Sand Martin (Bank Swallow) *Riparia riparia*



Juvenile Great Horned Owl (Craig Robson)

Tree Swallow *Tachycineta bicolor* The most widespread hirundine.

Violet-green Swallow *Tachycineta thalassina* Small numbers noted on a few occasions.

Barn Swallow (American B S) *Hirundo [rustica] erythrogaster* One near Nome.

American Cliff Swallow (Cliff S) *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota* At scattered breeding locations, mostly bridges.

Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis* One seen and a couple heard along the Denali Highway. Race *kennicotti*.

Golden-crowned Kinglet *Regulus satrapa*

Ruby-crowned Kinglet *Regulus calendula* This and the last species were noted at scattered forested locations.

Pacific Wren *Troglodytes pacificus* Five 'Pribilof' Wren (*alascensis*) at St Paul. One darker *stevensoni* Lowell Point.

Red-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta canadensis* Several. Cute nasal calls.

Brown Creeper *Certhia americana* Scarce here, but we had brilliant views of one near Seward.

Common Starling (introduced) *Sturnus vulgaris*

Varied Thrush *Ixoreus naevius* We enjoyed excellent views of this real stunner on several occasions.

Grey-cheeked Thrush *Catharus minimus* Common around Nome and along the Denali Highway.

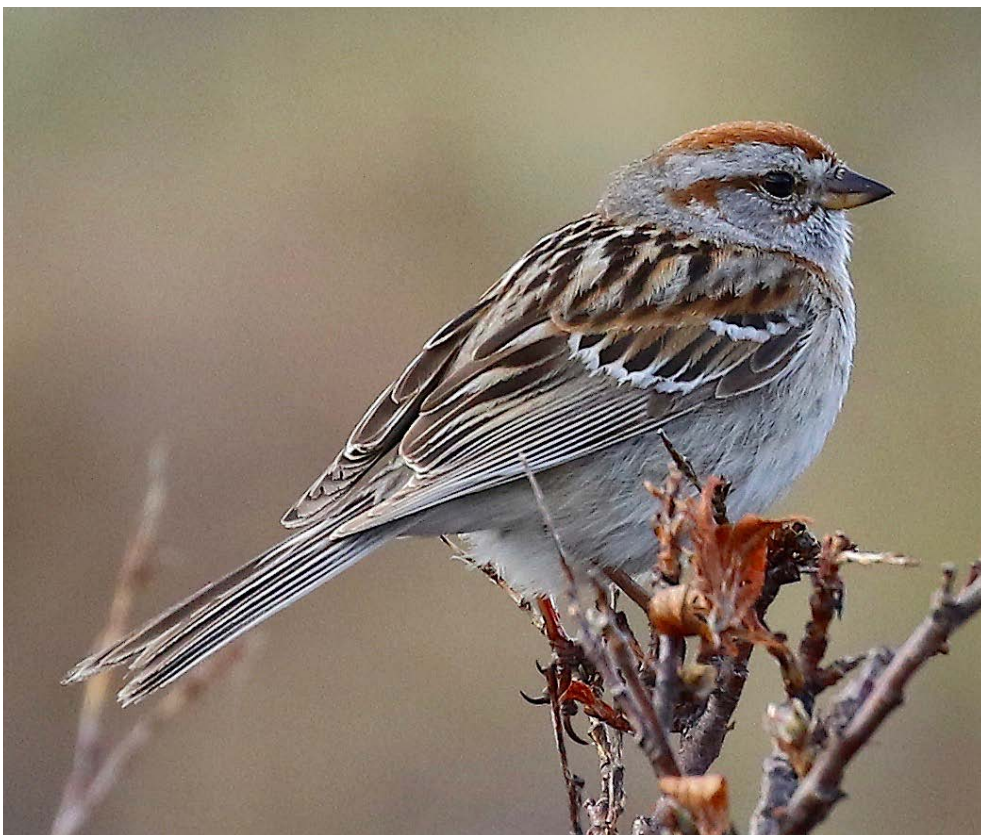
Swainson's Thrush *Catharus ustulatus* Regularly found in the interior.

