

Alaska Birding & Wildlife

With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



June 10 – 21, 2022

866.900.1146

520.558.1146

travel@naturalistjourneys.com

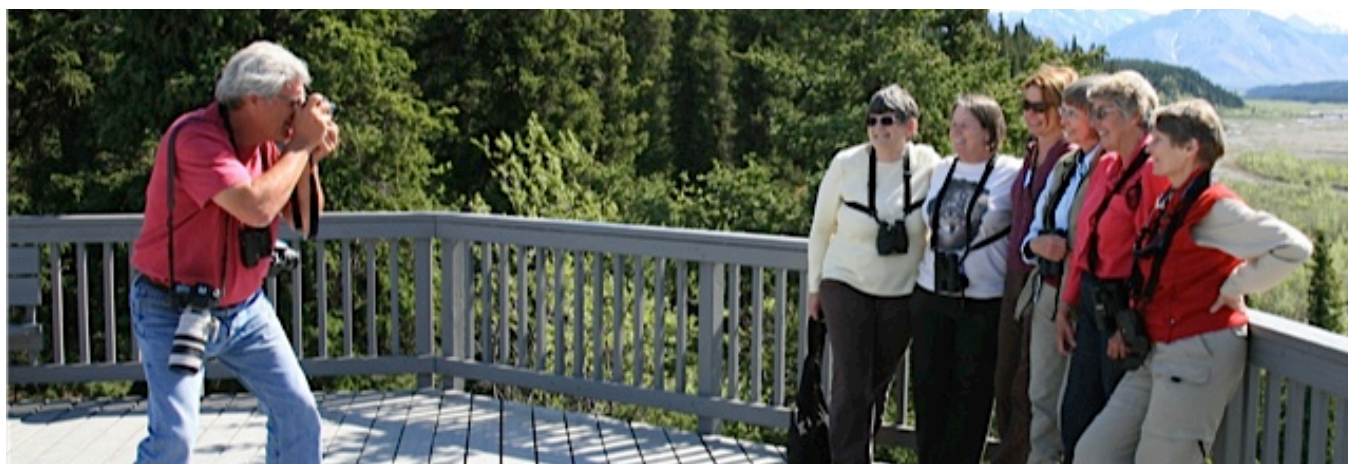
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Naturalist Journeys, LLC





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 Barrow, 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 explore in Barrow.

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 10 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

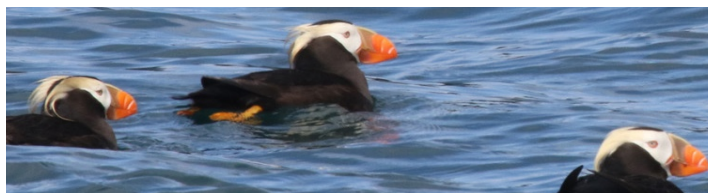
- ✓ Explore Nome's wild tundra landscape while searching close to the Arctic Circle for Asian vagrants and nesting waterbirds
- ✓ Stand on the finish line of the Iditarod
- ✓ Explore vibrant downtown Anchorage
- ✓ Cruise into the Gulf of Alaska while viewing a diversity of marine mammals and nesting seabirds
- ✓ Experience the sights and sounds of an actively calving glacier in Kenai Fjord NP
- ✓ Fly to the top of the world—spend three nights in Barrow
- ✓ Visit the northernmost point of the United States looking for marine mammals, possible Polar Bears, and brightly-plumaged breeding birds
- ✓ 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/ Peg Abbott

\$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 11 – Mon. June 13 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 14 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 15 Chiswell Islands | Northwestern Fjord Cruise | Seward

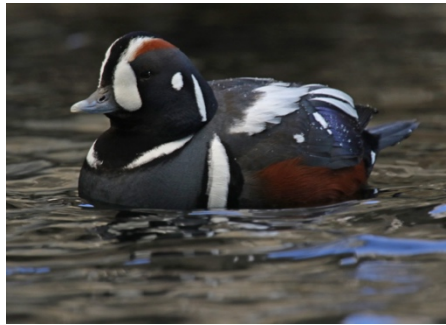
Today we embark on an all-day boat trip into Kenai Fjords National Park, heading towards Northwestern Glacier. This is a stunning day spent cruising among whales, glaciers, and seabird nesting islands in the Gulf of Alaska. As we leave the dock, we look for Northern Sea Otter, Marbled Murrelet, Pigeon 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 16 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 in Barrow!

Accommodations in Anchorage (B,L,D)

Fri., June 17 Anchorage | Flight to The Top of the World at Utqiagvik (Barrow)

We plan to have the full day in Anchorage, ahead of an early evening flight to Barrow. There are some really great wildlife hotspots in and around the city and we set out early in search of Moose, which are surprisingly at home around ponds and lakes of the city. With luck we find an antlered male, an impressive sight. We also look for breeding Pacific Loon, Merlin, and other northern species.

Enjoy time at the fascinating Anchorage Museum, where world-class exhibits on nature and culture inspire a better understanding of all that we see.



After lunch, we stroll the Alaska Botanical Garden, a wonderful place to see Arctic and Boreal plant species in bloom and also a good spot for songbirds like Boreal Chickadee. This 110-acre garden is run by a non-profit organization and we find it well worth a visit. Today is flexible so we can network with our local birding friends and follow the action.

