

Alaska Birding & Wildlife

With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



June 3 – 14, 2022

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**NATURALIST
JOURNEYS**



**“How could anyone
go through their life
without going to
Denali?”**

— *Ellen Lahlum*



In a world where the treasures of wildlife and wild places dwindle, Alaska remains a wilderness jewel. More than any place in North America, its wild character and ecological integrity make a visit here a must. We explore in June to take advantage of endless daylight, active birds, breeding wildlife, and very few biting insects.

In Nome, Seward, Anchorage, and Denali, we visit signature landscapes — from the coast to boreal forests. We explore the Arctic tundra and search for nesting shorebirds, seek out moose and a variety of birds in thick spruce forests, circumnavigate seabird nesting islands amid the narrow fjords of Kenai, and hike in Denali.

This is spring in Alaska, a wonderful time for bird activity as they nest in the almost 24-hour daylight at Nome. Mammals have their young and snow can still linger on the landscape. It's fresh and vibrant and one of the most wildlife-rich trips in our repertoire.

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Fri., June 3 Nome

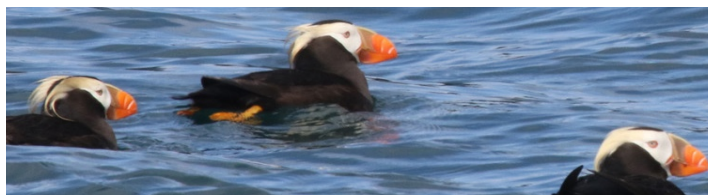
Today is arrival day in Nome where you are met by your guides at the Nome Airport. We start right in with birding, often seeing exciting species on the short drive from town to our accommodations which are ideally situated on the shore of Norton Sound. Flights arrive throughout the day and into the evening. Those arriving in time can join our guide for an informal dinner at a local restaurant.

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Explore Nome's wild tundra landscape while searching close to the Arctic Circle for Asian vagrants and nesting waterbirds
- ✓ Stand on the finish line of the Iditarod
- ✓ Explore vibrant downtown Anchorage
- ✓ Cruise into the Gulf of Alaska while viewing a diversity of marine mammals and nesting seabirds
- ✓ Experience the sights and sounds of an actively calving glacier in Kenai Fjord NP
- ✓ Indulge in fine food, scenic hikes, and abundant wildlife at the renowned Camp Denali in Denali NP
- ✓ Visit Camp Denali, spend time with expert naturalists as you search for iconic wildlife
- ✓ Relax on a stunningly scenic train ride from Denali to Anchorage
- ✓ Take advantage of once-in-a-lifetime opportunities to photograph Alaska's birds, mammals, wildflowers, and scenery

Tour Summary

12-Day / 11-Night Alaska Birding & Nature Tour w/ Greg Smith & Dan Donaldson
 \$6990, from Nome, departing Anchorage
 Arrival Airport is Nome (OME); Departure Airport is Ted Stevens Anchorage International (ANC)





Please note that Nome can be tricky to get into if there is inclement weather. We have booked some early rooms for those that like to play it safe and come in a day early. You are welcome to do some scouting with your guides, and you'll have leisure time to rest up and see a few of the sites of this very authentic Alaskan bush town.

Accommodations at the Aurora Inn, Nome (D)

Sat., June 4 – Mon. June 6 Three Great Days Birding in Nome!

Twenty thousand people lived in Nome at the turn of the last century, seeking their fortunes in gold found in the abundant beach sands. Today, only about 5,000 people live here at the edge of the Bering Sea. Nome is the service center for much of Western Alaska; huge barges give insight to the challenges of life on a 21st Century frontier. Birding the sea wall near the harbor can be rewarding, with sightings of large flocks of sea ducks, Glaucous and Mew Gulls, and a variety of shorebirds, now bright in breeding plumage.

Learn more about Arctic life — natural and cultural. Three main roads lead into the wilds of the Seward Peninsula — the Council Road, the Kougark Road, and the Teller Road — and we travel a combination of these based on current conditions, wildlife sightings, and the interests of the group. We should find Lapland Longspur perched on driftwood, Grizzly Bear or Red Fox digging up Arctic Ground Squirrels, Moose in the willows or a Reindeer roadblock, raised here for meat. Gyrfalcon, Long-tailed Jaeger, and Rough-legged Hawk nest in the region and some years can be found hunting the tundra (their numbers cycle with lemmings, their primary prey). This part of our itinerary does have a keen focus on birds since activity is so high in June in the Arctic. We look for Bluethroat and four species of loons, and hike up to a view of stunning mountains as we search for Bristle-thighed Curlew atop Coffee Dome — a signature species of the region.

