



This was a Tropical Birding Tours **Birding with a Camera (BwC)** tour

ALASKA Birding with a Camera Tour:
Barrow, Nome & Anchorage (Includes St. Paul and Seward Extension)

Arctic Specialties and Photogenic Wildlife of "The Last Frontier"

9th – 23rd June 2018



*Alaska is perhaps best thought of as outside of the United States, so different are the birds there. The birds are also famously confiding in the underpopulated Arctic, something that our first male **Willow Ptarmigan** proved only too well!*

Tour leader and report (and all photos): Sam Woods

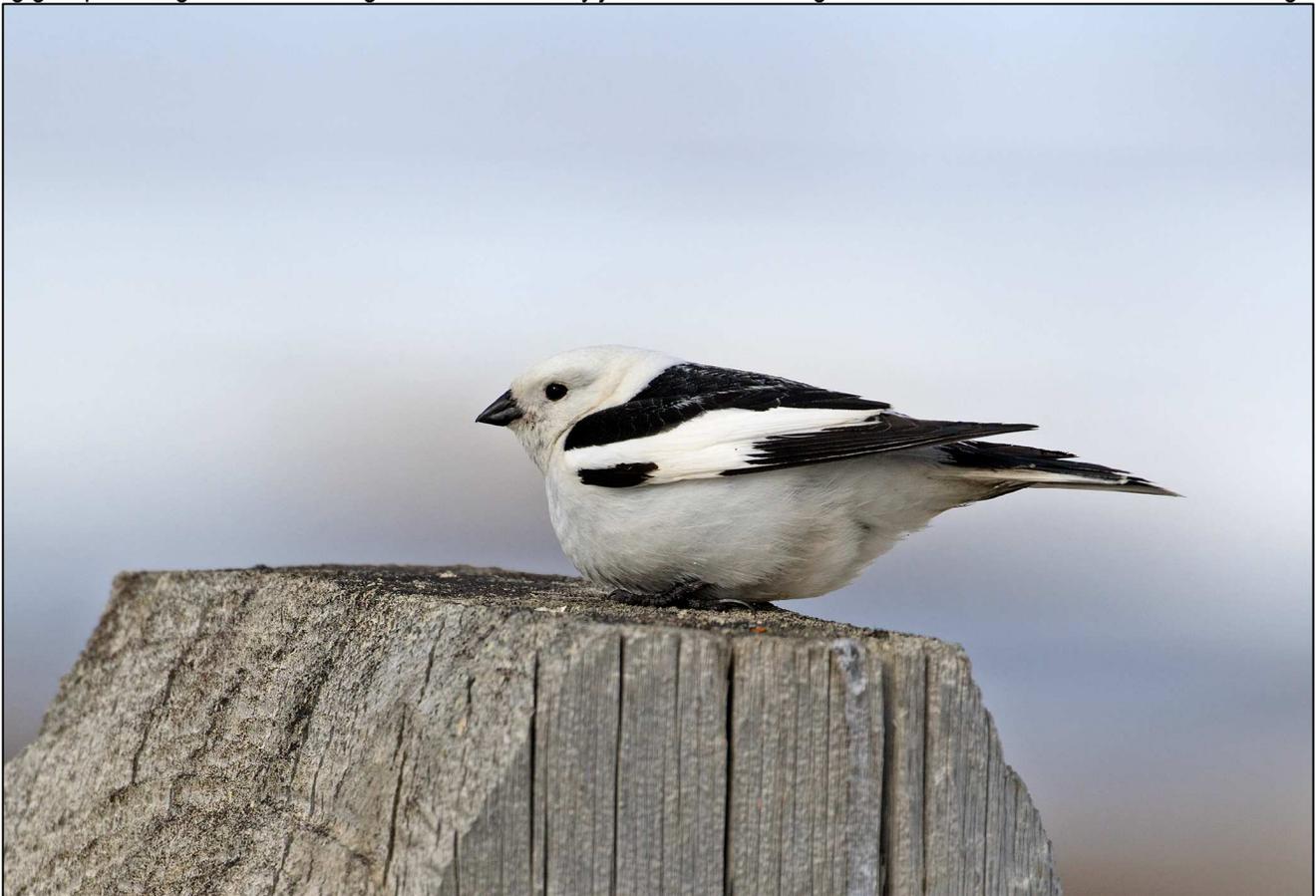
Alaska is about four principal things: Rare, local North American breeding birds, abundant birds that are frequently photographable (e.g. displaying Pectoral Sandpipers in Barrow), a nice selection of interesting mammals, and never-ending, achingly-beautiful landscapes. All of this was experienced on this tour, where the rare breeders included Steller's and Spectacled Eiders in Barrow, Gyrfalcon, Aleutian Tern, Bar-tailed Godwit, Pacific Golden-Plover, Bluethroat, Northern Wheatear, Arctic Warbler, and Eastern Yellow and White Wagtails all in Nome. The rare Lesser Sand-Plover in Nome was completely unexpected. We got to photograph many of these and others, like extremely confiding Willow and Rock Ptarmigans, hundreds of Red and Red-necked Phalaropes, breeding Red Knot, American Golden-Plover, Surf-bird, Long-tailed Jaeger, Snowy Owl, American Dipper, Boreal and Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Varied Thrush, and Golden-crowned Sparrow. Some of the easiest photography came on the extension to St. Paul in the Pribilofs, where Tufted and Horned Puffins, Parakeet and Crested Auklets, Red-legged Kittiwakes, Rock Sandpipers, and Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches all starred and were readily photographed. A photogenic American Three-toed Woodpecker right on the tour end north of Seward was also very memorable. A regular procession of mammals throughout included Arctic Fox, **Muskox** (below) Moose, Polar Bear, Dall's Sheep and Sea Otter. All of this was experienced within the stunning landscapes that characterize this huge state, from the icescapes of Barrow to the mountains of Nome, and the Chugach and Kenai Mountains south of Anchorage, there was plenty for our smartphones as well as our other cameras. Another aspect of the tour that may be less well-advertised, is the wonderful blooms of arctic flowers in this season like lilac-colored Nootka Lupines that carpeted St. Paul, and Chocolate Lilies that were prominent at Turnagain Pass near Anchorage. Alaska demands birder's attentions, and encourages people to return time and again, and that is exactly how we left the state, yearning to return again one day soon!



Tour Summary:

10th June: Anchorage to Barrow

Barrow is often referred to as the “*Top of the World*”, in reference to its position at the northern tip of the continent of North America. As such it appears a foreboding place, when viewed on a map before visiting there. In most years, the thaws have started and this image of a tough town to live in soon dissipates. However, 2018 was no ordinary year in *Barrow*, and we were greeted with the anomalous (for this time of year) sight of a landscape trapped in ice, with little notable thawing at all, even though we were technically there in early summer, and this should have happened by then. Thus, the images conjured by looking at a map were indeed correctly perceived, *unlike in a normal year*. After checking into the comfortable *King Eider Inn* (complete with King Eiders for chess pieces in the lounge!), we wrapped ourselves in all of our possible clothing and set out to explore this “Land of the Midnight Sun”, where lighting and time of day were never challenges to finding, seeing *and photographing* birds, with permanent sun present on the horizon. Right around the hotel we started seeing some of *Barrow*’s most conspicuous residents – handsome male **Snow Buntings** (*below*) proclaimed their territories all over town, and a few **Red-necked Phalaropes** and **Semipalmated Sandpipers** were foraging in the hotel’s untidy backyard. With another Tropical Birding group landing on the same flight, we successfully joined forces during our first afternoon, so as to cover more ground.



After lunch at a decent Japanese restaurant (surprising in a town so remote as *Barrow*), we headed out to some of the iconic birding sites of the area, including the **Cakeater Road** and the **New Landfill Road**, where our biggest avian windfalls came. At the latter a conspicuous white shape in the tundra morphed into our first **Snowy Owl** once the Swarovski scopes were trained in its direction. Over the landfill swarms of the abundant **Glaucous Gulls** were in attendance, and Nick Athanas found a **Short-eared Owl** resting nearby. One of the things about birding in the Arctic spring/summer is that the window is very narrow for birds to breed before the predominant Arctic weather closes in again and brings an abrupt end to the boom in insect life that has brought them there for breeding purposes. Therefore, it is common to bump into other tour groups during the same time frame, and this can prove very helpful, like when news reached us of a *Spectacled Eider* seen nearby, arguably the biggest target bird in the area, and the only realistic site on Earth where one can feel you have a realistic chance of seeing one, as their wintering grounds in the foreboding Bering Sea are so utterly remote. However, our first eiders were not to be *spectacled*, but a sharp pair of **King Eiders** and a handful of **Steller's Eiders** (*below*) sharing the same, recently-thawed pool, while the super abundant **Long-tailed Ducks** and **Greater White-fronted Geese** were rarely out of view throughout our entire time in *Barrow*...



Steller's Eiders were both conspicuous and unusually numerous in **Barrow** this year, with over 40 seen in a day

After returning from our walk in the odd mix of boggy tundra intermingled with deep snow to enjoy closeups of our *first* eiders, we returned to dry land, but were stopped in our tracks on our return leg by the compelling, “booming” display call of a local **Pectoral Sandpiper** (*below*), which was captivating. At one point the bird landed within 15 feet of us. This species may be numerous and even common on the arctic tundra, but it is still a must see/hear bird, as the species is transformed in spring, when they reveal a bold set of arrow-shaped streaks on the breast lending themselves to its name, and they emit extraordinary sounds as they glide low over the tundra to impress a mate with their frequent display flights. This bird, when it landed on the same tussocks of tundra bog we were standing on impressed all, and cameras went into overdrive as the male sandpiper pumped out its chest to impressive affect.



