

Southeast Alaska Cruise | Species List

July 7 – 15, 2023 | with Naturalist Journeys



Compiled by Peg Abbott

With participants Peg, Cathie, Amy, Alberto, Shannon, Mona, Gary, Deanna and Wilfried

This year was a bit of a jumble, as we got word about a week out that our ship would not make its delivery date a week ahead of our arrival in Juneau, due to a needed repair and the pandemic effects on supply chain; they tried valiantly but she did not arrive in Juneau until just about the time we returned. Thankfully, for most of the group we could find other cabins on our dates but we had to split up into two groups and go on two larger vessels. A few elected to wait until next year to stay with the small ship. But others had various plans built around our cruise and were elated that Peg could find these precious cabins. Three of us tripled up in a large cabin with windows on the top deck, pretty nice digs we decided after all! And as ever, the food was over the top with so much fresh local food available – a big treat of the voyage on both ships.

Once past this stress, it was clear sailing with once again beautiful weather, indeed way to sunny to match most impressions of Southeast Alaska. We could kayak and hike and explore to our heart's content. We had stunning encounters with Humpback Whales including several breaching. We witnessed the bubble net feeding they do, and heard a "croaker" making quite a racket in Icy Bay. In one narrow passage it seemed we could about reach out and touch their immense, silken sides. Puffins of two species topped most of the list for highlights, along with Kittlitz' Murrelet, a fairly local species we encounter in Glacier Bay annually. The top behavioral drama was a fight between a Peregrine and a Bald Eagle close to seabird cliffs they both wished to hunt by.

Peg was able to meet up with most of the group in Sitka before we split up and we enjoyed an optional add on day cruise to Saint Lazaria National Wildlife Refuge together to kick start our birding. This is not a high species number trip, but the species we see are icons of the north, and they appear in some of the most beautiful landscapes imaginable. Another amazing year in cool and green Southeast Alaska surrounded by beauty and whales once again soothed our souls!

Abundance code is for summer months, Southeast Alaska

C = Common, U = Uncommon, R= Rare

From: Guide to the Birds of AK, Robert Armstrong, 1983 OCC = occasional, ACC = accidental

(#) after species = Number of days out of 8 total seen

(#) after family = # species in family seen

BIRDS: 69 species in 30 families

DUCKS, GEESE, AND SWANS: ANATIDAE — (7)

Mallard (C) *Anas platyrhynchos* — (1) Seen in the freshwater lake in town while in Sitka

Greater Scaup (U) *Aythya marila* — (1) Seen by a few of our group while in Sitka

Harlequin Duck (C) *Histrionicus histrionicus* — (3) Seen in highest number (about 40) coming into the harbor at Petersburg where they were lounging on an island that held a buoy light. We saw them in many rocky coastal areas, 2-12 at a time, bright males were the most common seen.

Surf Scoter (C) *Melanitta perspicillata* — (4) We saw a few individuals at the start, then in Frederick Sound, Stephens Passage and vicinity we started seeing massive rafts, several hundred at a time, with mixed scoter species. Cathie estimated the largest raft to be 1000 individuals.

White-winged Scoter (C) *Melanitta fusca* — (3) Seen in good number, in Icy Strait and Glacier Bay, then Frederick Sound and Stephen Passage. Often whales were in the areas we found them, and often they were mixed with Surf Scoters but easy to pick out in flight.

Black Scoter (U) *Melanitta americana* — (1) Probably more were present in the big flocks, but Cathie got a positive ID on one sitting on the water by the ship.

Common Merganser (C) *Mergus merganser* — (1) Seen on one day by the hiking group, coming back for their boat pick up in a quiet bay.

PIGEONS AND DOVES: COLUMBIDAE — (2)

Rock Pigeon (R) *Columba livia* — (2) Flocks seen in the harbor areas in Sitka and Juneau.

Eurasian Collared-Dove (U) *Streptopelia decaocto* — (1) Seen and heard calling in Sitka before we boarded the ship.

SWIFTS: APODIDAE — (1)

Vaux's Swift (U) *Chaetura vauxi* — (1) A few individuals were flying low to the canopy, vocal, as we looped around the trail at the Visitor Center at Glacier Bay National Park.

HUMMINGBIRDS: TROCHILIDAE — (1)

Rufous Hummingbird (C) *Selasphorus rufus* — (3) Seen in Sitka, and then they showed up a couple of times to circle the ship, in sight of shore typically, perhaps attracted by colors of lights and gear.