The Council Road leads to Cape Nome, with panoramic Bering Sea views and sightings of Arctic and maybe Aleutian Terns, as well as different eiders and scoters. The road continues on to Safety Lagoon and points beyond, where we could find Bar-tailed Godwit, Arctic Loon, and large flocks of Tundra Swan. Short-eared Owl are on patrol, looking for their next sandpiper, while small patches of wetlands might hold a Red-necked Stint or an alternate-plumaged Red Phalarope. Near Solomon, old railroad cars and engines silently rust away — the



“Last Train to Nowhere.” The Council Road has the only spruce forest that can be accessed by vehicle from Nome. If snow is scarce, we drive to the end of the road in search of Bohemian Waxwing, Boreal Chickadee, and Pine Grosbeak.

The Nome-Kougarok Road leads 83 miles north into the Kigluaik Mountains. It is a stunning drive, with diverse birding habitats along the way. Willow bottoms attract Arctic Warbler, Gray-cheeked Thrush, and Bluethroat, and may also hide a group of Musk Ox with young! Small lichen-covered rocks provide perches for Willow and Rock Ptarmigans, Northern Wheatear, and Horned Lark, all while Peregrine Falcon hunt overhead. This is probably the most wildlife-rich and photogenic location on this part of our journey. The tundra provides nesting habitat for American and Pacific Golden Plovers, Ruddy Turnstone, Parasitic Jaeger, and for willing hikers, Bristle-thighed Curlew that nest high on the slopes adjacent to Coffee Dome. With luck, they are calling or displaying, a great reward for the tough climb to the top, and maybe even for folks who choose not to make the climb. Salmon Lake provides us a wonderful picnic spot, and at this time of year there are still snowfields around and ice covering the lake.

The Nome-Teller road leads off to the Northwest. Blackpoll Warbler use the willows of several small drainages along the way, while other habitats provide nesting areas for Northern Shrike and Long-tailed Jaeger. The side road to Cape Woolly is prime nesting habitat for three plover species: American Golden, Pacific Golden, and Black-bellied. This is one of very few locations we can get out of the vehicle and see all three species together in their nesting habitat. The sand spit at the end of the road in Teller is well-known for its rarities, including Black Guillemot, Steller’s Eider, and various sandpipers.

Our meals are fun, a time to relax, tally up our sightings, and sample the restaurants of Nome. By now they know our groups well and we look forward to each year’s return visits.

Accommodations at the Aurora Inn (B,L,D daily)

Tues., June 7 Departures from Nome | Anchorage | Seward

We have one more morning to head out to Cape Nome or other close-in hotspots, then depart Nome on a flight late morning or early afternoon, after this last (and hopefully productive!) morning of birding. We arrive in Anchorage and after our guides make a run to get our vans, start our drive southwest to Seward. This is a stunning route, and since we travel it coming *and* going to Seward, today we drive pretty directly with a few stops for photography and wildlife sightings along the way.



Upon arrival in Seward, we check into accommodations across the street from Resurrection Bay and the famous Sea Life Center.

Tonight, we enjoy fresh seafood or steaks at Ray's on the waterfront of the harbor — one of our favorite restaurants in Alaska and a great place to enjoy the view. It's fun to wander after dinner, watch the halibut harvest come in, and marvel at the many boats while looking for Northern Sea Otter, often just off the docks!
Accommodations at the Edgewater Hotel, Seward (B,L,D)

Wed., June 8 Chiswell Islands | Northwestern Fjord Cruise | Seward

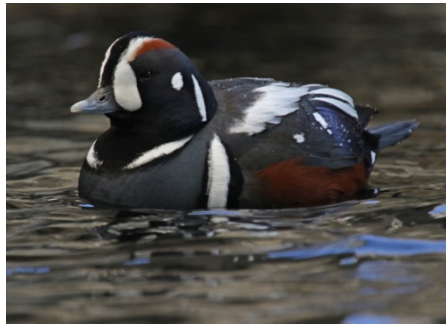
Today we embark on an all-day boat trip into Kenai Fjords National Park, heading towards Northwestern Glacier. This is a stunning day spent cruising among whales, glaciers, and seabird nesting islands in the Gulf of Alaska. As we leave the dock, we look for Northern Sea Otter, Marbled Murrelet, Pigeon Guillemot, Double-crested and Pelagic Cormorants, Bald Eagle, and Glaucous-winged Gull.