*Boom, boom, boom; the amazing display flights and song of the **Pectoral Sandpiper** were a regular highlight during our days in the High Arctic of **Barrow***

We also admired yet more of the local **Snow Buntings** in full song, seemingly oblivious of the non-spring like climate we were going through in *Barrow*! Not long after, the other *Tropical Birding* group headed back to town, while we lingered to scan through the numerous ducks on the *Cakeater Road*, and soon after hit the 'Eider Jackpot', with a party of four **Spectacled Eiders** (*below*) hiding poorly in a group of **Steller's Eiders** too! We got close and were happy to get this celebrity species by the time the end of day one was closing in.

The same pools were littered with hundreds of **Red-necked and Red Phalaropes** (*page 7*), which spun around us excitedly in their characteristic dizzy feeding frenzies as we passed very close by them, as they obliviously fed on.



Barrow is Eider Country, with four species occurring, including **Steller's Eider**, **King Eider**, and this, the rarest and fairest of them all: **Spectacled Eider**

Photos Next Page: **Red-necked and Red Phalaropes** in full breeding refinery in **Barrow**.
Anywhere the tundra was free of ice, there were hundreds of these birds foraging, many of them at extremely close range.



Lapland Longspurs, (*below*), while not quite as common as the more striking **Snow Buntings** in *Barrow*, were still easy to see in various parts of the tundra and singing around the town itself, where this photo was taken by the pizza restaurant!



11th June: Barrow

On the typical set departure for this tour, there is considerable more time on the tundra in *Barrow* to get more photos and birds. However, on this condensed custom tour, we had just the one full day, and an afternoon and morning either side of that to work with. The night before, after the group had retired after a long afternoon/evening's birding and photographing the abundant shorebirds and ducks in *Barrow*, Sam had continued on spurred on by endless daylight and the never ending photo opps, which presented themselves all-night long. What this meant was that he bumped into *Iain Campbell* and his other *Tropical Birding* group, and was informed they had a *Polar Bear* prowling the sea ice offshore from *Point Barrow*. Having never seen this iconic animal before, Sam headed back there alone and very much on a mission to see it. Hours went by with nothing but regular **Glaucous Gulls** and the occasional overflying flock of **King Eiders** to show for his efforts.

Then, at exactly 02:45am, he noticed a dirty patch of snow, and on close inspection, found it to be a **Polar Bear**!! Once the group has arisen at 7:40am he was with the group back on *Point Barrow*, where, thankfully, the bear was still happy to laze on the dense sea ice for much longer, before we pulled away for breakfast at the well-named Top of the World hotel.



Following this we toured some of the local sites, taking selfies next to some giant whale bones and visiting the cultural center, before we visited the only bird feeders in *Barrow*, where **Snow Buntings** were again conspicuous, but more importantly a **Brown Lemming** (*page 11*) scuttled around below the feeders, and a **Hoary (Arctic) Redpoll** (*above*) made an appearance there too, much to our delight; later in the day a **Common Redpoll** came in also for a nice side-by-side comparison of these similar species. In the afternoon, another run along *Cakeater Road* ended up with further sightings of *three species of eider* (**King, Spectacled, Steller's Eiders**), now seemingly settled on this recently thawed pond.

Shorebirds/Waders were abundant, as usual, with plentiful **Dunlin, Least, Pectoral and Semipalmated Sandpipers** (most of which were often witnessed in display flights), and hundreds of both phalarope species that seemed to be present in any opening of water, and another single **Sanderling** was sighted (one of this uncommon shorebird species was seen on each day in *Barrow*), and we stumbled onto a skittish **Arctic Fox** with a light dusting of winter coat still evident. A few **Pomarine Jaegers** also surveyed the tundra with menacing intent, searching for prey items to rob from other birds. After lunch, Irene retired in the evening, in spite of the ever-present sun still sitting high, while John and I went off in search of *owls* again (our shared passion). This seemed foolhardy for a while but then we hit a good streak around midnight, finding a **Snowy Owl** (*below*) using a snow bank as a perch and making it difficult to notice at first, while a **Short-eared Owl** (*next page*) preferred the prominence of a roadside power pole for its choice of perch. We retired to bed, with the sun eternally high in the sky, at around 1am, after another fascinating day in within the Arctic Circle.



Snowy Owls were readily found in **Barrow** this year, including a bird that chose to nest right on the edge of town in full view of local resident's houses that sadly had Polar Bear skins draped in their backyards.

Photos Next Page: **Brown Lemming** and midnight **Short-eared Owl**, **Barrow**



12th June: Barrow to Anchorage

Our last, partial day was spent in *Barrow*, before taking a late flight to *Anchorage*, landing mid evening in the Alaskan capital. Along with the swathe of wonderful regular Arctic birds that we'd become familiar with in recent days, we also saw our one and only **Sabine's Gull** (*below*) of the trip, which allowed extremely close approach with the aid of a pair of rubber boots/waders. A close **Parasitic Jaeger** in the snow and ice provided an upgraded view from before. We also finally caught up with **Pacific Loon** with at least seven of these velvet-textured birds seen around *Barrow* before we left for Anchorage.



Other than that, the clear standout bird was our first male **Willow Ptarmigan** (*next page*), a male of which showed at extraordinarily close quarters, and took offence to Sam being within its patch of tundra, snapping at him on several amusing occasions. We retreated with some excellent images of this beautiful arctic bird in hand! Our final stanza was to visit a female **Snowy Owl** sitting on its nest right on the edge of *Barrow*, within only a short distance of the houses on the edge of town. That night, after taking a late dinner in Anchorage, John and Sam walked to a nearby area, *Connor Lake*, where a calling **Wandering Tattler** (*page 14*) and a nesting **Pacific Loon** were seen during a short visit before the mosquitoes got the better of us and sent us scuttling back to our nearby hotel!







Photos Page Before: *Solomon River Railroad & Settlements along the edge of Norton Sound, Council Road, Nome*

13th June: Anchorage to Nome (Council Road)



Following a chance meeting with photographer *Brian Holiday* just as we were leaving **Barrow**, we left with some key tip-offs for sites around **Nome**, which led to a firm plan after our lunchtime arrival there; head straight out on the famous **Council Road**, one of just three roads that span out from **Nome**. What unfolded was a superb afternoon's birding. Although Sam had it in his head to get out to a certain point more than fifty miles out of Nome, this would mean passing by *Safety Sound* without stopping, a physical impossibility for a birder, with so many birds on offer. However, before we even got to that point, a stop off at the *Nome River Mouth* produced half a dozen **Aleutian Terns** sitting on an island with the more common **Arctic Terns** for company. Next stop was to check *Darby Creek*, not far out of town, which had been hosting a rarity, *Lesser Sand-Plover* in recent days. Our visit there did not produce this however, but we did find **Pacific Golden-Plovers** and **Western Sandpipers** on the mud where the *sand-plover* should have been; and also saw several **Eastern Yellow Wagtails** both perched and in enthusiastic display flights. Just behind the beach, the first of many graceful **Long-tailed Jaegers** (*page 14*) cruised above the tundra and rested only briefly between their agile flights overhead. Our unavoidable few stops at *Safety Sound* were quickly justified when we found a pair of **Arctic Loons** loafing just offshore in *Norton Sound*, white flanks gleaming, and a small party of **Sandhill Cranes** were located on the inland side. We then hit the road in earnest, but were prevented (once again) from making too much progress, when a mobile group of **Muskox** (*above*) crossed the road just in front of our vehicle.

Finally, we stopped right beside a bridge that was hosting a nesting **Gyr Falcon** (*below*), our afternoon's secret mission as it were. We found photographers already present, and an adult falcon with a white chick in its nest produced a moving moment for Irene, so awestruck and happy was she to see this massive arctic falcon at such rare and intimate quarters. A pair of **American Pipits** were also noted close by... The next stop also had a raptor theme, as an even larger predator lay 10 miles further up the road. The professional photographers at the Gyr "camp" had informed us of its generous location for anyone possessing any sort of camera, but we did not much take note of that significant detail, until we stopped the car, dumbfounded at an adult **Golden Eagle** leveling its impressive stare right at us only slightly above eye level. No tall cliffs for this individual. We backed our vehicle away and drained our cameras of memory space within minutes. We were glued to this atypically low-nesting and yet still seemingly tranquil eagle for a while, for it is a rare occasion to see such a large eagle so close, when their true magnificence can be truly appreciated. However, a twitter in the bushes took our minds off of eagles for a moment, and to Asia, as one of the few largely Asian species that stray into North America to breed, the **Arctic Warbler**, was seen as it darted about the willow shrubbery on the riverbank beside us. The *Golden Eagle* was the unmarked turnaround symbol to return to Nome, to eat up and head to sleep, with an early start planned for the following morning, for an assault on *Coffee Dome*, the infamous nesting ground of the *Bristle-thighed Curlew*.





Photos from Page Before: *Eastern Yellow Wagtail* and *Arctic Tern*, Nome



14th June: Nome – Kougatok Road & Teller Road

In the morning (after leaving the hotel very early indeed); we made the pilgrimage to the hill beside the *Coffee Dome on the Kougatok Road*, where for years *Bristle-thighed Curlews* have been coming to breed in very small numbers. However, we knew finding them was not going to be easy, with recent reports a little unnerving. As we drove north on the second of three roads that fan out from Nome, we stopped briefly at the *Salmon Lake Campsite*, hoping for a *Bluethroat*, but hearing none during a very cold blustery start. We did however, get distracted when a mother and two calves **Moose** passed by, and also picked up the first of many **Golden-crowned Sparrows** to come. We moved on to the 'curlew dome', and spent hours up on the hill, enduring frequent snow showers, a few **American Golden-Plovers** (next page), several "Hudsonian" **Whimbrels**, and heard the drumming of **Wilson's Snipe**. However, the star sighting was a displaying **Rock Ptarmigan** (page 22), our only sighting of the tour. No sight nor sound of the enigmatic *Bristle-thighed Curlew* though, before time ran out and we chose to return to Nome to reconnect with Irene (who sensibly opted out of the hike), and have a reunion over lunch.



