

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

MAY 16 – 24, 2007

LEADERS: KEVIN ZIMMER & DAN WETZEL

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ADAK, ALASKA BIRDLIST

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(LEADERS: Kevin Zimmer & Dan Wetzel)

List compiled by Kevin Zimmer

Our second joint foray to Adak was another success! There were no weather delays in getting to the island. In fact, if anything, the weather was too good (meaning no westerly winds). Once again, 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!

Our most exciting find was a female Smew, which was a new bird for almost everyone in the group. This bird had been reported by other birders a few days prior to our arrival, but it had not been seen for 24 hours before we arrived. Worse yet, despite repeated daily checks, it was not seen by anyone in our first couple of days on the island. We began our third day with another stop by the airport ponds, and there it was! We enjoyed scope views of this dainty duck at some length, reveling in our good fortune. And it did prove to be most fortunate, since we never encountered the bird again!

The Smew was hands-down the top waterfowl highlight, but certainly not the only one. This turned out to be the year of the Tufted Duck. We were treated to these Eurasian visitors on a daily basis, with up to six males seen at the airport ponds. A female at another location made for a total of at least seven individuals. We also found at least two pairs of Eurasian Wigeon, as well as a totally unexpected Barrow's Goldeneye. Other vagrants included a cooperative Wood Sandpiper, displaying Common Snipe, a last-minute Bristle-thighed Curlew, a White Wagtail, Black-headed Gull, a Common Greenshank that flew right past my van and disappeared along the beach, a most uncooperative Brambling that flew as soon as I announced that it was "in the scope," and an even more wretched Dusky Thrush that was seen by the folks in Dan's van, but which flushed before the rest of us could arrive.

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, Black Oystercatcher, Aleutian Tern, and Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch 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 three 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 Strait. By having a week on the island, we are able to pick the best weather day for our trip, and this year we needed every one of those days. In spite of the fact that the weather was pretty good (by Aleutian standards!) throughout our stay, persistent winds kept the seas whipped up to the point that a boat trip would have been uncomfortable. We decided to keep waiting for a good day, and finally, on our last full day, the seas laid down enough for us to go. We still had to take the back way into Little Tanaga, and rough waters wouldn't allow us to cruise the length of the strait. But conditions were good enough for us to get into the tidal rips that concentrate the Whiskered Auklets, and we saw several small groups totaling more than 150 birds. A couple of groups allowed us to approach closely, and, in spite of the boat motion, we could see the whiskers, bill color, and other details nicely. It was a far cry from the 1,500+ birds and flat-calm seas that we enjoyed in 2006, but we weren't in a position to be picky. After all, Whiskered Auklet is one of the most localized and difficult to see of all North American breeding birds, so any day you see one is a great day! As bonuses, we had close looks at numbers of Ancient Murrelets, and Horned and Tufted puffins, as well as an impressive colony of Steller's sea lions.

Itinerary:

5/16 - night in Anchorage
5/17 - fly from Anchorage to Adak
5/18 - Adak
5/19 - Adak
5/20 - Adak
5/21 - Adak
5/22 - Adak
5/23 - Adak
5/24 - Adak to Anchorage

Birds:

Cackling Goose - a single flock of 15+ on 5/20
Eurasian Wigeon - two pairs on 5/19, and single males on 5/22-23
American Wigeon - one male on 5/19 was the only one seen
Mallard - seen daily
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 - seen daily at the airport ponds, sporadically on the back side of Clam Lagoon. High count was of 6 males (multiple days) and 1 female.

Greater Scaup - seen daily

Common Eider - an estimated 100+ seen from our boat trip on 5/23, with 10–20 seen along the coast on 5/19 and 5/22.

Harlequin Duck - common/seen daily, with a high of 250+ on 5/18.

Surf Scoter - 2 on 5/18

Black Scoter - 1 on 5/18 was our only record

Bufflehead - seen daily in small numbers

Common Goldeneye - seen daily

Barrow’s Goldeneye - a female seen nicely at Clam Lagoon on 5/18 was an unexpected find, and assumed to be a minor rarity this far west.

Smew - 1 female photographed at the airport ponds on 5/19 was a great pick-up. It had been seen by other birders prior to our arrival, but had not been seen by anyone for the past three days. Despite checking the site multiple times each day, we never saw the bird again.