Scenery and some wildlife here are on a massive scale, and we should find several active Humpback Whale groups that spend summers feeding in these food-rich ocean waters. We may also find pods of Orca or Dall's Porpoise, and on bergy bits (glacial ice chunks) near Northwestern Fjord, Harbor Seal with pups.

The Chiswell Islands National Wildlife Refuge are prime seabird nesting sites and here, often close to the boat, we find Tufted and Horned Puffins. Common Murre are abundant too and easy to see and photograph. Hopefully our captain is able to find the much less common Thick-billed Murre. Black-legged Kittiwake are also common, and while cruising around the island we also hope to find a few Parakeet Auklet.

As we enter the narrow channel that leads to Northwestern Fjord, we look for Rhinoceros Auklet, and possibly Ancient Murrelet. The rare Kittlitz' Murrelet is usually found in the water adjacent to scree slopes near freshwater inlets. The boat must navigate floating ice recently calved from Northwestern Glacier, but our captain is still able to pull quite close to the glacier. Here we float among the ice and experience the sounds of an actively calving glacier — extraordinary! On the way back, we venture into deeper water where we look for Sooty and Short-tailed Shearwaters, other alcids, and Fin Whale. As we reenter Resurrection Bay, we search for Red-faced Cormorant, and may even find a Black Oystercatcher foraging along the rocky coast. After we regain our land legs, we turn you loose for a free night after all day on the boat.

Accommodations at the Edgewater Hotel, Seward (B,L)



Thurs., June 9 Alaska Sea Life Center | Scenic Drive | Return to Anchorage

Those that wish can sleep in a bit after yesterday's excitement. Or, optionally do a bit of local birding before breakfast. We often check a local set of feeders where we could see all three species of chickadee, Pine Grosbeak, and Red Crossbill.

After breakfast, we walk to the Alaska Sea Life Center, just across the street. This outstanding marine interpretive center was funded by mitigation money from the disastrous oil spill by the Exxon Valdez. The center provides information about the resources associated with Alaska's coastal waters and provides an opportunity to photograph and get up-close looks at rehabbed birds. Both species of puffins and kittiwakes, murres, and auklets, along with various waterfowl and shorebirds are on sight and ready for their close-up. And given that we visit during the Arctic nesting season, all are in alternate plumage — they are stunning!

We then pack up and depart Seward late morning. Enjoy a stop at the Bear Creek Fish Weir, where we watch Sockeye Salmon making their way upstream towards their spawning redds and keeping an eye out for the resident American Dipper. We plan lunch on the way at a local restaurant where Rufous Hummingbird often come in to baskets of colorful flowers. Near Girdwood, we also look for birds of the temperate rainforest, a habitat that extends up from Southeast Alaska to rim the more easterly-situated Prince William Sound. Birds not often found north of here include Rufous Hummingbird, Steller's Jay, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, and Townsend's Warbler.

The drive is just stunning and we keep our eyes peeled for wildlife. We drive along the edge of Cooke Inlet, scanning the rugged slopes for signs of Dall Sheep and Moose, and the waters for Beluga Whale, though these have become rare to site in recent years. From the boardwalk at Potter Marsh we hope to observe salmon, as well as nesting Bald Eagle, and a number of waterfowl and waders.

Coming into Anchorage, we check for nesting Red-necked Grebe and other species at Westchester Lagoon. Dinner tonight is at a favorite local restaurant, specializing in fresh seafood with a varied menu. We also provide an orientation for our grand finale — time at Denali National Park!

Accommodations in Anchorage (B,L,D)

Fri., June 10 Denali National Park | Camp Denali

Today is an early start for Denali National Park, and we take a shuttlebus from Anchorage to the train station at the entrance of Denali National Park. Our shuttle passes through boreal forest, where we see abundant black spruce interspersed with ponds and wetlands. We should see Trumpeter Swan, Moose, and other wildlife as we drive north. As we get close to Denali, the mountain scenery is quite dramatic and one of our restroom stops even provides our first look at "The High One." Guides from Camp Denali await us at the station and load our luggage. Lunch is provided for you to have en route since our time at the station is short.