Hermit Thrush *Catharus guttatus* Somewhat scarcer than the last species. Subspecies *nanus*.
Eyebrowed Thrush *Turdus obscurus* A single amongst a fall of migrants at St Paul.
American Robin *Turdus migratorius* Common and widespread. One on St Paul was unexpected.
Bluethroat (Red-spotted B) *Luscinia svecica* Good views of five males in the Nome area.
Siberian Rubythroat *Calliope calliope* A smart male amongst a fall of migrants at St Paul.
Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* Two near Nome.
American Dipper *Cinclus mexicanus* One at nest at Penny River, Nome. Adult feeding two fledglings near Seward.



One of many Olive-backed Pipits seen on St Paul (Craig Robson)

Eastern Yellow Wagtail (Alaskan W) *Motacilla [tschutschensis] tschutschensis* 1 St Paul; 2 near Nome.
White Wagtail (East Siberian W) *Motacilla [alba] ocularis* One near Nome.
Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni* At least nine noted on St Paul, a very high total for this vagrant.
Buff-bellied Pipit (American P) *Anthus rubescens* Quite widespread, including five at St Paul.
Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla* Four at St Paul, with at least one smart male.
Pine Grosbeak (American P G) *Pinicola [enucleator] leucura* A pair came to feeders near Seward.
Grey-crowned Rosy Finch (G-faced R F) *Leucosticte [tephrocotis] griseonucha* Common St Paul (bulky *umbrina*).
Common Redpoll *Carduelis flammea* Fairly common and very widespread.
Arctic Redpoll (Hoary R) *Carduelis hornemanni* Subspecies *exilipes* was occasional around Nome and Barrow.
Red Crossbill *Loxia leucoptera* A couple of unexpected males at feeders near Seward.
Two-barred Crossbill (White-winged C) *Loxia leucoptera* (H)
Pine Siskin *Spinus pinus* Best seen at feeders near Seward.
Lapland Longspur (L Bunting) *Calcarius lapponicus* Abundant on the tundra.
Smith's Longspur *Calcarius pictus* Great views of a male near Paxson. Another heard. Beautiful bird.
Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis* Otherwise known as the Barrow Sparrow.
Red Fox Sparrow *Passerella iliaca* Common around Nome, and Denali-Paxson. Rich song.
Sooty Fox Sparrow *Passerella unalaschensis* Several in the Seward area.