Red-breasted Merganser - seen daily

Rock Ptarmigan - seen daily (the endemic subspecies *chamberlaini*)

Arctic Loon - 3 seen feeding in tidal rips on 5/18, and 1 in the same spot on 5/19

Pacific Loon - small numbers (up to 20) seen daily, except for our first day

Common Loon - 1 on 5/22

Horned Grebe - small numbers seen almost daily; usually as singles feeding in the surf offshore from Clam Lagoon.

Red-necked Grebe - seen on 6 days, with a high of 5 birds on 5/19.

Laysan Albatross - 3+ seen offshore from the Loran Station on 5/22.

Northern Fulmar - a few birds seen distantly from shore at the Loran Station on 5/22.

Short-tailed Shearwater - numbers seen distantly from shore at the Loran Station on 5/22

Red-faced Cormorant - scattered singles were seen most days from shore as they fed in the surf.

Pelagic Cormorant - seen daily except for 5/18

Bald Eagle - common/seen daily (this species is more common and more approachable here than any place I’ve ever been!)

Pacific Golden-Plover - 3–4 birds seen around Contractors Marsh on 5/17–19.

Semipalmated Plover - seen daily

Black Oystercatcher - seen on 4 days

Common Greenshank - 1 that flew right past the lead van at eye-level on 5/19 disappeared over the berm and was never seen again.

Wood Sandpiper - 1 at Contractors Marsh on 5/17–18 was first found and photographed by our group.

Wandering Tattler - 2 along the rocky beach opposite Clam Lagoon on 5/18.

Bristle-thighed Curlew - 1 seen distantly (but identifiably) as it rested on an offshore rock on 5/24.

Bar-tailed Godwit - seen on 5 days, with a high of 8 on 5/23.

Rock Sandpiper - small numbers seen on 5 days
Wilson's Snipe - singles winnowing over Contractors Marsh on 5/19,21. This species, which is the widespread snipe in North America, is apparently the rarer of the two species of snipe found on Adak.
Common Snipe - seen and heard winnowing on 2 days at Contractors Marsh.
Red-necked Phalarope - 1-2 birds seen on 5/22-23 were the only ones recorded
Parasitic Jaeger - seen almost daily, with a high of 3 birds
Black-headed Gull - 1 at Clam Lagoon on 5/20
Glaucous-winged Gull - the common large gull in the Aleutians (seen daily in numbers).
Glaucous Gull - 1 along the coast on 5/18 was our only record.
Black-legged Kittiwake - 1 from the boat on 5/23 was our only record.
Aleutian Tern - seen on 4 days at Clam Lagoon, with a high count of 10+ on 5/21.
Thick-billed Murre - seen once from shore, and in small numbers from the boat.
Pigeon Guillemot - Common. Seen daily.
Marbled Murrelet - Seen daily, both along the coast and on Clam Lagoon.
Kittlitz's Murrelet - 6+ at Clam Lagoon on 5/18, including at least one bird that was in a basic or first alternate plumage.
Ancient Murrelet - seen daily from shore, with numbers on our boat trip.
Whiskered Auklet - 150+ seen from our boat trip on 5/23, including several views close to the boat. Rough seas prevented us from cruising through much of Little Tanaga Straights, which is where we encountered huge numbers of Whiskered in 2006.
Crested Auklet - seen by RJ on our boat trip
Horned Puffin - common from our boat trip on 5/23.
Tufted Puffin - common from our boat on 5/23.
Common Raven - seen daily
Winter Wren - a single seen on 5/18 by a few folks was our only record.
Dusky Thrush - Sadly, this great rarity was seen by only part of our group, at the dog cemetery on 5/20. It flushed just as one van was arriving, and could not be relocated. The same bird, or another one, was reported two days later from the cod shack at Clam Lagoon by a team of archaeologists.
White Wagtail - 1 at Sweeper Cove/boat harbor on 5/18 was unexpected.
Song Sparrow - common, seen daily (the large, dark subspecies *maxima*)
Lapland Longspur - common, seen daily
Snow Bunting - scattered singles or pairs seen almost daily.
Brambling - 1 female near Contractors Marsh on 5/17 flew before most people could get on it, and was never relocated.
Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch - seen almost daily

Mammals:

Harbor Seal - daily at Clam Lagoon
Sea Otter - daily at Clam Lagoon
Steller's Sea Lion - colony seen from our boat trip on 5/23.