Then it's into the wilds of Denali National Park, where we drive the scenic miles to our remote and peaceful cabins. En route, any number of up close wildlife sightings is possible, from Gyrfalcon to Grizzly Bear, Moose to Dall Sheep, and more. Along the way, we enjoy a bento box of snacks featuring wild Alaskan delicacies. We arrive in time for a light supper, an orientation to Camp Denali, and hopefully stunning views of the mountain. *Accommodations at Camp Denali, Denali National Park (B,L,D)*

Sat., June 11 & Sun., June 12 Denali National Park | Camp Denali

We have two full days to enjoy the spectacular wilderness of Denali National Park. There is simply no better place to base from, truly at the edge of the wilderness in a lodge that prides itself on sustainability and keeping a light footprint on the landscape. Our wilderness lodgings offer us great comfort, delicious meals, our own private outhouses (an Alaskan bush tradition), and warm hospitality. Each morning, expert naturalists offer three hike options in tundra, mountain, and forest habitats. These are described in detail at breakfast; you can select from an easy-paced "naturalist's foray," or either a moderate or strenuous hike that often follows ridgelines or riverine routes in Denali National Park.

Each outing is unique, and each of the three choices have abundant wildlife and wildflowers. On all hikes you learn about fascinating aspects of tundra ecology, geology, and more. We check creeks and tundra ponds for ducks and geese, and distant hillsides for wildlife. This is the best time of year to see Caribou, Red Fox, and Grizzly Bear. In addition to the large mammals, we may encounter Hoary Marmot, Pine Marten, Rock and Willow Ptarmigans, a variety of songbirds, and a wonderful mix of tundra wildflowers. You can hike as much or as little as you wish. The lodge offers an on-site library, canoes, bikes, and fishing gear, as well as trails just outside the door. Evening programs by the lodge staff or visiting guest speakers focus on Denali's natural and cultural history.

Accommodations at Camp Denali, Denali National Park (B,L,D, all days)

Camp Denali, Denali National Park

We stay at Camp Denali on this trip, one of the Cole/Hamm family's two lodges. Views from the lovely living and



dining room are superb! Camp Denali has a rich history and reputation as one of the first wilderness lodges in Alaska.

Over 50 years ago, people with vision and a true love of the wilderness had the foresight to establish Camp Denali in one of the most pristine areas adjacent to Denali National Park. Since 1975, the Cole family has extended this vision, adding North Face Lodge and managing both properties with an impressive commitment to both conservation and quality of experience. With the expansion of Denali National Park and Preserve in 1980, this owner-operated facility now sits in the center of the most scenic and wild portion of Denali National Park. Guided hikes and programs conducted by expert naturalists, with a keen focus on geology and natural history, are the key to providing far more than just a backcountry stay. Combine wonderful views of Denali with an unparalleled educational and wildlife viewing opportunity and you have the North Face/Camp Denali experience.

With all this to their credit, they also provide incredible service, delicious meals with fresh foods from their own greenhouse and gardens, and well-appointed, comfortable rooms with private outhouses at the Camp. Canoes and bikes are available, as is optional flight seeing (additional cost). The location, facilities, and programs are unique, and Naturalist Journeys is proud to offer this location as part of our itinerary.

Camp Denali is a wilderness lodge that offers guests a true Alaskan adventure. It is situated near treeline, providing access to native tundra and boreal forest habitats right from your door. Each of the 18 guest cabins has a picture window view of Denali and offers privacy throughout your stay.

The cabins are hand-crafted, well-appointed, and authentic. Quilts made by our staff adorn the beds, a wood stove provides cozy warmth, and propane lamps light the cabins. A short path leads to a private, meticulously maintained outhouse, and sink basin inside allows washing up. Drinking water comes from a spigot just outside and may be heated on your cabin's propane hot plate for a morning coffee or afternoon tea. A three- to seven-



minute walk uphill from your cabin leads you to the dining room, a modern shower facility, and the historic log lodge with an inviting wood stove, cozy seating, library, and unparalleled views.

Mon., June 13 Denali National Park | Train to Anchorage

Our return trip through the park is full of anticipation ... we never know what we may see. We keep our eyes open for rare sightings of Gray Wolf and even Lynx — not likely, but possible! We have seen Arctic Ground Squirrel, the blue morph of Red Fox, and, in some years, Northern Hawk Owl. We do have to meet the train so we can't linger, but we always hope for unusual sightings and photo opportunities.

By noon, we are at Denali Station where we board the train to Anchorage. We have upgraded everyone to the Gold Star Class so lunch and dinner, plus two drinks are included. This is an eight-hour journey, so make sure you bring your camera, journal, or a good book, or just enjoy sightseeing or visiting with each other from your dome car seating. Dinner seating on the train is in the dining car at tables of four.

We hate to see our adventure end, and some may want to linger on our hotel's patio looking over the float plane lake.

