

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

MAY 14 – 22, 2008

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It is with great excitement and eager anticipation that Victor Emanuel Nature Tours announces that we are joining forces with Dan Wetzel of NatureAlaska to offer birders the opportunity to bird Adak Island, Alaska. Adak is a large island in the Andreanof group of the central Aleutian chain, with a resident human population of less than 300. Over the years, it has accumulated a long list of Asiatic vagrants, in spite of the fact that it has received relatively little coverage from birders. Prior to 2004, access to the island was highly restricted, due to the presence of an active U.S. Navy base. Birders could only look at Adak on the map and dream about what could have been. But, in April of 2003, the government shut down the Adak base and relinquished control of the island and its facilities to the Aleut Enterprise Corporation. With that move, Adak became open for tourism. Adak offers the rare opportunity to search for Asiatic vagrants and Bering Sea specialties in relative ease and comfort.

May 14, Day 1: Arrival in Anchorage. Participants will arrive in Anchorage any time today and take the complementary shuttle to our hotel, where a room will be reserved in each person's name.

NIGHT: The Coast International Inn, Anchorage

May 15, Day 2: Anchorage to Adak Island. We will transfer to the airport in time for the 3:15 p.m. departure of Alaska Airlines Flight 138 to Adak Island, which is scheduled to arrive at 5:15 p.m. (subject to change).

Upon arrival, we will transfer to our accommodations in two-bedroom, two-bathroom houses (up to three participants quartered in each house) that were formerly occupied by U.S. Navy personnel. Access to birding locations is via an extensive system of roads, and we will have vans for transportation. This means that birding excursions will minimize the need for arduous long treks on foot and will also allow us to bird from the vehicles when the Aleutian weather takes a turn for the worse. The extensive road system also means that we can cover much more ground and many more habitats than is possible in most outpost locations.

NIGHT: Adak Island

May 16-21, Days 3-8: Adak Island. In addition to resident populations of such prizes as Harlequin Duck, Rock Ptarmigan, Bald Eagle, Rock Sandpiper, Aleutian Tern, Horned and Tufted puffins, Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch, and Lapland Longspur, Adak offers a tremendous opportunity for seeing a variety of alcids and other seabirds, often right from shore. Ancient, Marbled and Kittlitz's murrelets can all be common in the nearshore waters, and tubenoses such as Northern Fulmar, Short-tailed Shearwater, Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel and even Laysan Albatross regularly pass by offshore. A major attraction is the regular presence of Whiskered Auklets, which feed in tidal rips off of Adak. We may see at least a few of these localized alcids from shore, but should see hundreds more if plans for an optional one-day offshore boat trip to Little Tanaga Straight materialize. Our inaugural tour

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tallied more than 1500 Whiskered Auklets, 500+ Ancient Murrelets and a Laysan Albatross during our single boat trip to these waters! Much of our time will be spent searching for migrants, particularly vagrants from Eurasia. The list of vagrants that have occurred here is long, and includes such prizes as Whooper Swan, Bean Goose, Spot-billed Duck, Tufted Duck, Eurasian Wigeon, Common Pochard, Smew, Lesser Sand-Plover, Common Snipe (actually more regular here than Wilson's Snipe!), Bar-tailed Godwit, Black-tailed Godwit, Gray-tailed Tattler, Wood Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Spotted Redshank, Common Sandpiper, Terek Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint, Temminck's Stint, Long-toed Stint, Common Cuckoo, Eyebrowed Thrush, and Brambling.

Of course, as is always the case, the presence of vagrants is largely weather-dependent, and the number of vagrants seen in any single trip is likely to be small. However, the vagrant potential of Adak is great and largely untapped, and with a full week to cover the island, we should be well positioned to find whatever is there. Birding in these northern latitudes is always ephemeral and transient by nature, and these qualities only add to the unpredictability and excitement of birding Alaskan outposts. Rare birds arrive without warning and leave without notice; conditions are optimal one moment and inhospitable the next. One has to admire the feathered wanderers that return again and again from more hospitable climes to fulfill their reproductive destinies in lands that can be so capriciously unpredictable and unforgiving. Seemingly fragile, always restless, they strike out each spring for shores on both sides of the Bering Sea. And each spring, we wait, anticipating their arrivals, and reveling in our unexpected discoveries. It is a drama we look forward to repeating, year after year, with undiminished anticipation.