As we got back to the main road, before even starting to drive back, we hit a jackpot, when a displaying songbird caught our attention. A short time later, a beautiful **Bluethroat** was seen singing from several perches surrounding us, another of the *Nome* specialties had fallen! A couple of **Rusty Blackbirds** were also noted during the windy drive back to town.

After a seafood-themed lunch in town, we set off for the third and final spine of “the Nome fan”, the *Teller Road*, stopping in the harbor before we did so where we found a lone **Slaty-backed Gull**, which was to be the only one seen on the tour, in spite of plentiful scouring of many gull flocks in the area. A bright spring plumage **Red-necked Grebe** was also noted on a small pond on the edge of town. The *Teller Road* started well, with the wind having decreased from earlier in the day, and sun replacing the gray skies and snow we had experienced up on the dome. So, we opted to get an upgrade to our views of **Golden-crowned Sparrow** (*next page*), and also admired some of the regularly singing **Wilson’s Warblers** (*next page*) in the area. We also heard our first **Alder Flycatcher** in the area, but made no real effort to locate it, and some of the rivers hosted some swallows, with both **Tree and Cliff Swallows** added to the trip list by the end of the afternoon. **Gray-cheeked Thrushes** were both seen and heard during the afternoon, and we also got cracking looks at a “Red” **Fox Sparrow** singing in the sunshine.



Photos previous page: *Wilson's Warbler* (top) and *Golden-crowned Sparrow*, Teller Road, Nome



This was the only *Rock Ptarmigan* seen of the tour, during a snow shower on the *Kougarok Road*, 72 miles north of *Nome*

Our searches for breeding *Black-bellied Plover* and *Red Knot* fell short, but led to more **American Golden-Plovers** and our first **Northern Wheatears**; the songbird with the longest migration in the world. The birds that breed here in Alaska go an alternate route to Africa than their more easterly counterparts, migrating through Siberia, and across Asia before dropping south into central Africa for the winter, a journey of some 8,700 miles (14,000km)! Another **Eastern Yellow Wagtail** was seen bouncing its way over the *Teller Road*, although the standout sighting for all in the afternoon was a female **Moose** (*next page*) bathed in fantastic afternoon light, which ended up wading through a creek and wandering across the road in front of our car, in full view for some time.



A *Moose* casually walks out of the scrub along the *Teller Road*, near *Nome*, one of five seen that day

15th June: Nome – Council Road (including Safety Sound)

For our last full day in *Nome*, we returned to the legendary *Council Road*, a 70+ mile road, which passes by *Safety Sound* on the inland side and *Norton Sound* on the coastal front, and traverses through tundra, rocky outcrops, and eventually into remnants of boreal forest. With so much to cover, we took a hearty breakfast at the *Polar Café* in *Nome*, and then set off with plentiful food for lunch in the field, wherever along that road we ended up being by that time. What unfolded was one of the best days of the entire tour, with decent birds of tundra, coast and forest all featuring... Our main strategy was to ensure we got into boreal forest fairly early on, and spend most of our time searching *Safety Sound* and the coast on the return journey to *Nome* for dinner, rather than on the way out. However, for a birder, it is simply physically impossible to pass by *Safety Sound* without stopping as so many birds are visible as you pass by.

During one of these very brief morning stops, we noticed a brightly-colored *shorebird* working the edge of a near pond, which turned out to be none other than the rare **Lesser Sand-Plover** and presumably the same individual seen the week before around *Darby Creek*. That was an unexpected, and brilliant, opener. Before reaching the forest patches, we made a deliberate stop at the scenic **Skookum Pass** (*next page*), where the scarce *Surfbird* breeds in some years amongst the patchwork of rocks, alpine flowers and lichens. Strips of snow seemingly barred our way up to the highest peak (which John was keen to reach), but thankfully it was merely a shallow sliver of snow and we made it across in this most snowy of springs with no trouble. As we made our way towards the peak, a rock-colored shape moved in front of us, which then froze in full view to reveal itself to be a **Surfbird** (*below*) blending in perfectly with the arctic tundra, at this time of year with sprinkles of tiny, vibrant flowers, and colorful lichens revealed on its boulders. After spending some time admiring the *Surfbird* foraging on the hillside, we made our way to the small peak, being sidetracked by a pair of confiding **Northern Wheatears** (*page 26*) which seemed to be nesting within the outcrop. Then it was time to take in the breathtaking view of the tundra, the abundant sunshine of that moment hiding the chilly temperatures enhanced by the winds blowing straight across the pass at the time.



*It was extremely satisfying to find a **Surfbird** on breeding territory, amongst the flower-dotted rocks of scenic **Skookum Pass**, north of **Nome** on the **Council Road***



Skookum Pass on the **Council Road, Nome** home to breeding **Surfbird** and **Northern Wheatear**

After enjoying the views of the surrounding landscape and the *surfbird*, we continued on further north along the *Council Road*, paying respects to the nesting **Gyrfalcons** and **Golden Eagles** again as we passed by, and getting our first, brief view of a **Varied Thrush** singing its haunting song from above the eagle nest. However, we largely continued all the way to *Bear River*, where we did some birding either side of our field lunch. We quickly found a number of warblers there, with **Orange-crowned Warblers** being abundant, and found in the same area as **Yellow-rumped (Myrtle)**, **Yellow and Blackpoll Warblers** too. The same site also saw us with another **Varied Thrush** haunting us with its song, but only showing well to Sam, as it remained in thickets near the tops of trees. A couple of low flyby **Bohemian Waxwings** and **Pine Grosbeaks** occurred, although a **Boreal Chickadee** (page 27) showed much better, as an Arctic wind chilled for a while, and led us to retreat to the vehicle for lunch. A few **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** (page 27) were vocal in the area, and one even flashed off its ruby crown quite dramatically before our cameras were ready!



This male **Northern Wheatear** was seen singing from a rocky perch at **Skookum Pass** on the **Council Road, Nome**. This population is the world champion of migratory songbirds, covering 8,700miles/14,00km to winter in central Africa

As we made our way back south towards Nome in the afternoon, we stopped for an **American Dipper** (page 28) that was standing prominently on a roadside culvert, with a rushing mountain stream as a backdrop. A little way further down, a small raptor on the road caught our attention that took off and perched on a dead snag, where we could confirm that it was indeed a **Merlin**. A short time later, crossing one of the never ending scenic rivers that stud the road, we sighted our first **Harlequin Ducks** resting on the banks of the river. We also saw several redpoll flocks that day, some of which could clearly be identified as **Mealy Redpolls**, but there were also a few **Hoary Redpolls** identified too, when views allowed. By the time we were passing *Safety Sound* again, dinner was calling, so we just made a few stops to try and locate *Black Turnstone*, without luck, but saw plenty of the common bird species of Nome like **Red-throated Loons**, **Common Eider**, **Arctic Terns**, **Glaucous Gulls**, **Lapland Longspurs**, and **Long-tailed Jaegers**. Best of all on the return journey, was an obliging female **Willow Ptarmigan** (page 13) right beside the road close to town.





This *American Dipper* was a conspicuous roadside bird along the **Council Road, northeast of Nome**

After dinner, Irene retired for the night, while John and I went out for a more thorough scout around the *Nome River Bridge* and *Safety Sound*, in search of some missing shorebirds and pelagic species. We got a considerable return on this. Our first stop at the *Nome River Mouth*, saw us finding our first **Bar-tailed Godwits** of the tour, another *Nome* specialty, some of which were daubed in their burnt-red breeding plumage, and were observed in excellent mid-evening light. Walking to the river edge we also got some great looks at the half a dozen or so **Aleutian Terns** nesting on the island and foraging over the waters alongside.

Moving along to *Safety Sound*, we scoured several sites for *Black Turnstone*, initially finding a nice close feeding flock of **Surfbirds** feeding on the rocks that are part of the tidal barrier. Amazingly, we also noticed presumably the same breeding plumage **Lesser Sand-Plover** again at this different spot from the morning's sighting!

We also spent a bit of time checking the sea, knowing that a number of loons seemed to be on the move, with a handful of these passing overhead, including **Red-throated and Pacific Loons**, and eventually a **Yellow-billed Loon** passed over our car on the return journey, but quickly continued on, so was not seen as well as hoped. Scanning the sea in *Norton Sound*, we managed to find a male **King Eider** drifting offshore, a lone **Common Murre**, as well as a **White-winged and Black Scoter** resting on the sea together.

With evening turning into nighttime, (but no visible change in available sunlight), we decided to check the *Safety Sound Bridge* one more time for *Black Turnstone*, and quickly re-found the same party of six **Surfbirds**, which were now feeding with at least three **Black Turnstones** (*next page*). As we returned to the car, a very pallid **Red Fox** (*below*) came trotting towards us, and then quickly veered off the road, when it realized it had not only been spotted, but was being photographed at length, to close out a long, but extremely rewarding day. As we crossed the **Safety Sound Bridge** to return to *Nome*, a **Peregrine Falcon** darted in and shot underneath our car.