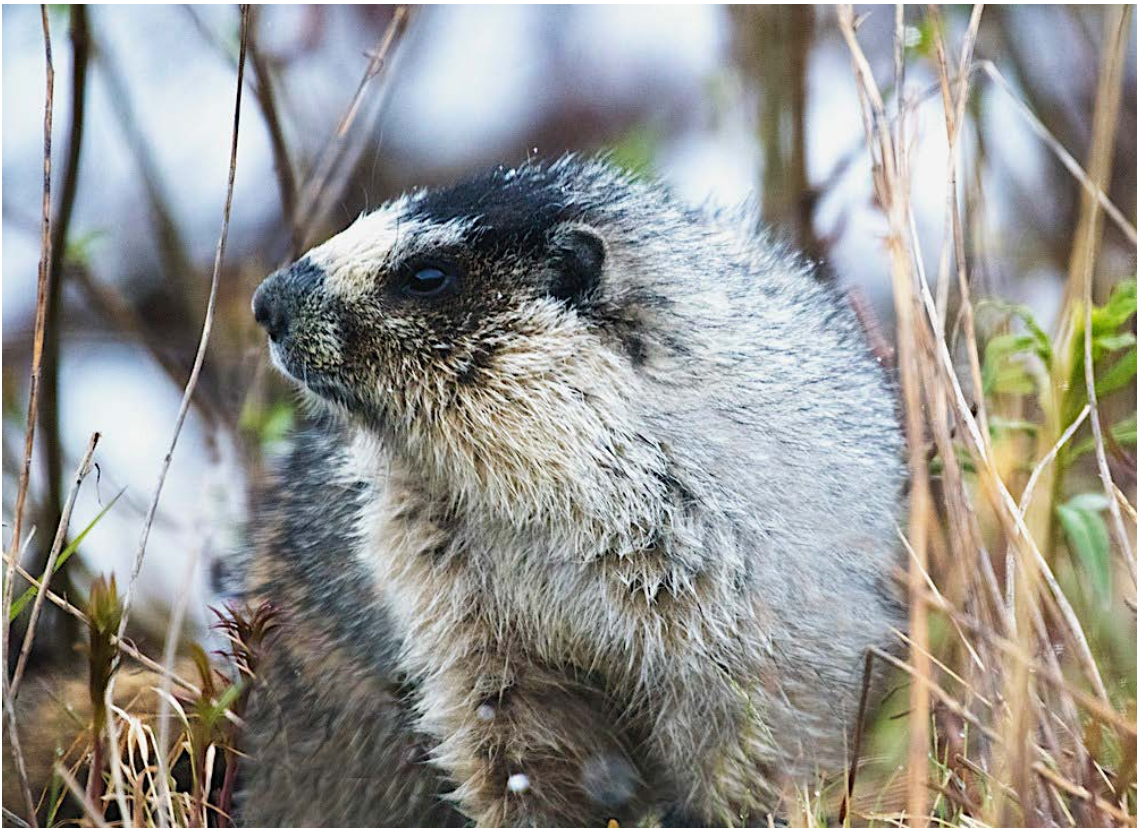
'Pacific' Song Sparrow (top) and American Tree Sparrow (Craig Robson)

Song Sparrow (Pacific S S) *Melospiza [melodia] rufina* One or two in the Seward area. Dark *kenaiensis*.

Lincoln's Sparrow *Melospiza lincolnii* This neat little sparrow showed well in several places.
White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys*
Golden-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia atricapilla* Several around Nome, and at higher levels in the interior.
Dark-eyed Junco *Junco hyemalis*
Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis*
American Tree Sparrow *Spizelloides arborea* Around Nome and along the Denali Highway.
Rusty Blackbird *Euphagus carolinus* Singles at Lake Spenard & Hood, and near Nome. Declining.
Northern Waterthrush *Parkesia noveboracensis* Widespread and often heard. A few seen well.
Orange-crowned Warbler *Leiothlypis celata* Widespread.
American Yellow Warbler (Northern Y W) *Setophaga aestiva* Surprisingly widespread this far north.
Blackpoll Warbler *Setophaga striata* Seen well, but often only heard giving its high-pitched insect-like song.
Myrtle Warbler *Setophaga coronata*
Townsend's Warbler *Setophaga townsendi* A couple in the Anchorage-Seward Boreal forests.
Wilson's Warbler *Cardellina pusilla* Another colourful warbler. A little skulking, but many good looks.



Grey (or Black-bellied) Plover nest near Nome (Craig Robson)



umbrina Grey-crowned Rosy Finch and Hoary Marmot (Einar Kongshaug)



Seward Harbour (Craig Robson)

MAMMALS

Total of mammal species recorded 33.

Snowshoe Hare *Lepus americanus* Several seen really well.

Collared Pika *Ochotona collaris* One near Tangle Lakes.

American Beaver *Castor canadensis* One along the Kougarok Road, near Nome.

North American Porcupine *Erithizon dorsatum* Singles near Hatcher Pass and along the Denali Highway.

North American Brown Lemming (Brown L) *Lemmus trimucronatus* A couple at Barrow.

Muskrat *Ondata zibethicus* One at Westchester Lagoon.

Hoary Marmot *Marmota caligata* Six near Hatcher Pass.

Arctic Ground Squirrel (A Souslik) *Spermophilus parryii* Common, especially around Nome and Denali.

Red Squirrel *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*

Canada Lynx (Canadian L) *Lynx canadensis* Antonio and Guy were lucky at Denali Park.

Arctic Fox *Alopex lagopus* Common at St Paul.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*

Brown Bear (Grizzly B) *Ursus arctos* Two along the Kougarok Road and a total of eight at Denali Park.



