

Birds of the High Arctic and Bering Sea

Alaska is geographically separated from the rest of the United States and is the largest in size of all the states. The habitats range from vast forests and glaciers to rugged mountains and tundra. This range of habitats in turn attracts a wide range of species to breed. Our tour takes in the major birding sites of Alaska which includes the tundra habitat around Barrow, home to the endangered Spectacled Eider. Nome is another isolated town with literally three roads running out of it, we will explore these for a wide range of sought-after species including Bristle-thighed Curlew and vagrants from Asia. In the interior of Alaska is Denali, a state park with spectacular scenery and vistas including Mount McKinley, one of the highest peaks in North America. Some of our time is spent around Anchorage with its varied habitats and a few days at Seward where seabirds can be numerous in the inlets. Finally we have an optional extension to the Pribilof Islands where close encounters with auks and seabirds are guaranteed.

Day 1: Fly from the UK to Anchorage via Seattle. Arrival is later the same day.

Days 2-3: Morning flight to Barrow, the most northerly city in Alaska, which has access to the Arctic tundra - a magnet for breeding birds. Our main targets include Steller's, Spectacled and King Eiders and stunning Red-necked and Grey Phalaropes in their breeding dress. The roadside lakes and small ponds attract Pacific Diver, Pectoral, Semipalmated, and Western Sandpipers, Dunlin and Long-billed Dowitchers. We also have good chances of finding White-billed Divers in breeding plumage whilst the tundra itself attracts Snowy and Short-eared Owls and Pomarine Skua if it is a lemming year. Other birds in and around Barrow include flocks of Snow and Lapland Buntings, Arctic and Common Redpolls.

Day 4: A final morning birding around Barrow followed by a flight to Anchorage where we overnight. On arrival we visit Westchester Lagoon, a reliable spot for Red-necked Grebe, American Wigeon, Greater Scaup, Bald Eagle, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Hudsonian Godwit, and Short-billed Dowitcher.

Day 5: Today we travel north through a habitat of black spruce and willow scrub to

Dates

Saturday June 13th – Sunday June 28th (extension to the Pribilofs until July 1)

Leader: Mark Finn and local guides
Group Size: 8
Birds: 140-180

the eastern end of the Denali Highway. Along the way stops are made for Spruce Grouse, Bohemian Waxwing and, with luck, Northern Hawk-Owl. Our overnight stop is at Paxson with a mix of tundra habitats holding Trumpeter Swan and the scarce and localised Smith's Longspur.

Days 6-7: An early departure this morning to bird along the Denali Highway. En route we should encounter Spruce Grouse, Bohemian Waxwing, Arctic Warbler, and further opportunities of Northern Hawk Owl. Trails near the park entrance hold Grey Jay, Varied Thrush, Golden-crowned Sparrow, White-winged Crossbill and Common Redpoll. Our base for the next two nights is on the edge of Denali National Park. On Day 7 we enter the park and utilise the shuttle buses for a round trip where we hope to encounter Willow Ptarmigan, Gyrfalcon, Golden Eagle, Long-tailed Skua and Northern Shrike. Mammals



Bristle-thighed Curlew Photo: George Matz

are a star draw with Grizzly Bear, Reindeer and Elk being of interest.

Day 8: Depart from Denali and travel back to Anchorage. We will be on the lookout for any recently burnt areas which give the group chances of locating American Three-toed and Black-backed Woodpeckers, Boreal Chickadee and Bohemian Waxwing. There are many lakes supporting Great Northern Divers and in some years colonies of Bonaparte's and Common Gulls. Night in Anchorage.

Day 9: This morning we visit various parks and forested areas around Anchorage looking for White-winged Crossbill, Alder Flycatcher, Lincoln's Sparrow, Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers. In the afternoon we travel in a southerly direction to the town of Seward. The route passes through mountain scenery and on to the Kenai Peninsula. Seward has large areas of Sitka Spruce where many species find a toehold in Alaska. Careful searching should reveal Rufous Hummingbird, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Varied Thrush, Townsend's

Warbler, Fox Sparrow and Pine Grosbeak. Two nights in Seward.