A **Red Fox** was lit up by the late night sun at **Safety Sound in Nome**, where we'd seen a **Lesser Sand-Plover** not long before



Photos from page before: *Surfbird and Black Turnstone* (top), and *Black Turnstone, Safety Sound, Nome*

16th June: Nome (Teller Road) to Anchorage

After another breakfast in the *Polar Café in Nome*, we spent most of the day along the *Teller Road*, before taking dinner, packing up, and departing for *Anchorage* on a late afternoon flight. At the start of the *Teller Road*, a male **Bluethroat** showed up, but then went to ground, shortly after *Sam* got eyes on it. While we tried again to locate it, the distinctive drumming sounds of a displaying **Wilson's Snipe** were heard regularly, and *Irene* got eyes on a bird flying past several times. Continuing along the road, which stretches some 63 miles (101 km) to *Teller*, we covered some ground on this day, going all the way to milepost 57, where a special bird was breeding during our visit and therefore was a must-visit spot. However, way before then, around 10 miles along this dirt road, we stopped to scan a shallow river where a cluster of shorebirds were feeding, which turned out to be some very confiding **Bar-tailed Godwits** (*below*), which allowed much better views than we'd had before, and allowed us to approach to get decent photos too...A breeding plumage **Ruddy Turnstone** was also foraging in the same place too.



A beautiful breeding-plumage **Bar-tailed Godwit** on the *Teller Road in Nome*

Continuing northwest towards *Teller*, a small flock of low-flying shorebirds crossed the road immediately in front of our vehicles and landed right by the roadside. This included three beautiful red, **Red Knots** (*below*), which we photographed for some time as they foraged on the arctic tundra in the sunshine. This being one of the scarce local breeding shorebirds was a good last day score, which we had tried to find before and failed.



On reaching milepost 57, which marks the *Bluestone River*, we stopped for a rare breeding species in North America, "**East Siberian**" **White Wagtail** (*next page*). Another birding group were there, which helped us quickly to locate this bird, which was nesting in the rocks that form the banks of the road. It went to-and-fro from the nest and was also seen foraging along the shore of the river, where a spotted **Spotted Sandpiper** and several **Gray-cheeked Thrushes** were also seen foraging. The bridge itself was a nesting place for several **Cliff Swallows** too. Behind this, a large rocky outcrop was hosting a nesting **Rough-legged Hawk** at the time, which was seen as we arrived briefly and just before leaving too.

On the return journey to Nome, we stopped first near *Woolley Lagoon*, where we eventually located a single calling **Black-bellied Plover**, a low density breeding species in this area. Several **Arctic Ground-Squirrels** (page 34) were also conspicuous and confiding there too. We also tried for *Rock Sandpiper* nearby, but only managed to find more **American Golden-Plovers** in our short survey of the area, before we needed to return to Nome to check out and catch a flight back to Anchorage.



"East Siberian" White Wagtail is a rare (not annual), but regular breeder in North America.
This one was on the **Teller Road in Nome**, a regular site for them in breeding years.

That evening, we returned to *Anchorage* by air, checked into our now familiar local hotel, and plotted a morning's birding south of *Anchorage*, where John had some more lifers to attend to...



17th June: Anchorage area (Girdwood, Potter Marsh & Westchester Lagoon)

The original plan for this day was to do some birding in and around *Anchorage*, during our free morning before our flight out to *St. Paul island in the Pribilofs* in the afternoon. However, a canceled flight in the afternoon, meant that we did not get onto *St. Paul* until later than planned.

In the morning, our first stop was an area of tall boreal forest at *Girdwood*, some 30 miles (km) or so south of *Anchorage*. This marks the northernmost extension of the boreal forest in the area, and so offered up some key species we had not yet seen. First of these was **Northwestern Crow**, a taxonomically questionable species, admittedly, but for now, a species not seen by the group until we pulled into *Girdwood*. Early on, we heard the distinctive buzzing songs of **Townsend's Warblers** (*next page*) which were abundant at the site, and one of our wanted birds, which then proceeded to give us several excellent views as they sung at lower levels. Next up was our main target bird, at the very northern limit of its range, *Chestnut-backed Chickadee*.

The sounds of a flock was quickly heard and 2-3 **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** were located within it and watched foraging and singing at mid-level in the trees. **Black-capped Chickadee** was also found there too, along with **Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler**, and a **Golden-crowned Kinglet** flared its golden crown at us. A quicker movement in the trees around the flock proved to be another unrelated bird, and the only hummingbird that makes it this far north, **Rufous Hummingbird**, another of our major target species for the morning. Then John and I noticed a couple of thrushes hopping along the road, which finally led to John's first decent looks at a **Varied Thrush** (*next page*) this involving a confiding pair, which then perched up in the trees at eye level for some time to cap off what had already been a more than satisfactory view.



Having found the chickadee much quicker than expected, we backtracked towards Anchorage and made a short walk along the boardwalk at *Potter Marsh*, where miserable chilling winds and overcast conditions made this less enjoyable than it should have been, but it did bring new trip birds, like **Lincoln's Sparrow**, the first **Alder Flycatchers** seen of the trip, along with nesting **Mew Gulls**, **Arctic Terns**, and **Tree Swallows** and a single unexpected **Barn Swallow** too. **Canada Goose** and **Green-winged Teal** were also noted there, and up to four **Bald Eagles** passed overhead from time to time too.



One of North America's most gifted songsters, and most attractive thrushes, the *Varied Thrush* was seen on a number of occasions, in **Nome**, in **Girdwood** south of **Anchorage**, and most often around **Seward**.

Our final stop of the morning was at *Westchester Lagoon*, most famed for its healthy population of **Red-necked Grebes**, (*next page*) which were easily found on arrival, one of which fed close to shore. **Gadwall** and **American Wigeon** were also seen there, in addition to **Greater and Lesser Scaups**, a single **American Herring Gull**, and a **Lesser Yellowlegs**. On a small pond nearby there was also a full breeding plumage **Short-billed Dowitcher** (*next page*).

In the afternoon, we headed for *Anchorage* airport, with news that due to an ongoing technical issue at *St. Paul* airport, we were unlikely to get to the island unless weather was ideal. The weather was sadly, not ideal, and so we were forced to return to the hotel and try again the following day...

Photos next page: *Red-necked Grebe* (top); *Short-billed Dowitcher* both *Westchester Lagoon, Anchorage*



St. Paul & Seward Extension

(Assisted by local guide **Philip Chaon** on St. Paul)



One of the star attractions of **St. Paul** was the awesome *Crested Auklet*

St. Paul Island, Pribilofs: At first look, *St. Paul* would seem an odd choice for birders to be excited to visit; a small, treeless volcanic island, all the way out in the foreboding Bering Sea, 300 miles west of *mainland* Alaska, and 750 *air miles* (a 2.5 hour flight) from *Anchorage*. A dot on the map sitting to the north of the Aleutian island chain. Looking further, the oddity continues, in spite of nearly 250 bird species having been recorded over the many years that birders have been flocking there, only just over 20 bird species breed on the island. In summer, this includes just *four* songbirds. The long bird list is quickly explained by its geographical location, which leads to many stray birds being recorded at the height of spring and fall migration, neither of which we were timed for during our early summer visit. For once on a bird tour, it appeared we were at a destination for the *minority* as it were, not the majority; we were searching for the handful of breeding species. As mentioned, few of these are songbirds; this part of the trip was about cliff-nesting seabirds for the most part.

Even though these are a minority in terms of numbers of species recorded on the island overall, they are the clear *majority* in terms of numbers of individuals; an estimated quarter of a million seabirds come to *St. Paul* in some years, an island only 13.5 miles (22km) long and just under 8 miles (12km) wide! Others have previously said that *St. Paul* is an island “*for the birds, and for the birders*”, and this sentiment sums up our take-home experience perfectly. A human population of just below 500 people was vastly outnumbered by breeding pelagic birds, seals (well over 100,000 *Northern Fur-Seals*-the largest population on the planet-are estimated to be on *St. Paul*), and foxes, all of which were (as usual) highly visible and photogenic during our trip there.



A recently-fledged *Rock Sandpiper* chick takes some of its first steps on *St. Paul*

A three-night stay on *St. Paul* was scheduled, due to flight timetables and to give us sufficient time for our lenses to be exposed to this Alaskan bird island's breeding inhabitants. However, this ended up being a bit of a topsy-turvy affair, due to technical issues on the island at that time (repaired during our time there), which saw our initial flight out being canceled, reducing our time on the island to a mere two nights, but then our flight back being put back two days, (due to an unrelated technical issue arising), leading to an unplanned, *four-night* stay on *St. Paul* instead! Luckily, this is a nice piece of rock to be "stranded" on as a birder. Let's hope these issues are solved for the sake of visiting birders in years to come, as this seemed a particularly odd year to be getting to and from there compared to years past!



Rock Sandpipers were (typically) abundant on **St. Paul**, giving us repeated chances to photograph them at length

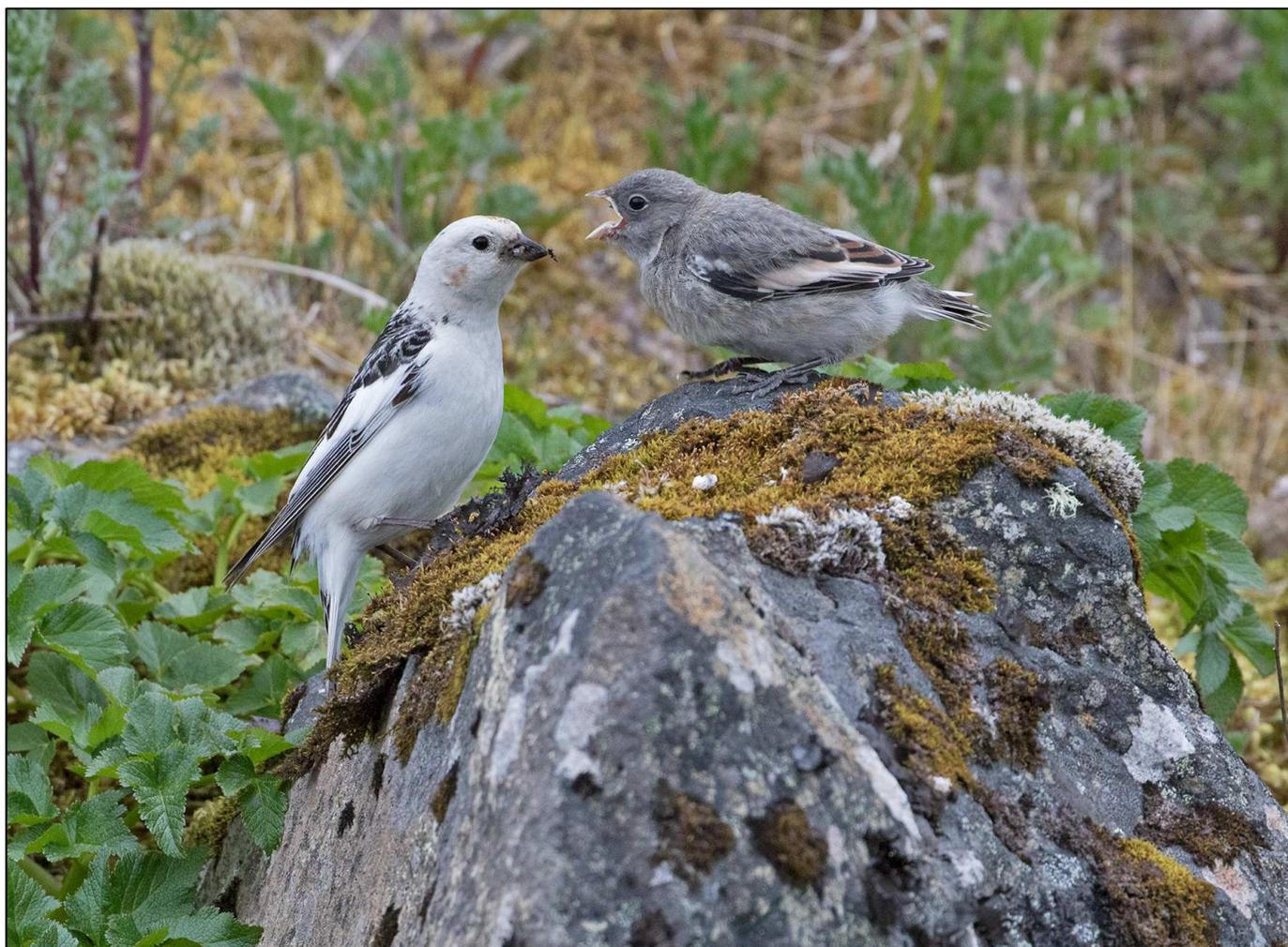
A first view of the island revealed a blanket of lilac, **Nootka Lupine** flowers seeming to cover almost the entire, treeless, island; with some sparsely-covered volcanic hills rising and falling here and there too. The most abundant bird on the island was one we had missed on the mainland around *Nome*, **Rock Sandpiper** (adult, *above*) which were nesting among the plentiful rocky landscapes, and sprawled across the many muddy fringes to the island and its ponds. It is no exaggeration to say that we could on occasion, see *hundreds* of these distinctive black-bellied shorebirds feeding on the flats together.

However, our best sightings came when we came upon nesting sites, when the adults would lead us away from the previously unseen dappled chicks behind, which were clumsily scrambling around, like newly-born babies finding their feet for the first time, among the nearby rocks.

As we crisscrossed the island with local guide *Philip Chaon*, the handful of local songbirds revealed themselves frequently. **Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches**, *below*, (a particularly “beefy” race on the island), were seen in parties feeding on the cliffs, foraging among rocky outcrops, and even singing regularly from the rooftop of the *King Eider Hotel*, where we stayed.



The other songbirds seen included many **Lapland Longspurs**, (which by then were very familiar to us from *Barrow* and *Nome* where they were also abundant), a regular dose of **Snow Buntings**, and several of the local race of **Pacific Wren** were seen shouting their songs from the clifftops. We were particularly pleased to find a young recently emerged juvenile Snow Bunting being fed by an adult as it perched on a boulder close by (*next page*)...



An adult *Snow Bunting* feeding its recently emerged offspring on *St. Paul*

As conspicuous as any of the birds on the island were the animals that *St. Paul* is arguably *most* famous for, its massive population of **Northern Fur-Seals** (*next page*). Signs warned us to stay off certain beaches at this time, in respect of them, and it was immediately evident why, as masses of these bloated, (but beautiful) creatures sprawled across them, in their hundreds in a single view at times. When not loafing in an appearance of laziness, they were loud, and boisterous; some of our clifftop bird shoots being interrupted by male fur-seals on the rocks below, roaring up at us, way above on our lofty perch. They seemed to be territorial against absolutely anything in sight, *fur-seal or not!* The sheer number of them on some, non-nesting beaches, where mostly females or young males gathered, the impressive enthusiasm of their breeding bellowing in other areas, and the playful bouts between rivals were all entertaining to watch, and provided plentiful photos alongside the endless bird shoots too.



Aside from *fur-seals*, the other conspicuous animal on *St. Paul* was the **Arctic Fox**, many of which were looking a bit scruffy as they were transitioning from their winter to summer coats, and one new kit was seen shortly before we departed the island, apparently the first of the season. A single, massive **Steller's Sea-Lion** was also seen early on, but not again thereafter.

It is not often that *gulls* are featured as highlights on a birding tour, as they are often overshadowed by other more popular bird groups. However, *St. Paul* has a particular, local, species that is arguably one of the more remote and less accessible gulls on the planet; proof of this was seen firsthand by us this spring with several other visiting birders gaining it as their final gull species for the world. I am referring to the **Red-legged Kittiwake** (*below*) which like all of the breeding specialties on the island, was easily found, being chalked up shortly after arrival, seen resting in their dozens on a large lagoon, and watched resting on the cliffs that they nest on. They were, like all other birds and animals on *St. Paul* readily photographed from every angle and in every setting desired...As there is also a healthy population of **Black-legged Kittiwakes** on the island they were often seen side-by-side too, when the more compact, cute-faced nature of the *red-legged*, and its outstandingly-bright legs, could best be appreciated.



Before we took to the island's various 'stages' as it were, (i.e. the various seabird nesting cliffs at *Reef Point*, *Zapadni Point*, and *Ridge Wall* on the western side of the island), we walked across a neck with a large boulder field sprawled along it, where we experienced our first *auklets* on the *Pribilofs*, the tiny, sparrow-sized **Least Auklet** (*below*), which nest among these large structures. This is a well-named species, which it is hard to comprehend the miniature nature of until seen next to its considerably larger cousins, or even a *rosy-finch* for that matter!

A lot of time was spent on the cliff tops looking down at the extraordinary scenes on the rocks below, where **Thick-billed Murres** were stacked so tight on some rock shelves that they stood shoulder-to-shoulder, and the odd **Common Murres** were mingled in rather inconspicuously.



The tiny **Least Auklet** (**St. Paul**) measures the same in length as a House Sparrow!



Parakeet Auklet was the most conspicuous of the cliff nesting auklets in the **Pribilofs**, and very tame too!

While the *murres* seemed like they were muscling for space, the *auklets* of the cliffs were much more ordered, seeming to give each other more space than the clusters of *murres*, preferring to rest in pairs or singletons. The odd **Northern Fulmar** (page 48) also passed by on occasion, often hanging in the wind effortlessly, with no wingbeats required for these masters of the sea air; The dominant *auklet* on the cliffs was the striking **Parakeet Auklet** (above and next page) being conspicuous and ever-present. A few groups of **Red-faced Cormorants** (page 48) were also noted on the rock faces, and **Pelagic Cormorant** was also recorded during our time on the island, but was much less abundant than their scarlet-faced cousins.



Rain did not dissuade us from taking hundreds of shots of *Parakeet Auklets* as they sat and called from the cliffs.

However, of course on *St. Paul* the *puffins* took center stage and grabbed all of the headlines, for it is getting photos of these that most draw birders, 'birders with cameras', and bird photographers from all over the world there. Our encounters with them were highly-anticipated, and although there was no pressure on *seeing* them, and it was well-known how 'guaranteed' they were before we poked our heads over the first cliff to view them, there was simply no way of preparing ourselves for the visual feast of these birds as they sat conspicuously on the rock face, while we sat on this wonderful remote rock island staring straight into the Bering Sea. These moments on the cliff tops amongst the seabird epicenter of the island were very special indeed. There are three species of puffin worldwide and two of them come on to land to breed each spring in the *Pribilofs*, the clownish **Tufted Puffin** (page 50), and moderately less flashy **Horned Puffin** (page 51), both of which were seen repeatedly for lengthy periods during our days on there...



