

**ADAK:
A SPECIAL TOUR
TO ONE OF ALASKA'S
OUTERMOST ISLANDS**

MAY 17 – 25, 2006

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ADAK, ALASKA BIRDLIST

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(LEADERS: Kevin Zimmer & Dan Wetzel)

Our first foray to Adak was a big success! A storm that preceded our arrival brought a number of Siberian vagrants to the island, most of which stayed long enough for us to see. The weather was ugly for the first 24 hours, then abated, leaving us with largely pleasant birding conditions for the remainder of the week. The infrastructure was every bit as good as advertised: comfortable lodging in former Navy housing (two-bedroom/two-and-a-half bathroom apartments with full kitchen, living room, solarium, and satellite TV), good meals, and vans for transport. Habitat for birds was plentiful, and a nice road system with virtually no other traffic made it easy to get around. All that was left for us was to find the birds!

And find them we did! From a vagrant perspective, it was the week of the Wood Sandpiper. The species was seen every day, and was by far the most common species of shorebird during our stay, with a single-day high of over 100 individuals seen! We saw, literally, flocks of Wood Sandpipers, including several birds that were singing and displaying. We also recorded Smew every day of the tour, with two different females seen. A Common Greenshank made a brief appearance, and we had one-day encounters with a male Tufted Duck, a male Eurasian Wigeon, and two Black-headed Gulls. Common Snipe were displaying alongside of Wilson's Snipe at Mechanics Marsh, which made for a nice comparison of the winnowing sounds of these two recently split species. Three Bramblings were most confiding in granting close studies on two different days, although an adult male that we found near the old Loran station a few days later wasn't nearly as accommodating. The winds shifted to out of the southwest for several hours midweek, which was just long enough to blow in a few additional vagrants. We found a Gray-tailed Tattler and several *variegatus* Whimbrels (the white-rumped, Asiatic subspecies), both of which were firsts for the spring.

Vagrants aside, there were a number of other interesting things to look at. Bald Eagles were more common and approachable (to the delight of photographers in the group) than anywhere I have ever been. Rock Ptarmigan were also exceptionally common, here represented by an endemic subspecies that is considerably darker and less variegated in plumage than individuals from the mainland. The number of alcids seen from shore was impressive. Ancient Murrelets were a common sight in Sweeper Cove and offshore from the beaches, as were Pigeon Guillemots. I particularly enjoyed the scope studies of both Kittlitz's and Marbled murrelets on Clam Lagoon. Arctic Loon, Red-faced Cormorant, Bar-tailed Godwit, and Black Oystercatcher are just a few of the other "normal" species that we saw during our stay. And of course, how many places can you hope to see Laysan Albatross from shore? We saw at least five from the cliffs at the old Loran Station.

For all of this, if I had to pick a single highlight, it would have been our half-day boat trip to Little Tanaga Straight. By having a week on the island, we were able to pick the best weather day for our trip, which resulted in flat seas and relatively warm temperatures. As we approached the straight we began seeing more and more alcids, which were concentrating above the tidal rips that defined the shallows between the islands. Our primary goal was Whiskered Auklet, the most range-restricted and enigmatic of all North American alcids. The first scattered Whiskered Auklets soon yielded to small groups, and these, in turn, gave way to larger groups. As we came to the main tidal rip, there were alcids everywhere—scattered puffins, murrelets, Parakeet Auklets, and Crested Auklets—dominated by large numbers of Whiskered Auklets and Ancient Murrelets. Rafts of these birds reluctantly scattered at the close approach of the boat, but not before yielding repeated close views of the birds as they sat on the water. By the end of the day, we had tallied over 1,500 Whiskered Auklets and 500 Ancient Murrelets, with a close Laysan Albatross thrown in as a bonus! It was an incredible day for seabird enthusiasts, and the Whiskered Auklet was a life bird for everyone, including me! It was particularly satisfying in that we had such good views of birds close on the water, not just a bunch of dark specks flying away. Whiskered Auklet is one of the most difficult-to-see of North America's breeding birds, and this was a fabulous way to see them!

Itinerary:

5/17 - night in Anchorage
5/18 - fly from Anchorage to Adak
5/19 - Adak
5/20 - Adak
5/21 - Adak
5/22 - Adak
5/23 - Adak
5/24 - Adak
5/25 - Adak to Anchorage

Birds:

Cackling Goose - recorded 4 days, with a high of 200+ on 5/20
Eurasian Wigeon - single male seen on 5/23
American Wigeon - 2 on 5/23 were the only ones seen
Mallard - seen daily
Northern Shoveler - 2 on 5/22 were the only ones seen
Northern Pintail - seen daily
“Eurasian” Teal - seen daily (these were nominate *crecca*, which are considered by the AOU to be conspecific with the widespread North American form *carolinensis*, which we call “Green-winged Teal”. Europeans treat *crecca* as a distinct species from *carolinensis*.)
Tufted Duck - 1 male on 5/23 was seen nicely
Greater Scaup - seen daily
Common Eider - an estimated 100 seen from our boat trip on 5/21