Accommodations at the Lakefront Hotel, Anchorage (B,L,D)



Tues., June 14 Departures | At Leisure, Explore Anchorage

If you can add some time in Anchorage post-tour, we are happy to give you ideas for your time and suggestions for local activities and guide services. Our hotel has a handy shuttle to downtown, so if you have a good part of the day ahead of late flights, you can store luggage and visit the city, its fine museum, good restaurants, and shopping. (B)

Guides Greg Smith & Dan Donaldson



Greg spent 20+ years as an ecologist managing sensitive bird species for California State Parks along the Central coast. His decision to promote to the Park Superintendent series allowed him to work directly with partners in conserving lands for the benefit of birds, people, and resources. And then he retired! Three days later he started his career with Naturalist Journeys by leading his first of over 100 tours. He has traveled to all seven continents, and has a Master Bird Banding permit. His relaxed style and breadth of knowledge makes his tours both educational and fun, all while exploring Naturalist Journeys' diverse locations and viewing the areas' distinctive birds, wildlife, and plant species. Two of his favorite past times are good food and photography, so take a peek at his Flickr site to see some of what he shares with those that join him on his tours.



Dan Donaldson is an accomplished naturalist-birder based in Northeastern Ohio. Dan has developed his skills while working as a naturalist for a local park district for 15 years as well as with his full-time job as director of the local soil and water conservation district. With varied audiences from novices to experts, Dan incorporates much more than just identification in his tours and programs. Dan led tours for Discovery Tours and this is where Peg and Dan met. His specialization in birding locales ranges from the Great Lakes to coastal destinations from the Maritime Provinces of Canada to the Florida Keys.

Dan has led a number of historical tours including Michigan's lighthouses.

Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Their website will show a grid of tour cost and your age category for you to make selections. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Group Size

Maximum of 12, minimum of six. Please make sure your tour is fully confirmed prior to booking air.

Travel Information

The arrival airport for this journey is Nome Airport (OME). Please plan to arrive in Nome, Alaska, at a time convenient for you on June 3. Your guide will be there to meet you. If you wish to arrive early to Nome, it's a short taxi ride to any of the hotels. You may depart at leisure on June 14.

Cost of the Tour

Cost of the journey is **\$6990 DBL / \$7960 SGL***, from Nome, Alaska, departing Anchorage. This cost includes: accommodations for 11 nights, all meals as specified in the itinerary (B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner), park entrance and other activity fees for activities as described in the itinerary, Gold-Car Class Upgrade on the Alaska Railroad train from Denali to Anchorage, the all-day boat tour in Kenai Fjords National Park, return one-way flight from Nome to Anchorage, professional guide services, pre-departure materials and miscellaneous program expenses.

*Singles are available at all locations other than Denali where lodging is mostly available on a share basis only. We are limited to ONE single allowed at Denali for an additional \$100 per night. Be the first to sign on and you may have a chance at it. Please note that we pay single supplements direct to hotels and they incur no markup.

Tour Cost does not include: airfare to Nome, Alaska, or from Anchorage, Alaska. Note, we do book and include the group flight segment (one-way, on Alaska Air) from Nome back to Anchorage. Cost also does not include items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, or gratuities for luggage handling or personal services.

Going to Alaska is an adventure! Please note that your cost does not include alternate hotels required at the last minute if inclement weather precludes landing or departing in Nome. Nome is in the far north, almost at the Arctic Circle, and flights can be delayed due to fog or other inclement weather. We have not experienced this in recent years with modern and improved navigation equipment on the planes, but it can happen that your plane is turned back to Anchorage where alternate hotel reservations would be required. As we will not be able to cancel rooms paid for in Nome due to such a delay, have a contingency amount of \$150 in your budget in the unlikely event that we rebook. Our office will make every effort to rebook at a reasonable rate at a convenient location.

Photo Credits

Grizzlies, Greg Smith (GS); Horned Puffins, Peg Abbott (PA); Musk Ox, PA; Willow Ptarmigan, PA; Harbor Seal, PA; Grey Wolf, GS; Group in Denali, PA; Tufted Puffins, PA; Last Train to Nowhere, GS; Short-eared Owl, Tom Dove; Rock Ptarmigan, GS; Bristle-thighed Curlew, GS; Birding Cape Nome, PA; Peg and Greg, Ken Copenhaver (KC); Musk Ox, KC; Group near Seward, PA; Common Murres, PA; Glacier Viewing, PA; Humpback Whale Fluke, PA; Harlequin Duck, PA; Harbor Seals with Pup, PA; Group in Denali with Guide, PA; Caribou, PA; Pika, PA; Red Fox, PA; Moose Cow, PA; Denali and Wonder Lake, PA; Grizzly GS; Willow Ptarmigan, PA; Train Views x3, PA; Group in Denali w/ David Sibley, PA.

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