Sea Otter at Seward (Craig Robson)

- Sea Otter** *Enhydra lutris* Good views of many at the Kenai Fjords and around Seward.
- Northern American Otter (N River O)** *Lutra canadensis* One from the boat at Seward was unexpected.
- American Mink** *Neovison vison* One near Nome; a surprising write-in.
- Northern Fur Seal** *Callorhinus ursinus* Plenty at St Paul where they were coming back to the beaches to breed.
- Steller Sea Lion** *Eumetopias jubatus* 20 off St Paul and c.150 during the Kenai Fjords cruise.
- Spotted Seal (Largha S)** *Phoca largha* 20+ at Nome.
- Harbour Seal (Common S)** *Phoca vitulina* One at St Paul and 500+ on ice off the Northwestern Glacier.
- Ringed Seal** *Pusa hispida* About ten hauled-out on the pack-ice at Barrow.
- Walrus** *Odobenus rosmarus* An unbelievably hulking male near Cape Nome. A tour write-in.
- Killer Whale (Orca)** *Orcinus orca* Eight 'fish-eaters' and three 'meat-eaters' during our Kenai Fjords boat trip.
- Beluga** *Delphinapterus leucas* One cruised by close insure at Safety Sound - totally unexpected and a tour write-in.
- Harbour Porpoise** *Phocoena phocoena* 5-9 were noted close to Seward.
- Dall's Porpoise** *Phocoenoides dalli* 20+ in speedy groups around the fjords near Seward.
- Fin Whale** *Balaenoptera physalus* At least six were seen nicely during the cruise - a tour write-in.
- Humpback Whale** *Megaptera novaeangliae* Five or so during the Kenai Fjords cruise; some great encounters.
- Eurasian Elk (Moose)** *Alces alces* Over 50 of these impressive beasts this year, with some neat youngsters.
- Reindeer (Caribou)** *Rangifer tarandus* A herd of 185 along the Teller Road, Nome, and 25+ at Denali Park.
- Mountain Goat** *Oreamnos americanus* 23 seen quite well in the Seward area, though quite distant.
- Muskox** *Ovibos moschatus* 118 logged near Nome. Amazing beasts, and how they could run across snow-patches.
- Thinhorn Sheep (Dall S)** *Ovis dalli* 17 scoped near Beluga Point, and just one reported from Denali Park.



Eurasian Elk (Moose) and Muskox (Craig Robson)



Humpback and Killer Whales (Craig Robson)

NOTES TO THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

Red-tailed Hawk (Harlan's H) *Buteo [jamaicensis] harlani*

Some authorities split off the local form of Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis* as Harlan's Hawk *B. harlani*.

Black-legged Kittiwake (Pacific K) *Rissa [tridactyla] pollicaris*

Some authorities have suggested splitting off this form as a distinct species, Pacific Kittiwake *Rissa pollicaris* (see BirdLife/HBW).

Mew Gull (Short-billed G) *Larus [canus] brachyrhynchus*

Some authorities have suggested splitting off this form as a distinct species, Short-billed Gull *Larus brachyrhynchus* (see BirdLife/HBW).

Glaucous-winged Gull *Larus glaucescens*

American Herring Gull *Larus smithsonianus*

These two species interbreed freely in the Anchorage area and many of the gulls there are simply hybrids ("Cook Inlet Gull"), with very few showing pure characters of either species.

Barn Swallow (American B S) *Hirundo [rustica] erythrogaster*

Some authorities have suggested splitting off the New World form as a distinct species, American Barn Swallow *Hirundo erythrogaster* (see BirdLife/HBW).

Pacific Wren *Troglodytes pacificus*

Pribilof Wren (*alascensis*) of St Paul is a potential split. After several hard winters taking a toll on the population, the numbers are well up this time, and we even found an occupied nest.

Song Sparrow (Pacific S S) *Melospiza [melodia] rufina*

There is a reasonable possibility that the current species will in future be divided into a number of new species (as suggested by BirdLife/HBW). The form seen on this tour would then become Pacific Song Sparrow *M. rufina*.