The **Crested Auklet** below, (apparently a notable favorite for visiting *Japanese* bird photographers), was much less numerous, and harder to pin down. Initial views were of sooty shapes with carrot colored bills darting from sea to cliff-top burrow like auk-shaped bullets. Not what we had signed up for, and definitely not what's in all the brochures and coffee table books! However, with persistence and local intelligence, we found the spot where they felt happy sitting in the open and showing off their 'punk cuts' for us! As you would understand by now, *auklets* were an expected and fulfilled ambition on *St. Paul*, with the three aforementioned species regularly breeding there. However, we weren't expecting to see a **Rhinoceros Auklet** that does *not* breed there, however one day *Phil* noticed a bulky *alcid* sitting offshore, which turned out to be an immaculate individual of this species, a very pleasant bonus indeed.









St. Paul to Anchorage; drive to

Seward: After getting off of *St. Paul* a little later than expected, due to technical issues, a drive was taken directly south from the airport to *Seward* for the night, and the final leg of the trip. A drive of around 137miles/205km sounds unexciting, but it was anything but. This journey to the *Kenai Peninsula*, (where *Seward* is located), passes by first *Beluga Point*, where a handful of ivory-colored **Dall's Sheep** were found grazing on the hill above. Continuing south from there, the highway passes through the scenically appealing *Chugach Mountains*, where we made another mammal stop at *Turnagain Pass*, where we found some **Hoary Marmots**, no doubt only recently emerged from their winter hibernation, and also stopped for our first

'**Sooty**' **Fox Sparrows** (*below*) of the tour, and to admire the meadow of flowers that included more **Nootka Lupines**, and also some **Chocolate Lilies** (*above*) too. We continued to admire the scenery as headed on south, passing numerous glassy lakes with mountains for backgrounds, and entered into tall, imposing boreal forests. As we reached the outskirts of the small



town of *Seward*, we made a short stop at the feeders of a local lady who has been feeding and welcoming birds to her yard for years. Quickly after arrival there, one of the main species we were hoping for appeared front and center, when a **Red Crossbill** (*next page*) landed alongside other feeder attendees like **Hairy Woodpecker**, **Pine Siskin**, more fox sparrows, some wonderfully confiding **Pine Grosbeaks**, and several **Rufous Hummingbirds**.



Photos Page Before: Top – Sea Otter, Seward Harbor, and Red Crossbill at feeders on the outskirts of the same town



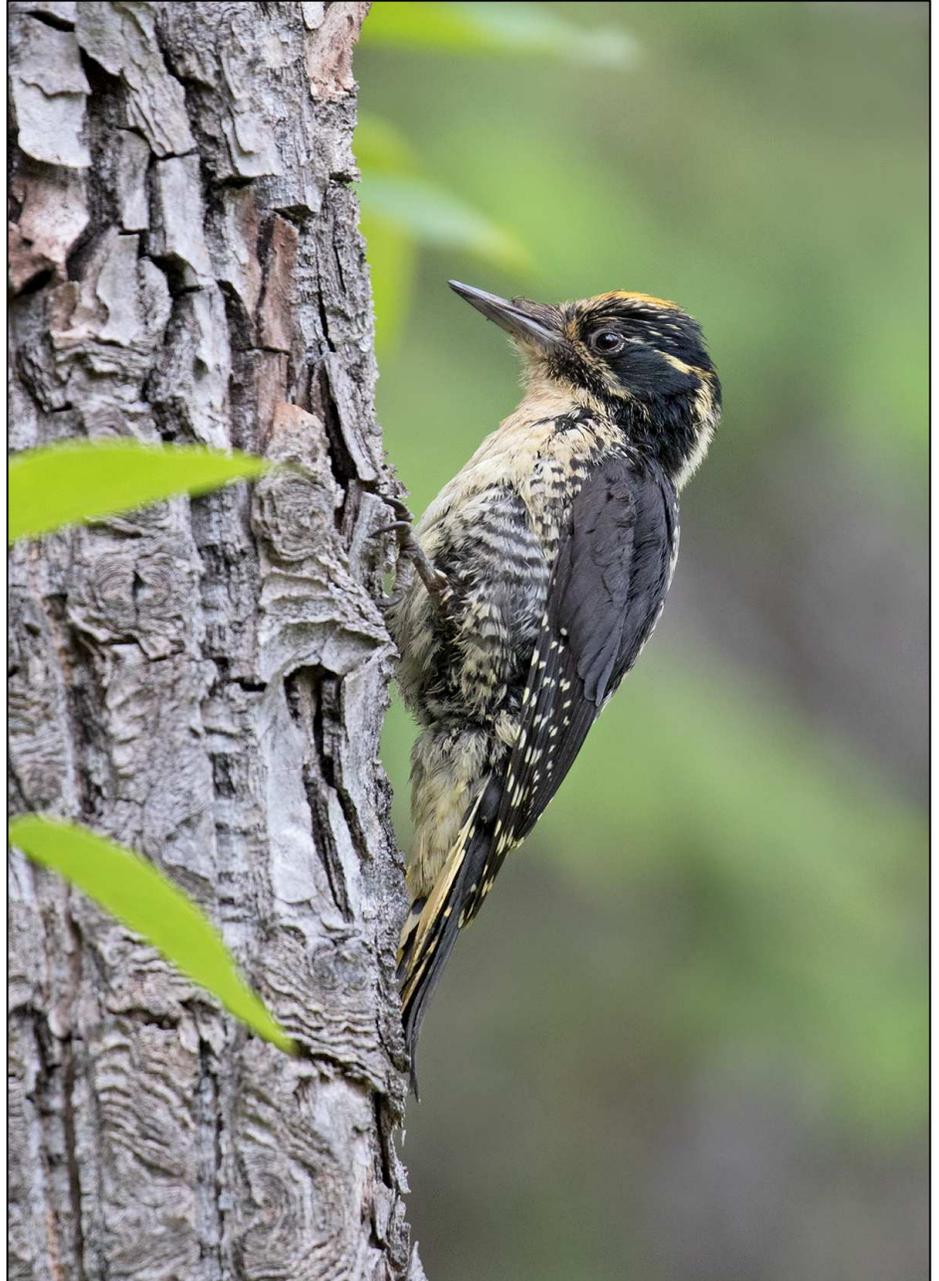
Exit Glacier (far right) at midnight, a 15-minute drive out of Seward

With such long daylight hours available to us, some dinnertime birding around Seward produced a very confiding and attentive mob of **Steller's Jays** that surrounded Sam, while a **Brown Creeper** crept up a nearby spruce trunk at *Lowell Point* just outside of town. **Sea Otters** (page before) were enjoyed at length within the harbor, one of which was watched as it made regular dives into the murky harbor, regularly emerging with mollusks from the sea bed, which it then ripped apart, while using its chest as a table when needed. A late night visit to **Exit Glacier** (above) the only accessible glacier in the area by car/on foot, was impressive and also saw an encounter with a young male **Moose** casually walking along the road on the way back to Seward for a late bedtime.

Seward to Anchorage/DEPARTURE: As an evening flight out of Anchorage was scheduled, we had limited time to bird in Seward, and so spent time among various boreal forest sites in the area. A pre-dawn start at a glassy *Bear Lake* was evocative, as we both heard and saw a pair of **Common Loons** calling and causing the only break in the water's surface, as they swam out into the center of the lake. A **Belted Kingfisher** rattled past too. On the trail leading to the lake, we took in the songs of both **Swainson's and Hermit Thrushes**, saw a few **Varied Thrushes**, and got close up to a different form of **Pacific Wren** to the one that was seen on *St. Paul*. We then returned to *Lowell Point*, after a hearty breakfast in town, when we got a flight view of a **Marbled Murrelet** on the way out, along with **Double-crested Cormorant** and **Harlequin Ducks**, while in the forest at the point, we found a small party of **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**. We also returned to the same set of feeders we had dropped in on the afternoon before on the edge of Seward, where the **Hairy Woodpecker** was this time joined by a **Downy Woodpecker** too, a **Red-breasted Nuthatch** came in several times, while **Pine Siskins**, **'Sooty' Fox Sparrows** and **Song Sparrows** fought for the fallen seeds below.

Other repeats included **Red Crossbills** and **Pine Grosbeaks** at the feeders themselves, and regular circuits overhead from **Violet-green Swallows**. Nearby a large lake held a nesting pair of **Trumpeter Swans** (our only sighting), and a small group of **Ring-necked Ducks**.

It was then time to check out of the *Seward* hotel and point the vehicle northwards, for the return to *Anchorage*. Extra time was left to ensure several extended stops could be made in the swathes of boreal forest on the way back. Stopping at some lakes brought us another breeding plumage **Red-necked Grebe**, another **Common Loon**, and many more nesting **Arctic Terns**. The boreal forest stops were slow work initially, with little seen until our final attempt at *Quartz Creek Campground near Cooper Landing*. With precious few minutes remaining, another **Boreal Chickadee** appeared, but was soon ignored once the distinctive drums of an *American Three-toed Woodpecker* were heard close by. During a scan to try and locate it, amazingly, a **Spruce Grouse** was found instead sitting high in the trees! Not long after, the **American Three-toed Woodpecker** (*right*) swooped in and landed on a close trunk, where it gave unbeatable looks as it drummed, and shuffled up the trunk in full, glorious view, an excellent close to the extension. From there, it was necessary to drive direct to the airport to connect with flights out, but that did not stop us picking up a final new bird, when a **Red-tailed Hawk** glided over the *Seward Highway*.



It had been a highly successful trip, when we recorded most of the specialty birds we targeted, many of which were rare or local North American breeding birds, in addition to having enjoyed excellent photography each and every day, endless stunning landscapes, and multiple mammals too; it was very much the quintessential Alaska experience!

BIRD & MAMMAL LISTS:

BIRDS

Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl (Anatidae)

Brant *Branta bernicla*: Recorded regularly in Barrow.

