

Alaska – Birding & Wildlife: Summer 2020

Alaska is an immense and superb birding and wildlife destination with spectacular scenery: snowy mountains, glaciers, islands teeming with seabirds, coastal fjords edged with fog-drenched forest, vast boreal taiga, and untold miles of rolling tundra. This tour offers an excellent cross-section of the wildlife and habitats of this enormous land.

NOME (4 days, 3 nights) is an exciting bird-rich, historic coastal gold rush town giving access to large areas of remote tundra and taiga habitat on the Seward Peninsula. The coastline harbours a wide variety of nesting and migrant water-birds such as Pacific and Red-throated Divers, Tundra Swan, Brant, Black Scoter, Red-necked Phalarope, Semi-palmated & Western Sandpipers, Long-tailed Skua and Aleutian Tern along with migrants and rarities. Inland we venture through tundra, willow-edged rivers and rocky outcrops where Harlequin Duck, Wandering Tattler, **Bristle-thighed Curlew**, Rock Ptarmigan, American Golden Plover, Rough-legged Buzzard, **Gyr Falcon**, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Northern Shrike; Orange-crowned, Yellow, & Wilson's Warblers, Northern Waterthrush; American Tree, Golden-crowned & Fox Sparrows nest. Other wildlife can be exciting here, with reasonable chances of **Grizzly Bear** and the only chances of sighting **Musk Ox**.

BARROW (3 days, 2 nights) is the northernmost town on the N. America and still predominantly an Inuit community. In a setting of 24-hour sunlight, the birdlife is unmistakably High Arctic. Flat coastal tundra is dotted with shallow lakes above permafrost which support breeding waders such as Baird's, Pectoral, Buff-breasted & White-rumped Sandpipers. King, Common, **Steller's & Spectacled Eiders** are possible along with **Snowy Owl**. Other highlights may include White-billed Diver, Long-tailed Duck, Pomarine Skua, Sabine's Gull plus Arctic Fox, Caribou and even a chance of **Polar Bear**!

SEWARD (3days, 2 nights) on the Kenia Peninsula is a scenic, relaxed day's drive south from Anchorage with good birds and wildlife along the way – Slavonian & Red-necked Grebes, Barrow's Goldeneye, Rufous Hummingbird, Pine Grosbeak, White-winged Crossbill, Townsend's Warbler, American Three-toed Woodpecker, Varied & Hermit Thrushes, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Spruce Grouse, Steller's Jay all possible.

A day's boat trip from Seward into the Kenai Fjords National Park is a tour highlight. Of special interest here are Sea Otters, Steller's Sea Lion, Dall's Sheep and Mountain Goat, **Orca**, Dall's Porpoise and **Humpback Whales**. Birding is superb: vast numbers of nesting seabirds such as Ancient, Marbled & Kittlitz's Murrelets, Rhinoceros Auklet, Brunnich's & Pigeon Guillemots, Tufted & Horned Puffins, Pelagic & Red-faced Cormorants, migrant Short-tailed & Sooty Shearwaters, all in a beautiful setting of rugged offshore islands and majestic glaciers.

DENALI NATIONAL PARK 3 days, 2 nights) is an easy drive north from Anchorage into spectacular mountain scenery centred on Mt. McKinley, the highest peak in North America. Here we can seek out Gray Jay, Boreal Chickadee, and Bohemian Waxwing, Trumpeter Swan, **Northern Hawk-Owl**, Northern Flicker and Blackpoll Warbler. But the stunning views and chance of sightings of **Moose, Grizzly Bear and Grey Wolf** will be equally exciting.

BROOK'S FALLS, KATMAI NATIONAL PARK (Overnight package from Anchorage) is the place for Grizzly Bears where large numbers of these immense creatures gather to catch

salmon on the shallow waterfalls. A fascinating and world-class wildlife spectacle observed at remarkably close range. **BROOK'S FALLS, KATMAI NATIONAL PARK**

This is the place for Grizzly Bears! It is possible to do this as a day trip from Anchorage using special flights including float plane – or to extend viewing time by staying overnight. I've made two previous day trips and been amazed both times as I've spent several hours watching large gatherings of these immense creatures catching salmon on the shallow waterfalls of the river. Each bear has its own methods of catching salmon – some standing above the falls and catching salmon as they leap, others taking salmon as they fall back below the falls. Each too has its own status in the melee – an utterly fascinating and world-class wildlife spectacle. Assuming we get our timing right and the salmon are running this will afford some remarkably close and unique wildlife viewing. After arrival at Brooks Falls we are on foot, taking a short walk to an open viewing platform very close to the Falls – and the bears! I've never taken so many photos in such a short space of time as on my visits here. Notes from Peter Roberts, who will be our guide.

Nowadays it is very busy, so early booking is required. The place can require that you wait for your time to walk the short distance up to the viewing platforms on the falls to get the best views of bears. To gain a bit more time in a more tranquil pace, an overnight is a good idea as it allows bear-viewing after the masses of day-trippers have left.

Provisional itinerary

DAY 1: Arrive Anchorage

DAY 2: Morning fly to Nome, birding Safety Lagoon. Overnight Nome

DAY 3: Birding Nome - Taylor/Kougarok Road. Overnight Nome

DAY 4: Birding Nome - Teller Road & Taylor Road. Evening flight to Anchorage

DAY 5: Morning flight to Barrow, PM birding Gas Well Road. Overnight Barrow

DAY 6: Full day birding Barrow. Overnight Barrow

DAY 7: Birding Barrow, then afternoon flight Anchorage. Overnight Anchorage

DAY 8: Drive to Seward for 3 days birding and a boat trip in Kenai Fiords NP

DAY 9: Seward overnight Seward

DAY 10: On to Denali for two nights.

DAY 11: Denali to Anchorage

DAY 12: Start our one night package to Brooks Falls.

DAY 13: Return to Anchorage.

These very short notes are an indication of what we can expect and more on this tour. Please note that this holiday is being sold at cost and thus the prices looking ahead may vary and the exchange rate being rather volatile these days may have a bearing too.

However costed at current prices and rates, the cost of this trip is approximately £4300 plus international flight probably with Icelandic Air at about £7-800. Price based on 8 guests which is also the max number so early booking is recommended.

One will never get another chance of this full-on trip at this price. It really is a special offer

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