Day 10: We spend the day birding in Resurrection Bay and Blying Sound, a spectacular region dominated by glaciers and deep water habitats to the south of Seward. Several large seabird colonies are home to Tufted and Horned Puffins, Rhinoceros Auklet, Ancient Murrelet, Brunnich's and Common Guillemots and Black-legged Kittiwakes. If we encounter groups of Marbled Murrelet we may find the uncommon Kittlitz's Murrelet among them. Marine mammals present include Steller's Sea Lion, Sea Otter and Humpback Whale.

Day 11: A final morning birding around Seward with a visit to the Exit Glacier and its numerous trails. It is possible to locate Steller's and Grey Jays, Hermit and Varied Thrushes, American Dipper, Northern Waterthrush, Orange-crowned, Townsend's and Wilson's Warblers and White-winged Crossbill. Later we head back to Anchorage with a stop at Potters Marsh for Slavonian Grebe, Sandhill Crane, Alder Flycatcher



Red-breasted Nuthatch Photo: Simon Papps

and Rusty Blackbird. Night in Anchorage.

Day 12: Morning flight to Nome, which is situated close to the Barents Sea. Nome has three dead-end roads which run out in various directions for us to explore. Our first visit is along the Teller Road where roadside pools have Red-breasted Merganser and Common Gull. Low scrub and bushes may reveal White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows, Grey-cheeked Thrush and Wilson's and Yellow Warblers. Patches of lichen-covered rocks allow Horned Larks to breed along with nesting shorebirds, notably Pacific Golden Plover, Western Sandpiper and Red Knot.

Day 13: Morning visit to the Nome River where we should locate Arctic and Aleutian Terns and Cackling Geese. The road towards Cape Nome often has Long-tailed Skuas. At the cape a scan of the sea may provide views of Pelagic Cormorant and showy Harlequin Ducks. Safety Sound is close by, an area attractive to Surfbird, Black Turnstone and Sandhill Cranes. The low scrub often has Lapland Bunting and Arctic Warbler here at the end of its extensive eastern range. The Council Road

meanders on towards a bridge which often hosts Gyrfalcon, American Pipit and Say's Phoebe. At the end of the road a patch of pine forest should have Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Orange-crowned and Yellow-rumped Warblers and Rusty Blackbirds.

Day 14: Kougarak Road is our destination this morning where the hillsides are home to American Golden Plover, Bristle-thighed Curlew and the Hudsonian race of Whimbrel. The road also allows us to see Bufflehead, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Waterthrush and Alder Flycatcher. Back in Nome we can check for American Wigeon, Black and White-winged Scoters and any other species we may have missed.

Day 15: Fly back to Anchorage for an overnight stay

Please note: The Pribilof extension is subject to weather which can cause delays or cancellations.

Days 16-17: Flights back to Europe via Seattle where arrival is on the following day, or fly to St Paul in the Pribilof Islands



Sandhill Crane Photo: George Matz

for a two-night stay. On St Paul Island we explore the numerous seabird colonies which offer exceptionally close views. St Paul is renowned for Parakeet, Least and Crested Auklets, Horned and Tufted Puffins. We should also see the range-restricted Red-faced Cormorant and Red-legged Kittiwake along with Rock Sandpipers and Glaucous-winged Gulls. St Paul holds very few passerines but it may include Grey-crowned Rosy-finch, Lapland and Snow Buntings. Rarer species which occasionally turn up on the islands include Sabine's Gull, Emperor Goose and Mackay's Bunting. St Paul also has a reputation for vagrants from Asia and hopefully some may be present during our stay.

Day 18: A final morning on St Paul and then fly back to Anchorage for the night. Departure is the following day back to Europe.

Prices

Ground Price: £6,495
 Single room: £1,000
 Deposit: £600
 *Air Fare: £1,275

Pribilof Extention: £2,400
 Deposit: £250
 *Air Fare: included

Please note single rooms are not always available on the Pribilof Islands and Barrow.

This holiday is fully inclusive of accommodation and meals, transport, permit fees, guidance, tips and taxes.

Not included: Visa to enter USA, drinks, insurance, and items of a personal nature.

**Please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights*