

# **ALASKA MAINLAND**

**JUNE 14–25, 2013**

**LEADER: BARRY ZIMMER**  
**COMPILED BY: BARRY ZIMMER**

**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, INC.**  
**2525 WALLINGWOOD DRIVE, SUITE 1003**  
**AUSTIN, TX 78746**  
**[WWW.VENTBIRD.COM](http://WWW.VENTBIRD.COM)**

**TOUR REPORT**  
**ALASKA MAINLAND**  
**June 14–25, 2013**

**By Barry Zimmer**

On our first full day in Nome, we headed out the Teller Road. We had barely reached the edge of town before several Long-tailed Jaegers appeared next to the road. Lapland Longspurs, Hoary Redpolls, and Red-necked Phalaropes followed in short order. A perched Rough-legged Hawk (one of five that morning) gave great views, as did the male Willow Ptarmigan in the middle of the road. Out the window, the trill of an Arctic Warbler caught our attention and soon we had wonderful scope studies of this Old World species. Several more ptarmigan were spotted, along with Parasitic Jaegers, Harlequin Ducks, and a stunning American Golden-Plover. A patch of willows along the roadside yielded two incredible male Bluethroats dueling over the habitat. We watched, mesmerized, as these avian gems skylarked, chased each other around, and posed for pictures. A herd of Musk Ox on a distant ridge provided some nice scope views. In a higher, rockier portion of tundra we located five Rock Ptarmigan (one of which posed 20 feet away on a mound of dirt), a spectacular male Snow Bunting, a pair of Northern Wheatears, several more American Golden-Plovers, and two breeding plumaged Red Knots. On the way back into town, a Pacific Golden-Plover added to our ever growing list, as did a moth-like Short-eared Owl floating effortlessly over the tundra.

After lunch, we took the Council Road toward Safety Lagoon and beyond. A much closer group of Musk Oxen at the Nome River mouth caused quite a stir. At the Safety Sound bridge we watched as three Bar-tailed Godwits circled directly over our heads, enjoyed a pair of Black Turnstones just feet away, and had a late Red Phalarope and Sabine's Gull in the same pond. Nearby, a third year Slaty-backed Gull was a nice find. Pacific and Red-throated loons dotted the lagoon, and the Tundra Swans were too numerous to count. Black Scoters and Common Eiders were also much in evidence. A pair of Aleutian Terns, another regional specialty, circled around our van, showing off their white foreheads and black bills. Near the town of Solomon the road turned inland, and here someone in the group spotted three Grizzly Bears across the water. Though far away, they provided good, lengthy scope studies. A perched Peregrine Falcon, a fly-by Merlin, and a pair of Eastern Yellow Wagtails all vied for our attention. Finally, we reached a spot where a pair of Gyrfalcons was nesting. Three downy white babies were in the nest, but initially no parent to be found. Then someone spotted one of the adults on a rocky cliff face above the nest site. We enjoyed long scope views of this wonderful Arctic species. All of this was packed into one day of our recent Alaska Mainland tour!

Other Nome area highlights included four Bristle-thighed Curlews (one within 20 feet of us for several minutes), a pair of Arctic Loons, several more Arctic Warblers (one at Salmon Lake almost in our laps), Golden Eagles, a wonderful study of Wandering Tattler, a mating pair of Harlequin Ducks, Blackpoll Warbler from about 10 feet away, Caribou, and lots of wonderful tundra wildflowers.

The second leg of our tour was to the Kenai Peninsula and Seward. En route we enjoyed a family of Horned Grebes, fledgling American Dippers being fed by their parents, striking Townsend's Warblers, Varied Thrush, Pine Grosbeak, Boreal Chickadee, Dall's Sheep, Mountain Goats, a Grizzly Bear from about 50 yards away, and more. An all-day boat trip into Kenai Fjords National Park was very productive with hundreds of Horned and Tufted puffins, the best views of Ancient Murrelet ever for this trip, Parakeet and Rhinoceros auklets, Marbled and Kittlitz's murrelets, Pigeon Guillemot, Common Murre, Red-faced Cormorant, a rare Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel, Sea Otters, bow-riding Dall's

Porpoises, a pod of Killer Whales, and 11 Humpback Whales. The Humpbacks put on an incredible show with breaching, tail lobbing, and bubble net feeding. What a day! The return journey to Anchorage produced great views of the always elusive Three-toed Woodpecker, in addition to Trumpeter Swans, Rufous Hummingbird, Steller's Jay, and Chestnut-backed Chickadee. In Anchorage itself we added Barrow's Goldeneye, Hudsonian Godwit, and Western Wood-Pewee among others.

The final leg of the tour was a visit to Denali National Park. We were blessed with totally clear skies on the day of our shuttle bus ride. Mount McKinley towered above the Eielson Visitor Center, resulting in the best scenery show I have seen in the park. Another Grizzly Bear, several Moose (including three bulls), and more Caribou and Dall's Sheep were all found on our ride. On the bird front, we had multiple scope views of Bohemian Waxwing in this area, as well as Merlin, Golden Eagle, Northern Harrier, Trumpeter Swans, White-winged Scoter, and more.

Our 11-day journey through Alaska produced over 150 species of birds, 20 species of mammals, countless superb dinners (with salmon, halibut, and king crab topping the list), and unseasonably warm temperatures with almost no rain for the entire trip. I can't wait to get back!

## **Alaska Mainland**

June 14 - 25, 2013

Leader: Barry Zimmer

### **Itinerary:**

June 14 - arrival in Anchorage; Lake Spenard & Hood after dinner (4 species)

June 15 - Westchester Lagoon, flight to Nome (twice!) (25 species; 27 total)

June 16 - Teller Road to MP 34, Council Road to MP 46 (69 species; 88 total)

June 17 - Kougarak Road to MP 72; evening option to Council Road MP 26 (67 species; 101 total)

June 18 - Council Road to MP 29; return flight to Anchorage via Kotzebue; Lagoon after dinner (43 species; 105 total)

June 19 - Anchorage to Seward with stops at Potter Marsh, Turnagin Arm, Williwaw, Granite Creek Campground, Summit Lake, Trail River Campground, Ava's house in Seward; post dinner excursion to Lowell Point (53 species; 129 total)

June 20 - all day boat trip to Kenai Fjords National Park & Chiswell Islands (24 species; 138 total)

June 21 - Nash Woods, Ava's house, Bear Creek, Primrose Campground, drive to Anchorage, Hillside Park (42 species; 145 total)

June 22 - Lions Club Park, drive to Denali along Parks Hwy with some roadside birding, Denali Hwy to MP 121 (38 species; 150 total)

June 23 - bus ride into Denali National Park to Eielson Visitor Center, evening option to Denali Hwy MP 120 (22 species; 151 total)

June 24 - Denali Hwy to MP 101; return to Anchorage with some roadside birding (26 species; 152 total)

June 25 - departures home or on to Barrow extension (152 total species)

### **Key:**

N = Nome and surrounding Seward Peninsula

A = Anchorage and surrounding areas (Hillside Park, Potter Marsh, Turnagin Arm, Williwaw, etc.)

S = Seward, Kenai Fjords, Summit Lake, Granite Creek (Kenai Peninsula)

D = Denali National Park, Denali Hwy, and Parks Hwy north of Wasilla

**bold-faced species** indicate birds of rare, casual or accidental occurrence

underlined species indicate birds of very uncommon occurrence or species which occur regularly but in such low densities as to be easily missed

# - indicates birds seen with babies or on nests

### **Birds:**

Greater White-fronted Goose N--- uncommon; three on lake off the Kougarok Road

Brant N---the western race *nigricans* (a possible future resplit)

Cackling Goose N---although very difficult to separate from *parvipes* type Canadas, all

"white-faced" geese on the Seward Peninsula are of the large Cackling Goose group *taverneri*

Canada Goose A---presumed to be of the small "Lesser Canada Goose" group *parvipes*; #

Trumpeter Swan S,D---especially well near Seward

Tundra Swan N---up to 200 in one day

Gadwall A---one at Westchester (spotted by Bill); very uncommon

American Wigeon A,N,D

Mallard A,N,D---somewhat rare in Nome

Northern Shoveler A

Northern Pintail N

Green-winged Teal A,N,D

Canvasback D---female near Cantwell; very uncommon

Ring-necked Duck D---uncommon

Greater Scaup A,N,D

Lesser Scaup A,D

Common Eider N--- v-nigra subspecies along Safety Lagoon

Harlequin Duck N,S---always spectacular; many great views including an amazing flock of 31 on Lowell Point & a mating pair in the Nome River  
 Surf Scoter S---flock of 30 from the boat in Seward  
 White-winged Scoter N,D---well along the Denali Highway  
 Black Scoter N---good numbers this year  
 Long-tailed Duck N  
Bufflehead D---uncommon  
 Common Goldeneye A,N---four total  
Barrow's Goldeneye A---adult male, immature male & female on Lake Hood the first evening  
 Red-breasted Merganser N  
 Willow Ptarmigan N,D---superb studies in Nome; a total of eleven seen ( a good count for a species whose numbers rise and fall cyclically)  
Rock Ptarmigan N---five birds in one location near Nome; always tough; we had superb views this year  
 Red-throated Loon N---nice breeding-plumaged birds; up to 25 in a day  
**Arctic Loon** N---nice scope views of pair on evening option on Bering Sea side of Safety Lagoon; rare U.S. visitor  
 Pacific Loon N---spectacular breeding-plumaged birds to the road  
 Common Loon A,D  
Horned Grebe A---pair with young at Potter Marsh was spectacular; uncommon  
 Red-necked Grebe A---common  
**Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel** S---first time on this trip in over a decade; this was Ellen's 600th bird!  
 Double-crested Cormorant S  
Red-faced Cormorant S---after missing the species completely in 2012, this year we only had one pair in flight from the boat; declining in this area?  
 Pelagic Cormorant N,S  
**Osprey** N---rare was a pair nesting on the Kuzitrin River bridge outside of Nome  
 Bald Eagle A,S,D---18 in one day!  
 Northern Harrier D---one male in the park  
 Red-tailed Hawk S---the "Harlan's" subspecies  
 Rough-legged Hawk N---five seen; great views  
 Golden Eagle N,D---four total  
 Sandhill Crane N  
 American Golden-Plover N---in stunning breeding plumage; Bill's 500th ABA bird!  
 Pacific Golden-Plover N---gorgeous breeding-plumaged bird; only one this year  
 Semipalmated Plover N---our first spotted by Ellen  
 Black Oystercatcher S---nice views of one from the boat  
 Spotted Sandpiper N  
 Wandering Tattler N---only one, but great views  
 Lesser Yellowlegs A,D---some in trees!  
 Whimbrel N---two spotted by Ellen on the curlew hike  
**Bristle-thighed Curlew** N---after an arduous hike we had superb close studies of four (one within 25 feet!) birds on the ground showing off their cinnamon tails and rumps; easily missed  
 Hudsonian Godwit A  
 Bar-tailed Godwit N---*baueri*; only four total this year; seen especially well at Safety Sound  
Black Turnstone N---incredibly close views of a pair at Safety Sound  
Red Knot N---two in striking breeding-plumage spotted by Woody along the Teller Road; very uncommon  
 Semipalmated Sandpiper N

Western Sandpiper N  
 Least Sandpiper N---uncommon; one total  
 Dunlin N  
 Short-billed Dowitcher A---subspecies *caurinus*  
 Wilson's Snipe N,D  
 Red-necked Phalarope N,D---beautiful breeding-plumaged birds  
**Red Phalarope** N---one spotted by Ellen at Safety Sound was a bonus; very late migrant  
 Black-legged Kittiwake N,S---thousands in Kenai Fjords; #  
Sabine's Gull N---one at Safety Sound; late  
 Bonaparte's Gull A,D  
 Mew Gull seen daily in numbers; #  
 Herring Gull N,A---"Vega" Gull at Nome (two only) and "American " Herring Gull (*smithsonianus*) around Anchorage; could be a future split by the AOU  
**Slaty-backed Gull** N--- second year bird on Safety Lagoon; rare but somewhat regular  
 Glaucous-winged Gull S---common around Seward  
 Glaucous Gull N---very common  
 Aleutian Tern N---only three this year, but great views of one pair  
 Arctic Tern A,N,S---repeated spectacular views; #  
 Parasitic Jaeger N  
 Long-tailed Jaeger N---common and conspicuous birds around Nome  
 Common Murre S---very common  
 Pigeon Guillemot S---great studies from shore (as close as twenty feet away!) and on the boat  
 Marbled Murrelet S---about 12 from the boat and one from shore  
Kittlitz's Murrelet S---three near Aialik Glacier; less numerous than usual  
Ancient Murrelet S---8 total with really good views of three birds on the water right next to the boat; generally tough and scarce; voted the second favorite bird of the tour!; 600th bird for Jake  
Parakeet Auklet S---great views of eight near False Pete's Pass; often missed entirely  
 Rhinoceros Auklet S---about 12 total  
 Horned Puffin S---about 1000 seen; superb views  
 Tufted Puffin S---about 500 seen  
 Rock Pigeon A  
 Short-eared Owl N---three scattered around Nome; irregular; nice studies  
 Rufous Hummingbird S---including one nice adult male  
 Belted Kingfisher D  
 Downy Woodpecker A,S  
 Hairy Woodpecker S  
American Three-toed Woodpecker A---last minute find at Hillside Park; great study of female; always tough  
 Northern Flicker D---"Yellow-shafted"  
 Merlin N,D---nice view on the bus ride in Denali; uncommon  
Gyr Falcon N---nice scope study of gray morph bird with three young at nest beyond Solomon; #  
 Peregrine Falcon N  
 Western Wood-Pewee A---at the secret spot  
 Alder Flycatcher A,S,D  
 Say's Phoebe N---one briefly beyond Salmon Lake  
 Gray Jay S,D---including interesting juvenile plumaged birds  
 Steller's Jay S---darker, shorter crested race with dark blue spots on crest; only one seen  
 Black-billed Magpie A,S,D  
 Northwestern Crow S---right in front of our hotel!