NIGHTS: Adak Island

May 22, Day 9: Final Day in Adak; Return to Anchorage. After a final day of birding, we'll be transferred to the Adak Airport in time for the 6:45 p.m. departure of Alaska Airlines Flight 139 which is scheduled to arrive in Anchorage at 10:45 p.m. (subject to change). A hotel room for this evening is not covered by the tour fee. However, upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with any lodging arrangements.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 15 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Michael O'Brien and Dan Wetzel (an additional local leader will be added if group size warrants)

Michael O'Brien is a freelance environmental consultant, artist, and author living in West Cape May, New Jersey. He is an Associate Naturalist with Cape May Bird Observatory for whom he conducts numerous workshops and a fall songbird migration count. He is co-author of *The Shorebird Guide*, *Flight Calls of Migratory Birds*, and *America's 100 Most Wanted Birds*. Michael has served on the Maryland/DC and New Jersey Records Committees, as an editorial consultant for *Birding*, and as a regional editor for *North American Birds*. His illustrations have been widely published including in *National Geographic's Field Guide to the Birds of North America*.

Dan Wetzel has been a professional naturalist and licensed Alaskan guide for almost 40 years. Graduate work at the University of Alaska in biology, geology, atmospheric sciences, natural resources, and journalism has finely sharpened his interpretive skills. A resident of Alaska since 1967, Dan broke new trails radio-tracking grizzly bears by helicopter, packing geologists on horseback on the Arctic Divide, hunting in umiaks with Eskimos in the Arctic Ocean, authoring a Denali Park wildlife guide, raising winning Iditarod lead dogs, and pioneering nature and birding tours from the Arctic tundra to the Aleutian Islands to Kenai Fjords. Blending diverse wilderness skills with scientific collaboration has become a foundation for NatureAlaska Tours to foster a more informed public interest in the welfare and enjoyment of wildlife and wilderness. Dan's leadership role in conservation initiatives facilitated the first partnership between the Alaska Watchable Wildlife Conservation Trust and the Alaska tourism industry. He continues to develop challenging new ways for travelers to enjoy their Alaskan vacations, not only as adventurous and fun-filled, but as life-changing experiences.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$4595** per person in double occupancy from Anchorage, Alaska. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 2 to lunch on Day 9, all lodging as stated in the itinerary (see ACCOMMODATIONS section below), ground transportation, commercial flights between Anchorage and Adak Island, and guide services provided by your tour leaders. The tour fee does not include airfare from your home to Anchorage and return, lodging on the night of May 22, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

This tour is an exception to VENT's guaranteed domestic departure policy. VENT reserves the right to charge a small-party supplement or cancel the tour due to low enrollment.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$85**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you. This fee only covers single accommodations in Anchorage on Day 1. It does not cover nor guarantee single accommodations at Adak Island where you may be asked to share (see ACCOMMODATIONS section below). However, your preference will be noted and accommodated, if possible, at no additional cost.

We are hoping to arrange an optional boat trip to get closer looks at Whiskered Auklets and Laysan Albatross. If a suitable boat is available, this will be offered to all participants for an additional fee. The per-person cost will be determined by the number of participants choosing this option. From 2006-07 the per-person cost was between \$300-400.

The cost of the flights between Anchorage and Adak Island is subject to change. Should this happen, VENT reserves the right to adjust the tour fee accordingly.

On this tour, participants will be responsible for any extra expenses incurred during the tour (extra hotel nights, additional transportation, etc.) which directly result from events out of VENT's control (weather delays, flight cancellations, strikes, acts of God, etc.). For more information, please see the enclosed letter from Victor Emanuel and the RESPONSIBILITY section at the end of this itinerary.

ACCOMMODATIONS: Accommodations on Adak Island will be in houses which each have a bedroom with 2 beds, another bedroom with a single bed, two and a half baths, a living room, full kitchen, microwave, laundry facilities, linens, refrigerator, coffee pot, dishes and utensils. Although the tour fee covers all meals, participants are welcome to bring personal snacks, coffee, tea or other beverages for consumption outside of regular meal times which may be stored in the house. No more than three participants will be quartered in each house. However, due to the limited number of houses and depending on group size and composition, singles may be required to share.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refunds are made according to the following schedule: If cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less **\$125** per person is refundable. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions, as well as any transfers from one tour to another. *We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself.*

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$125.
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available.

TRIP CANCELLATION INSURANCE: Application forms for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. We **strongly recommend** that you purchase trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering. Contact the VENT office prior to registration for details.**

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE REQUIREMENT: All participants are **required** to purchase a medical evacuation policy for this tour and will be asked to sign and return to the VENT office a waiver stating that this has been done. Such a policy should be available from any insurance company which provides trip cancellation coverage (see below).

TRIP CANCELLATION INSURANCE: Application forms for this coverage along with optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. We **strongly recommend** that you purchase trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; as are other coverages such as terrorism protection; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering. Contact the VENT office prior to registration for details.**

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AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

BAGGAGE: Arrangements can be made to store any gear not needed for Adak in Anchorage (most likely at the Coast International Inn). Please use the VENT luggage tags provided in your participant packet to aid leaders in recognizing your baggage during our airport and hotel transfers.