Then, it's time to head to the airport to catch our flight to Barrow. We have plenty of daylight this time of year, from May to July the sun never sets below the horizon this far north. We are bound for the Top of the World, the USA's northernmost settlement, 320 miles north of the Arctic Circle on the shores of the Arctic Ocean. We land at the Wiley Post – Will Rogers Memorial Airport. This flight is included in the cost of your journey. We have time here not to rush and work around the weather if need be. There is only one traffic light here, by the local school. Slow down, bring your parka, and savor the experience!

Accommodations at The Top of the World Hotel, Utqiagvik (Barrow) (B,L,D)

Sat., June 18 & Sun., June 19

Utqiagvik Days: Birding, Nature, Culture & Photography

We have two full days to search for birds and wildlife and experience true high Arctic Tundra. It is the season of ice breakup and time to search for Snowy Owl and shorebirds like stunning American Golden Plover in breeding plumage.

Birds abound! In the quiet Isatquaq Lagoon by the hotel we look for Long-tailed Duck which are calling, courting, and quite common. There are few roads in Barrow (and none connect to the "outer world") but enough to give us access to plenty of open terrain. Driving along them we can expect to still find snow surrounding the myriad pools and gravel ponds close to the road that shorebirds use. Snow Bunting are common even in town and the calls of Lapland Longspur, bright in breeding plumage, call us out to explore the tundra. Larger ponds may still have ice, but those of any size have a resident Red-throated or Pacific Loon ready to set up housekeeping. Three species of jaeger—Pomarine, Long-tailed, and Parasitic—patrol overhead as we pursue high Arctic birding prizes such as the trio of eiders: Steller's, King, and Spectacled—WOW. Tundra Swan and Greater White-fronted Goose occur among numerous Northern Pintail, and we find ample numbers of noisy Arctic Tern and Glaucous Gull. Listen for the display flight sounds of Semipalmated Sandpiper whirring overhead or the loud calls of Pectoral Sandpiper. This species is really common and displays with inflated chest sacs, giving off resounding "hoots."



Learn new identification skills with your guides who help you sort out Common and Hoary Redpoll. Perhaps the top shorebird for many is Red Phalarope, which, along with Red-necked Phalarope, are common. Seabirds we scan may be quite distant due to ice (we scan the open leads) but could include Thick-billed Murre and Black Guillemot. We may find beautiful Sabine's Gull feeding in the leads or open tundra ponds. Each visit brings its special rarities. It's just great to get out in the Arctic and explore.

We also want to experience Inupiat hospitality and to better understand past and current residents' way of life in this tough, remote, yet starkly beautiful part of the world. About 4500 residents live here. The Inupiat Heritage Center houses artifacts and exhibits that give background on past and present lifestyles—this region has been settled for over four thousand years. Bowhead Whale are much a part of the culture here, and the residents still conduct subsistence whale hunts twice a year. This is out of the comfort zone for many visitors but travel stretches your experience and being; it's a part of being up here. One of the top attractions is a Whale Bone Arch photo site that frames the Arctic Ocean. Some evenings there may be dances or performances.

Bundle up! We take a local tour, if available and snow conditions allow us to drive and walk a way out to Nuvuk (Point Barrow), a peninsula stretching nine miles out into the Arctic Ocean (Chukchi Sea) forming the northernmost place in the USA. This is our best chance to see Polar Bear, which hang out here feeding on meat left on Bowhead Whale carcasses. Natives have a quota they can hunt each year and butchering is done out here on the point. Ringed Seal and possible Bearded Seal may be hauled out as well, though shy as they are hunted by locals.

Dining here is a mix of ethnic Korean, Japanese, Mexican, and Chinese, not unlike Nome, but our hotel restaurant, the Niggivikput, has some local dishes such as reindeer soup and sausage. Good hot food after our often blustery days always tastes so good!

Accommodations at The Top of the World Hotel, Utqiagvik (Barrow) (B,L,D)

Mon., June 20 Return to Anchorage | Potter Marsh | Local Birding

We take the morning flight back to Anchorage, arriving mid-day.

In the afternoon, we return to Potter Marsh and enjoy some other birding hotspots, again networking with local friends and colleagues to choose our locations. Dinner tonight is a celebration! We go over our final bird list and reminisce about a fantastic trip.

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 21 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)

Guide Peg Abbott



Peg Abbott is the owner and lead guide of Naturalist Journeys, LLC. She has been designing, guiding, and organizing natural history tours for more than 25 years, working for the National Audubon Society and other organizations before launching Naturalist Journeys, LLC in 1998. Her work has taken her from Alaska to Africa and Argentina, as well as many other locations around the world. She has conducted research on several bird and mammal species and keeps a close interest in Yellowstone and Mexican wolf reintroduction projects. Her interests include all aspects of natural history and geology. After 20 years in and around the Yellowstone area, Peg relocated in 2003 to the birding mecca of Portal, AZ.

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 10. 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 21.

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, the all-day boat tour in Kenai Fjords National Park, return one-way flight from Nome to Anchorage, flight from Anchorage to Barrow, professional guide services, pre-departure materials and miscellaneous program expenses.

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 Photo, Bud Ferguson; 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; Snowy Owl, James Bekkers, courtesy UnSplash; Barrow Sign, Bob Johnston, courtesy Wikimedia Commons; American Golden Plover, Peter Wilton, courtesy Wikimedia Commons; Moose Cow, PA; Bald Eagle, PA; Grizzly GS; Willow Ptarmigan, PA.

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