Cackling Goose (Aleutian) *Branta hutchinsii leucopareia*: Just a few were seen on St. Paul in the Pribilofs.

Cackling Goose (Taverner's) *Branta hutchinsii taverneri*: A handful was seen in the Nome area.

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis parvipes*: These very small Canada Geese were seen in the area around Anchorage.

Trumpeter Swan *Cygnus buccinator*: A breeding pair was seen in Seward.

Tundra Swan *Cygnus columbianus*: Regularly encountered in Barrow and Nome, and also on St. Paul Island.

Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata*: Singles were seen several times in Nome, and also on St. Paul.

Gadwall *Mareca strepera*: A small group was seen at Westchester Lagoon, in Anchorage.

American Wigeon *Mareca americana*: A few were seen at Westchester Lagoon, Anchorage, and also seen in Seward.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*: Seen in Anchorage, Nome and on St. Paul.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*: An abundant bird in Alaska, recorded regularly throughout.

Green-winged Teal (American) *Anas crecca carolinensis*: Encountered in Nome and Anchorage.

Green-winged Teal (Eurasian) *Anas crecca crecca/nimia*: Recorded regularly (in small numbers) on St. Paul in the Pribilofs.

Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris*: Three birds were seen on a lake in Seward.

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*: Encountered regularly throughout.

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*: A few were seen on Westchester Lagoon in Anchorage.

Steller's Eider *Polysticta stelleri*: At least 40 birds were seen in a day in Barrow, sometimes in company with Spectacled Eider.

Spectacled Eider *Somateria fischeri*: Four birds were seen in a flock of Steller's Eiders over several days in Barrow.

King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*: A spectacular male was seen in Barrow; others were seen there and in Nome, and on St. Paul.

Common Eider (Pacific) *Somateria mollissima v-nigrum*: Abundant along the Council Road in Nome.

Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus*: Seen first in Nome, then again on St. Paul and in Seward.

White-winged Scoter *Melanitta fusca*: A male was seen drifting offshore from Safety Sound near Nome.

Black Scoter *Melanitta americana*: A single bird was seen with a White-winged Scoter on Norton Sound, near Nome.

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*: A very abundant species, especially around Barrow, where hundreds were seen.

Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola*: One was seen along the Kougarok Road near Nome.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*: Two were seen on St. Paul in the Pribilofs.

Barrow's Goldeneye *Bucephala islandica*: A couple were seen close to Seward.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*: Seen daily in the Nome area.

Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies (Phasianidae)

Spruce Grouse *Falcapennis canadensis*: One was found sitting in a tree near Cooper Landing on the journey back from Seward.

Willow Ptarmigan *Lagopus lagopus*: Several extremely confiding birds were seen, in Barrow and Nome.

Rock Ptarmigan *Lagopus muta*: Just the one was seen near the Coffee Dome, north of Nome.

Loons (Gaviidae)

Red-throated Loon *Gavia stellate*: Seen regularly in the Nome area, with some great looks there too.

Arctic Loon *Gavia arctica*: A pair was seen on Norton Sound near Safety Sound, east of Nome.

Pacific Loon *Gavia pacifica*: We got some great looks on our final day in Barrow; others were seen passing by Nome.

Common Loon *Gavia immer*: A pair was on Bear Lake (Seward), and another was just off the Seward Highway at Tern Lake.

Yellow-billed Loon *Gavia adamsii*: A single flyover was recorded close to the Nome River.

Grebes (Podicipedidae)

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*: Dozens were seen on Westchester Lagoon, and another was seen near Nome.

Shearwaters and Petrels (Procellariidae)

Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*: Spectacular views were had in flight and perched on the St. Paul Extension.

Cormorants and Shags (Phalacrocoracidae)

Red-faced Cormorant *Phalacrocorax urile*: Excellent views and photos were obtained on St. Paul.

Pelagic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pelagicus*: A few were seen in the Nome area, and a few more in the Pribilofs.

Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auratus*: A few singles were seen off of Lowell Point, Seward.

Hawks, Eagles, and Kites (Accipitridae)

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*: A fantastic close nesting bird was photographed along the Council Road, Nome.

Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonius*: Recorded several times in Nome.

Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*: Several were seen around Potter Marsh, and others near Seward.

Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis*: The last addition of the trip, on the return journey from Seward to Anchorage.

Rough-legged Hawk *Buteo lagopus*: One was nesting at the White Wagtail nesting site along the Teller Road, in the Nome area.

Cranes (Gruidae)

Sandhill Crane *Antigone canadensis*: Four birds were seen resting beside Safety Sound, near Nome.

Plovers and Lapwings (Charadriidae)

Black-bellied Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*: A single bird was found near Nome, a local species on this itinerary.

American Golden-Plover *Pluvialis dominica*: Seen very well, on multiple occasions in Barrow and Nome.

Pacific Golden-Plover *Pluvialis fulva*: Only recorded around Nome, where three birds were seen on one afternoon.

Lesser Sand-Plover *Charadrius mongolus*: We managed to refine this rarity twice in one day at Safety Sound, Nome.

Sandpipers and Allies (Scolopacidae)

(Hudsonian) Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*: 3-6 birds were seen north of Nome.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica baueri*: A specialty around Nome, where we encountered small groups of two occasions.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*: Scattered sightings in Barrow and Nome, with up to four birds in a day.

Black Turnstone *Arenaria melanocephala*: 3 birds were seen feeding with a group of 6 Surfbirds at Safety Sound, Nome.

Red Knot *Calidris canutus*: Three birds were found in rocky tundra beside the Teller Road, Nome.

Surfbird *Calidris virgata*: A bird on territory at Skookum Pass (Council Rd), and another 6 at Safety Sound (both Nome).

Sanderling *Calidris alba*: Singles were seen on three days in Barrow, the only ones seen on the tour.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*: Common in Barrow, where regular displaying birds were seen; another large group was found in Nome.

Rock Sandpiper *Calidris ptilocnemis ptilocnemis*: Arguably the most common bird on St. Paul, where chicks were also seen.

Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla*: A handful was seen around Barrow.

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*: One of the undoubted highlights was seeing regular displaying birds in Barrow.

Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*: Recorded around Barrow and Nome, displaying regularly and abundant in Barrow.

Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri*: Some great looks in both Barrow and (especially) in Nome.

Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus*: One showed well at Westchester Lagoon on Anchorage.

Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*: Excellent views of rusty breeding birds at Darby's Creek, near Nome.

Wilson's Snipe *Gallinago delicata*: A few drumming birds were heard in Nome, with Irene picking up one in flight there.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*: Hundreds were seen daily (and extremely close up) in Barrow; also, on St. Paul.

Red Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*: These handsome shorebirds were seen by the hundreds each day in Barrow.

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*: A single bird was seen along the Teller Road west of Nome.

Wandering Tattler *Tringa incana*: A bird was observed calling from the trees at Connors Lake Anchorage; a few also St. Paul.

Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*: One was recorded at Potter Marsh, near Anchorage.

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*: One was seen at Westchester Lagoon in Anchorage.

Skuas and Jaegers (Stercorariidae)

Pomarine Jaeger *Stercorarius pomarinus*: Seen in small numbers each day in Barrow.

Parasitic Jaeger *Stercorarius parasiticus*: Just seen a couple of times in Barrow.

Long-tailed Jaeger *Stercorarius longicaudus*: The most regularly recorded of the jaegers, being seen each day in Nome.

Auks, Murres; and Puffins (Alcidae)

Common Murre *Uria aalge*: A handful of them were seen on the cliffs on St. Paul, and one was seen off of Nome.

Thick-billed Murre *Uria lomvia*: Good numbers on the cliffs in the Pribilofs.

Marbled Murrelet *Brachyramphus marmoratus*: One was seen flying past Lowell Point, Seward.

Parakeet Auklet *Aethia psittacula*: Some excellent looks on St. Paul.

Least Auklet *Aethia pusilla*: This tiny seabird gave some fantastic views each day on St. Paul.

Crested Auklet *Aethia cristatella*: This comical bird was seen in small numbers on St. Paul, where the least common auklet.

Rhinoceros Auklet *Cerorhinca monocerata*: A surprise find by Phil on the sea off St. Paul, where it is not known to breed.

Horned Puffin *Fratercula corniculata*: The less common of the two puffin species, but still seen numerous times.

Tufted Puffin *Fratercula cirrhata*: The spectacular looking seabird was one of the stars on St. Paul in the Pribilofs.

Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers (Laridae)

Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*: Seen around Barrow, Nome, and also on St. Paul.

Red-legged Kittiwake *Rissa brevirostris*: This Pribilof specialist was seen on St. Paul, with up to 50 birds seen in a day.

Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini*: Just one single bird was seen in Barrow, but it did give us looks down to about twenty feet.

Mew Gull (American) *Larus canus brachyrhynchus*: Seen best at Potter Marsh where good numbers breed.

Herring Gull (American) *Larus argentatus smithsonianus*: One was seen at Westchester Lagoon, Anchorage.

Slaty-backed Gull *Larus schistisagus*: One of these regular rarities was seen in Nome Harbor.

Glaucous-winged Gull *Larus glaucescens*: Seen regularly on St. Paul.

Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*: Regularly recorded at Barrow and around Nome, and also a single bird was seen on St. Paul.

Aleutian Tern *Onychoprion aleuticus*: Around half a dozen birds were seen at the Nome River Mouth.

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*: Seen at all major sites; good numbers of breeding birds were at Tern Lake and Potter Marsh.

Pigeons and Doves (Columbidae)

Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*: Seen around Anchorage only.