WEATHER: Normally the temperatures range from 25 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit at Adak Island. It is often windy with drizzle and fog.

CLOTHING: The weather in Alaska in May and June is notoriously unpredictable and can still be quite cold. The “layered” technique is your best defense against the variable weather. We suggest you combine a thermal undershirt, shirt, sweater, and coat or jacket. Medium-weight wool or synthetic equivalent for shirts, slacks, and sweaters is ideal. Cold-weather gear is essential and should include a warm coat or down jacket, warm hat, gloves, thermal underwear (both tops and bottoms), wool or synthetic equivalent socks, and warm shirts. A rain jacket or poncho is also essential for times when the weather turns misty. Since it can be surprisingly warm, too, you should bring some lighter field clothing as well.

FOOTWEAR: Insulated rubber boots or NEOS Overshoes are recommended for footgear during most birding excursions. Although much of the birding will be done from roadsides, there will likely be frequent short off-road treks through wet grass or marshy areas.

OTHER ITEMS: We recommend you bring insect repellent (although unlikely to be a problem), alarm clock, sunglasses, seasickness medication (if necessary, for the optional boat trip) and sunscreen. The leaders will have a spotting scope and reference books, but you may wish to bring your own.

HEALTH: If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (877) FYI-TRIP. You can check the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

SUGGESTED READING: Our website at www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from the store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You might also want to visit such other online stores as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com, or www.buteobooks.com, which specializes in ornithology books. Also see the note about the Alaska Geographic Society at the end of the reading list.

Field Guides—Birds:

- Armstrong, Robert H. *Guide to the Birds of Alaska*. Fourth edition. Bothwell, WA: Alaska Northwest Books, 1995.
- Dunn, Jon and Jonathan Alderfer. *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. Fifth edition. Washington, D. C.: National Geographic Society, 2007. The recommended field guide.
- Peterson, Roger Tory. *A Field Guide to Western Birds*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1998.
- Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000.
- Wild Bird Society of Japan. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Japan*. Japan: Kodansha International, 1991. Offers additional illustrations of the Asian strays. Difficult book to find, however!

Reference—Birds:

- Gabrielson, I. N. & F. E. Lincoln. *The Birds of Alaska*. Harrisburg PA: Stackpole, 1959. Outdated now, but has a lot of information on the life histories of Alaskan birds. Try www.abebooks.com.
- Grant, Peter J. *Gulls: A Guide to Identification*. Academic Press, 1997.
- Harrison, Peter. *Seabirds: An Identification Guide*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1991 (reprint).
- Hayman, Peter, John Marchant & Tony Prater. *Shorebirds: An Identification Guide to the Waders of the World*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1991 (reprint).
- Kessel, Brina. *Birds of the Seward Peninsula, Alaska: Their Biogeography, Seasonality and Natural History*. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1996.
- Kessel, Brina & Daniel D. Gibson. *Status and Distribution of Alaska Birds*. Studies in Avian Biology No. 1, 1978. Try www.abebooks.com.
- Zimmer, K. J. *Birding in the American West: A Handbook*. Cornell University Press, 2000.

General Background Reading:

- Freuchen, Peter. *Book of the Eskimos*. Fawcett Books, 1981. An easy-to-read classic account of Eskimo life, written in 1931. Out of print, but appears on www.amazon.com. Other Freuchen titles are available as well: *Arctic Adventure* (AMS Press, 1995) and *Ivalu, the Eskimo Wife* (AMS Press, 1935).

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Lopez, Barry. *Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape*. Vintage Books, 2001.

McGinniss, Joe. *Going to Extremes*. Plume, 1989 (reissue edition). Raw non-fiction about the people and places of America's last frontier.

McPhee, John. *Coming into the Country*. Noonday Press, 1991 (reissue). Published in 1976, this chronicles a remarkable journey by kayak into the last frontier.

Audubon (May 1988). The entire issue is devoted to Alaska. Especially worthwhile is "Exploring Literature of the Far North," a great bibliography of interesting books on the region.

Alaska Guidebooks:

Rennick, Penny (ed.) *Mammals of Alaska*. Alaska Geographic Guides. Alaska Geographic Society, 1996.

A variety of books on Alaska are available through the Alaska Geographic Society: (907) 274-0521. Alaska Geographic Online is found at www.akgeo.com. Some of these resources include: Alaskan Native Peoples, Mammals of Alaska, and National Parks and Monuments of Alaska.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, and local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

RESPONSIBILITY: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its Agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. When this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on September 14, 2007 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.