Pine Grosbeak (American P G) *Pinicola [enucleator] leucura*

Some authorities have suggested splitting off New World forms as American Pine Grosbeak *Pinicola leucura* (see BirdLife/HBW).

Grey-crowned Rosy Finch (Grey-faced R) *Leucosticte [tephrocotis] griseonucha*

Some authorities have suggested splitting off some north Pacific forms, including those occurring on this tour, as Grey-faced Rosy Finch *Leucosticte griseonucha* (see BirdLife/HBW).

APPENDIX 1 - Top 5 birds/mammals of the tour

- 1st **Spectacled Eider**
- 2nd **Snowy Owl**
- 3rd **Smith's Longspur**
- 4th **Tufted Puffin**
- 5th **White-tailed Ptarmigan & Northern Hawk-Owl**

APPENDIX 2 - Other fauna & flora recorded

PLANTS

Black Spruce *Picea mariana*
White Spruce *Picea glauca*
Hare's-tail Cottongrass *Eriophorum vaginatum*
Mountain Alder *Alnus crispa*
Dwarf Birch *Betula nana*
Oyster Plant *Mertensia maritima*
Bluebells (Chiming B) *Mertensia paniculata*
Arctic Scurvygrass *Cochlearia [officinalis] arctica*
Moss Campion *Silene acaulis*
Arctic Sandwort *Minuartia arctica*
Canadian Dwarf Cornel *Cornus canadensis*
Swedish Dwarf Cornel *Cornus suecica*
Lapland Diapensia *Diapensia lapponicum*
Bog-rosemary *Andromeda polifolia*
Alpine Bearberry *Arctostaphylos alpine*
Crowberry *Empetrum nigrum*
Labrador Tea *Ledum palustris*
Trailing Azalea (Alpine A) *Loiseleuria procumbens*
Lapland Rhododendron *R. lapponicum*
Bog Bilberry (B Blueberry) *Vaccinium uliginosum*
Beach Pea *Lathyrus maritimus*
Arctic Lupine *Lupinus arcticus*
Nootka Lupine *Lupinus notkatensis*
Wild Geranium *Geranium erianthum*
False Hellebore *Veratrum viride*
Woolly Lousewort *Pedicularis kanei*
Labrador Lousewort *Pedicularis labradorica*
Arctic Lousewort *Pedicularis langsdorffii*
Alaska Poppy *Papaver alaskanum*
Tall Jacob's Ladder *Polemonium acutiflorum*
Northern Jacob's Ladder *Polemonium boreale*
Beautiful Jacob's Ladder *P. pulcherrimum*
Alpine Meadow Bistort *Polygonum viviparum*
Rock Jasmine *Androsace septentrionalis*
Frigid Shooting Star *Dodecatheon frigidum*
Shooting Star *Dodecatheon pulchellum*
Chuckchi Primrose *Primula tschuktschorum*
Alaska Blue Anemone *Anemone multiceps*
Narcissus-flowered Anemone *Anemone narcissiflora*
Yellow Anemone *Anemone richardsonii*
Marsh Marigold *Caltha palustris*
Pasque Flower *Pulsatilla vulgaris*
Snow Buttercup *Ranunculus nivalis*
Mountain Avens *Dryas octopetala*
Shrubby Cinquefoil *Potentilla fruticosa*
Marsh Cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*
Cloudberry *Rubus chamemorous*
Sibbaldia *Sibbaldia procumbens*
Alaska Spiraea *Spiraea beauverdiana*
Balsam Poplar *Populus balsamifera*
Quaking Aspen *Populus tremuloides*

Arctic Willow *Salix arctica*
Net-leaved Willow *Salix reticulata*
Least Willow (Round-leaf W) *Salix rotundifolia*
Aleutian Violet (Alaska V) *Viola langsdorffii*



Blue Anemone (Einar Kongshaug) and Lapland Diapensia with Trailing Azalea (Craig Robson)