Harlequin Duck - common/seen daily
 Long-tailed Duck - 2 on 5/20 and 1 on 5/24 were the only ones seen
 Bufflehead - seen on 6 out of 8 days
 Common Goldeneye - seen daily
Smew - 1–2 females seen daily (1 constantly at Smew Pond, the other on the southeast side of Clam Lagoon)
 Common Merganser - a pair seen by KJZ at Clam Lagoon on 5/22 was our only record.
 Red-breasted Merganser - seen daily
Rock Ptarmigan - seen daily (the endemic subspecies *chamberlaini*)
Arctic Loon - 3 seen just offshore from Clam Lagoon on 5/24.
 Common Loon - 1 seen just offshore from Clam Lagoon on 5/24.
 Horned Grebe - singles at Clam Lagoon on 5/24-25.
 Red-necked Grebe - seen on 5 days, with a high of 8 birds on 5/23.
Laysan Albatross - 5+ seen distantly from the Loran Station overlook on 5/20, and 1 seen very nicely as it flew right past our boat on 5/21.
Short-tailed Shearwater - a huge concentration just offshore on 5/18 was almost certainly blown in by the storm that preceded our arrival. Smaller numbers were seen the next few days.
Red-faced Cormorant - scattered singles were seen from shore as they fed in the surf on 5/22–24.
 Pelagic Cormorant - seen daily except for 5/18
Osprey - 1 seen on 5/18, 19, 21, and 23 was presumably the same individual, and was a good find for Adak (considered “Accidental”)
 Bald Eagle - common/seen daily (this species was more common and more approachable here than any place I’ve ever been!)
 Peregrine Falcon - singles on 5/21-22.
 Black-bellied Plover - 1 on 5/20 (not seen by KJZ)
Pacific Golden-Plover - 4
 Semipalmated Plover - seen almost daily, with a high count of 8 on 5/23.
 Black Oystercatcher - seen on 5 days, with a high of 4 birds on 5.24.
Common Greenshank - 1 on 5/19 stayed long enough for all but one person to see. This was the rarest of our vagrant shorebirds.
Wood Sandpiper - Seen daily, with a high of over 100 on 5/20. Amazingly, this was the most common shorebird during our stay, and we were treated to repeated views of singing and displaying birds.
 Wandering Tattler - 1 along the rocky beach opposite Clam Lagoon on 5/24.
Gray-tailed Tattler - 1 on 5/23 at the drainage leading into Sweeper Cove was a good find.
Whimbrel - 3 on 5/22 (1 at Mechanics Marsh and 2 at Clam Lagoon) and 1 at Clam Lagoon on 5/24 were all of the white-rumped, Asiatic subspecies *variegatus*.
Bar-tailed Godwit - seen on 5 days, with a high of 5 on 5/22.
 Western Sandpiper - oddly, singles at Clam Lagoon on 5/22 and 5/24 were our only records.
Rock Sandpiper - seen on 4 days, with a high of 10 birds on 5/23.

Wilson's Snipe - one or more birds winnowing over Mechanics Marsh on 5/19,20 were significant in that the species had not been definitively recorded on Adak. KJZ taped them displaying in the same marsh with Common Snipe!

Common Snipe - seen on 4 days at Mechanics Marsh, with a high count of 5+ on 5/20. KJZ taped winnowing displays.

Red-necked Phalarope - seen daily

Parasitic Jaeger - seen almost daily, with a high of 8 birds on 5/22 (mostly at Clam Lagoon, and mostly dark-morph birds)

Black-headed Gull - 2 at Clam Lagoon on 5/22; seen again by Tom on 5/23.

Herring Gull - 1 first-year bird of the Siberian subspecies *vegae* was seen at Clam Lagoon on 5/22-24 (treated by Europeans as a separate species, called "Vega Gull").

Glaucous-winged Gull - the common large gull in the Aleutians (seen daily in numbers).

Glaucous Gull - 1 at Sweeper Cove on 5/19 was our only record.

Black-legged Kittiwake - 1 on 5/22 at Clam Lagoon was our only record.

Thick-billed Murre - seen on 2 days from shore, and in small numbers from the boat on 5/21.

Pigeon Guillemot - Common. Seen almost daily.

Marbled Murrelet - Seen daily, both along the coast and on Clam Lagoon, where at least 20 were seen on 5/19. Also seen from the boat (20+), mostly as we cruised out of Sweeper Cove.

Kittlitz's Murrelet - seen on 3 days at Clam Lagoon (5/19,23,24), with a high of 8+ there on 5/24. On each occasion we saw a least 1 bird in what appeared to be basic plumage.

Ancient Murrelet - seen almost daily from shore, with a spectacular high of 500+ birds on our 5/21 boat trip.

Parakeet Auklet - 4 seen on our boat trip on 5/21 were our only records.

Whiskered Auklet - 1500+ seen from our boat trip on 5/21 was a spectacular showing, with many being seen extremely well right alongside of the boat!

Crested Auklet - 2 seen from our boat trip on 5/21 were our only record.

Horned Puffin - common from our boat trip on 5/21.

Tufted Puffin - common from our boat on 5/21, with 2 seen from shore on 5/24.

Short-eared Owl - 1 at Clam Lagoon on the evening of 5/24 was our only record.

Common Raven - seen daily

Tree Swallow - 1 over Smew Pond on 5/22 was unexpected.

Winter Wren - singles seen near the Loran Station on 5/20 and 5/24, plus another heard near town on 5/19.

Song Sparrow - common, seen daily (the large, dark subspecies *maxima*)

Lapland Longspur - common, seen daily

Snow Bunting - scattered singles or pairs seen on 3 days.

Brambling - 3 birds seen on 5/19-20 at one location near Clam Lagoon, plus a fully adult male that we found near the Loran Station on 5/24 (excellent views of this pretty vagrant!)

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch - seen daily