Common Raven      daily  
 Horned Lark      N---uncommon  
 Tree Swallow      A,N,S  
 Violet-green Swallow      A,S,D---excellent views of this beauty; #  
 Bank Swallow      A  
 Cliff Swallow      N,D  
 Black-capped Chickadee      A,S  
 Chestnut-backed Chickadee      S---the chestnut-sided subspecies *rufescens*  
Boreal Chickadee      S,A---uncommon; great views  
 Red-breasted Nuthatch      S  
Pacific Wren      S---heard only from the boat; very uncommon  
 American Dipper      A,S---great studies of adult & young; voted the fourth favorite bird of the tour  
 Golden-crowned Kinglet      S---wonderful study of male with orange crest flared!  
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet      S,A,D  
 Arctic Warbler      N---superb views of this specialty; six total  
Bluethroat      N---great luck with two competing males sitting up for wonderful studies; voted the favorite bird of the tour!  
Northern Wheatear      N---pair along the Teller Road were our only ones; uncommon  
 Gray-cheeked Thrush      N,D  
 Swainson's Thrush      S,A  
 Hermit Thrush      S,A---perhaps the best song in North America  
 American Robin      almost daily  
 Varied Thrush      S,D---another top song contender  
European Starling      A---very uncommon, but increasing in Alaska  
 Eastern Yellow Wagtail      N---subspecies *tschutschensis*; several nice views  
Bohemian Waxwing      D---eight seen along Denali Hwy on our three visits; several nice scope studies; always tough; voted the third favorite bird of the tour  
 Lapland Longspur      N---spectacular in breeding plumage; common around Nome  
Snow Bunting      N---stunning male along Teller Road; scarce in this area  
 Northern Waterthrush      N,A,D---nice scope views  
 Orange-crowned Warbler      A,N,S  
 Yellow Warbler      N,S,A  
 Blackpoll Warbler      N,D---excellent views from just feet away!  
 Yellow-rumped Warbler      A,S,D---Myrtle types  
 Townsend's Warbler      S---superb view of this striking species; five total  
 Wilson's Warbler      N,A,D  
 American Tree Sparrow      N,D  
 Savannah Sparrow      N  
 Fox Sparrow      N,S---"Red" birds (*zaboria*) in Nome, "Sooty" (*unalaschensis*) birds around Seward  
 Song Sparrow      S---fantastic looks at the big, dark coastal race *kenaiensis*  
 Lincoln's Sparrow      A,S  
 White-crowned Sparrow      N,A,D  
 Golden-crowned Sparrow      N,S,A  
 Dark-eyed Junco      A,S,D---Slate-colored types  
Rusty Blackbird      N,S---uncommon & easily missed  
 Pine Grosbeak      S---wonderful views at Ava's  
 Common Redpoll      A,N,S,D  
 Hoary Redpoll      N---good views of several  
 Pine Siskin      A,S---somehow we left this one off the list

total species - **152**

**Mammals:**

Red Squirrel---about nine seen

Arctic Ground Squirrel---common in Nome & Denali

Common Muskrat---one at Potter Marsh

Snowshoe Hare---this species has bottomed out in it's cycle with only one seen the entire trip

Red Fox---three total

Grizzly Bear--- three in Nome, one very close to road north of Seward, and another distantly in Denali; the first four all spotted by Michelle!

Steller's Sea Lion---declining at a ridiculous pace; maybe 50 total

Harbor Seal---particularly numerous around the glacier; at least 75 seen

seal species---several around Nome that were either Spotted or Ringed

Sea Otter---great views of these cute critters in Kenai Fjords; 8 total individuals

Moose---a total of 12 including three bulls

Caribou---five in Nome & five in Denali

Mountain Goat---nine total including a baby or two

Musk Ox--- superb views including babies!;68 seen

Dall's Sheep---four rams along Seward Hwy and several distant groups in Denali

Humpback Whale-----eleven from the boat; great behavioral studies including breaching, tail lobbing, pectoral fin flapping, and most spectacularly bubble net feeding; WOW!

Killer Whale (Orca)----pod of five gave prolonged views; missed more often than seen

Harbor Porpoise---one in Resurrection Bay

Dall's Porpoise---common (about 40) on boat trip including bow-riding

total species - 19

**Butterflies:**

Canadian Tiger Swallowtail

Old World Swallowtail

Mustard White

sulphur species (probably Clouded)

unidentified blue species

Bog Fritillary

Red-disked Alpine

Common Ringlet

total species - **8**

**Significant others:**

our arrival in Nome---finally!

ice chest arrival in Nome

airport Pizza cook in jail

blueberry fritters in Girdwood

king crab, halibut, & salmon dinners



blackberry & fruits of the forest pie at Summit Lake

the garbage grinder

all food at Chinook's (voted the best restaurant of the trip!)

nice wildflowers including the likes of Alpine Azalea, Mountain Avens, Woolly Lousewort, Lapland Rosebay, Cow Parsnip, alaska Lupine, Bell Heather, Alaska Cotton, Wild Geranium, Fireweed, and many others left unidentified

Mount McKinley (Denali) in full view on our day in the park---magnificent!!!

the ongoing search for the elusive House Rustle