Owls (Strigidae)

Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus*: Seen each day around Barrow, including a bird sitting on a nest close to town.

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*: Two different birds were seen in Barrow.

Hummingbirds (Trochilidae)

Rufous Hummingbird *Selasphorus rufus*: First seen just south of Anchorage at Girdwood, then at the feeders in Seward.

Kingfishers (Aldediniidae)

Belted Kingfisher *Megaceryle alcyon*: One was seen at Bear Lake, Seward.

Woodpeckers (Picidae)

Downy Woodpecker *Picoides pubescens*: One visited the feeders in Seward.

Hairy Woodpecker *Picoides villosus*: A couple came in to the feeders at Seward.

American Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides dorsalis*: One of last birds of trip, found by Quartz Creek Camp, Cooper Landing.

Falcons and Caracaras (Falconidae)

Merlin *Falco columbarius suckleyi*: One was seen close to Council, near Nome.

Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus*: A nest seen along the Council Road near Nome had an adult and chick present on two visits.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus tundrius*: One was seen swooping below the Safety Sound Bridge near Nome.

Tyrant Flycatchers (Tyrannidae)

Alder Flycatcher *Empidonax alnorum*: A few were seen at Potter Marsh; others were heard at Nome and in Seward.

Crows, Jays, and Magpies (Corvidae)

Gray Jay *Perisoreus canadensis*: Recorded near Cooper Landing, between Seward and Anchorage.

Steller's Jay *Cyanocitta stelleri*: Seen on both visits to Lowell Point in Seward.

Black-billed Magpie *Pica hudsonia*: Readily seen around Anchorage and Seward.

Northwestern Crow *Corvus caurinus*: First seen at Girdwood, south of Anchorage, then plenty more were seen around Seward.

Common Raven *Corvus corax*: Seen regularly throughout the tour.

Larks (Alaudidae)

Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris*: One was seen on high ground above the Teller Road, near Nome.

Swallows (Hirundinidae)

Tree Swallow *Tachycineta bicolor*: A few were seen near Nome, and others were seen at Potter Marsh in Anchorage.

Violet-green Swallow *Tachycineta thalassina*: A few birds were seen in Seward.

Bank Swallow *Riparia riparia*: A couple of birds were seen on St. Paul in the Pribilofs.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*: One was seen flying low across Potter Marsh, Anchorage.

Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*: Recorded in small numbers along the Teller Road outside of Nome.

Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice (Paridae)

Black-capped Chickadee *Poecile atricapillus*: Seen at Girdwood, and also in Seward.

Chestnut-backed Chickadee *Poecile rufescens*: 3 were seen at Girdwood, and another pair was seen at Lowell Point, Seward.

Boreal Chickadee *Poecile hudsonicus*: 1 was at Bear Creek, near Council; another was seen near Cooper Landing.

Nuthatches (Sittidae)

Red-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta canadensis*: One was heard at Girdwood, and one visited the feeders in Seward.

Treecreepers (Certhiidae)

Brown Creeper *Certhia americana*: One was seen at Lowell Point, Seward.

Wrens (Troglodytidae)

Pacific Wren *Troglodytes pacificus stevensoni*: This form was seen at Bear Lake and Lowell Point in the Kenai Peninsula.

Pacific Wren *Troglodytes pacificus alascensis*: Excellent views were had of several of this distinctive form on St. Paul.

Dippers (Cinclidae)

American Dipper *Cinclus mexicanus*: Smashing views of one near the end of the Council Road out of Nome.

Kinglets (Regulidae)

Golden-crowned Kinglet *Regulus satrapa*: One was seen very well at Girdwood, south of Anchorage.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet *Regulus calendula*: Several birds were seen at Bear Creek, near Council, one of which flashed its crown.

Leaf Warblers (Phylloscopidae)

Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*: Heard several times, and seen at the first attempt near Nome (Council Rd.).

Old World Flycatchers (Muscicapidae)

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*: Two different males were seen near Nome, the best one being 72 miles up the Kougarok Rd.

Northern Wheatear (Eurasian) *Oenanthe oenanthe oenanthe*: Seen on three occasions around Nome.

Thrushes and Allies (Turdidae)

Gray-cheeked Thrush *Catharus minimus*: Several were seen, and many heard, in the Nome area (e.g. Teller Road).

Swainson's Thrush *Catharus ustulatus*: Heard regularly and seen in the Chugach National Forest, near Seward.

Hermit Thrush *Catharus guttatus*: Recorded several times on the Kenai Peninsula around Seward.

American Robin *Turdus migratorius*: Commonly encountered around Nome and Seward.

Varied Thrush *Ixoreus naevius*: This handsome thrush was seen around Nome, Girdwood, and numerous times around Seward.

Starlings (Sturnidae)

European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*: A few were seen in Anchorage.

Wagtails and Pipits (Motacillidae)

Eastern Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla tschutschensis tschutschensis*: Nome-3 seen at Darby Creek; 1 on Teller Road.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba ocularis*: A breeding bird was seen very well by the Bluestone River (Teller Road), Nome.

American Pipit *Anthus rubescens*: Seen on three occasions in the Nome area.

Waxwings (Bombycillidae)

Bohemian Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulous*: A couple flew low over us on the Council Road, in the Nome area.

Longspurs and Snow Buntings (Calcariidae)

Lapland Longspur *Calcarius lapponicus*: An abundant bird, seen many times in the tundra at Barrow, Nome and on St. Paul.

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*: A very common and conspicuous bird in Barrow and on St. Paul, in the Pribilofs.

New World Warblers (Parulidae)

Northern Waterthrush *Parkesia noveboracensis*: Heard regularly in Nome, where seen at Bear Creek on the Council Road.

Orange-crowned Warbler *Oreothlypis celata*: A number of them were observed on the Council Road, Nome.

Yellow Warbler *Setophaga petechia*: Seen at Bear Creek, near Council (Nome).

Blackpoll Warbler *Setophaga striata*: A couple were seen in boreal forest at Bear Creek, on the Council Road, Nome.

Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler *Setophaga coronata coronata*: Recorded at Nome, Girdwood, and in Seward.

Townsend's Warbler *Setophaga townsendi*: Recorded at Girdwood and near Seward.

Wilson's Warbler *Cardellina pusilla*: Commonly heard in scrubby areas near Nome, where several showed well too.

Buntings and New World Sparrows (Emberizidae)

American Tree Sparrow *Spizelloides arborea*: A few were seen on the Kougarak Road in Nome, another was seen in Girdwood.

Fox Sparrow (Red) *Passerella iliaca zaboria*: Regularly heard, and also seen near Nome.

Fox Sparrow (Sooty) *Passerella iliaca sinuosa*: Seen first at Turnagain Pass, and then again in Seward.

Dark-eyed Junco (Slate-colored) *Junco hyemalis hyemalis*: Seen in Anchorage and also on the Kenai Peninsula.

White-crowned Sparrow (Gambell's) *Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*: Seen a few times around Nome.

Golden-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia atricapilla*: Commonly encountered around Nome, with some super looks.

Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis*: Recorded around Barrow, Nome and Seward.

Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia kenaiensis*: This large, dark form was seen in Seward.

Lincoln's Sparrow *Melospiza lincolni*: Several were seen on a blustery morning at Potter Marsh.

Troupials and Allies (Icteridae)

Rusty Blackbird *Euphagus carolinus*: Several were seen along both the Kougarak and Council Roads in Nome.

Finches, Euphonias, and Allies (Fringillidae)

Pine Grosbeak *Pinicola enucleator*: A couple were seen in flight east of Nome, then four birds were seen at feeders in Seward.

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch *Leucosticte tephrocotis umbrina*: Regularly observed on St. Paul, which is the largest race.

Common Redpoll *Acanthis flammea flammea*: Observed at a feeder in Barrow, and then daily around Nome.

Hoary Redpoll *Acanthis hornemanni exilipes*: Great looks at feeders in Barrow, then seen again around Nome multiple times.

Red Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra sitkensis*: Regular visitors to feeders in Seward, where up to three birds were seen.

Pine Siskin *Spinus pinus*: A handful of birds were regularly attending the visitors in Seward.

MAMMALS

Arctic Fox *Alopex lagopus*: A whitish one was seen in Barrow; then commonly recorded on St. Paul in the Pribilofs.

Red Fox *Vulpes Vulpes*: One approached close to us near Nome.

Polar Bear *Ursus maritimus*: A distant sleeping bear was seen off of Point Barrow.

Harbor Seal *Phoca vitulina*: One was seen near Norton Sound, Nome.

Northern Fur Seal *Callorhinus ursinus*: Hundreds were seen on St. Paul, which boasts the largest population in the World.

Steller's Sea Lion *Eumetopias jubatus*: One was picked up by Phil off of the cliffs at St. Paul in the Pribilofs.

Sea Otter *Enhydra lutris*: Two of these confiding mammals were seen eating mollusks in Seward Harbor.

Moose *Alces alces*: 3 were seen on the Kougarak Road, Nome, another two on the Teller Road, and 1 in Seward too.

Orca (Killer Whale) *Orcinus orca*: Two were seen off St. Paul island, in the Pribilofs.

Snowshoe Hare *Lepus americanus*: One was seen on the Council Road in Nome.

Tundra (Alaskan) Hare *Lepus othus*: One was seen near Nome.

Hoary Marmot *Marmota caligata*: One was seen at Turnagain Pass south of Anchorage.

Arctic Ground Squirrel *Spermophilus parryi*: Regularly seen around Nome.

Red Squirrel *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*: Seen in Anchorage and Seward.

Brown Lemming *Lemmus trimucronatus*: One was seen in a Barrow garden.