OYSTERCATCHERS: HAEMATOPODIDAE — (1)

Black Oystercatcher (C) *Haematopus bachmani* — (4) Seen off rocky islands including Saint Lazaria Island, various islands of the west coast, and the Inian Islands. Often vocal and chasing each other.

SANDPIPERS AND ALLIES: SCOLOPACIDAE — (3)

Black Turnstone (R) *Arenaria melanocephala* — (1) Cathie spied a small group blending in well with seaweeds on the rocky shore of Saint Lazaria as we circled it at a slow pace.

Red-necked Phalarope (U) *Phalaropus lobatus* — (2) First seen in Icy Strait before we rounded Gustavus Point, then more were seen as we left Bartlett Cove and headed up Glacier Bay. We found them again in rich currents associated with the Inian Islands.

Greater Yellowlegs (C) *Tringa melanoleuca* — (1) Reported by our hikers that saw one on nesting territory, atop a tree.

SKUAS AND JAEGER: STERCORARIIDAE — (1)

Parasitic Jaeger (U) *Stercorarius parasiticus* — (1) Good looks and a chance for photographs of two hunting low on the water where Marbled Murrelet chicks were plentiful in Icy Strait, close to Gustavus Point.

ALCIDS (AUKS, MURRES AND PUFFINS): ALCIDAE — (8)

Common Murre (C) *Uria aalge* — (5) We saw scattered individuals feeding in various parts of the ocean, but where nesting was possible on cliffs (Saint Lazaria, several areas in Glacier Bay, Inian Islands) they were present in high numbers.

Pigeon Guillemot (C) *Cephus columba* — (6) Quite common, especially numerous on the outer coast, but also near

cliff nesting areas of Glacier Bay. Feeding in the harbors in Petersburg and Juneau.

Marbled Murrelet (C) *Brachyramphus marmoratus* — (8) We saw really extraordinary numbers this year, very evenly spread all along the coast, then literally hundreds of parents with fledged chicks were in a large raft outside of Bartlett Cove in Glacier Bay. Many were in groups of four, adults with fledged young getting used to their world.

Kittlitz's Murrelet (U) *Brachyramphus brevirostris* — (1) Always a prize on this trip, we looked for them in freshwater areas coming in to glacier zones, finding several for some very good looks. All were in Glacier Bay, we watched for them keenly once past Marble Island.

Ancient Murrelet (U) *Synthliboramphus antiquus* — (1) Seen by morning and afternoon groups that went out to Saint Lazaria Island, a breeding plumage adult allowed pretty close viewing – nice!

Rhinoceros Auklet (U) *Cerorhinca monocerata* — (2) Seen near Saint Lazaria, the morning boat got particularly good views. We picked up a few small groups later in Glacier Bay.

Horned Puffin (R) *Fratercula corniculata* — (2) Our best views were at Marble Island, Glacier Bay of 6-10 individuals. We had a few on the outer coast, seen by a few of the zodiacs.

Tufted Puffin (U) *Fratercula cirrhata* — (4) Many seen at Saint Lazaria and then again near the Marble Islands and Gloomy Knob in Glacier Bay. Wonderful views on the water and in flight.

GULLS AND TERNS: LARIDAE — (6)

Black-legged Kittiwake (U) *Rissa tridactyla* — (3) These vocal and acrobatic small gulls were a big part of our time in Icy Straits and out to the Gulf of Alaska near the Inian Islands. They seemed to hang in the presence of whales in areas of rich ocean upwelling and currents. We saw them in groups resting on logs or coastal rocks and feeding, dipping excitedly into the sea.

Bonaparte's Gull (C) *Chroicocephalus philadelphia* — (1) This small and handsome gull seems more at home in quiet inlets and we found them this year in Petersburg, once into the harbor area they were pretty common.

Short-billed (Mew) Gull (C) *Larus canus* — (4) This species is quite common near Sitka, but we did not find them in any kind of number after leaving Peril Strait. Yes, they could be present, but were far fewer than the ubiquitous Glaucous-winged Gulls. We picked them up again by Frederick's Sound and Petersburg.

Herring Gull (C) *Larus argentatus* — (3) Seen in small numbers near harbors in Sitka, Petersburg and Juneau.

Glaucous-winged Gull (U) *Larus glaucescens* — (8) By far the most common and widespread gull, nesting on Saint Lazaria and the Inian Islands, Marble Island in Glacier Bay. They were seen daily at times in numbers reaching a couple of hundred individuals.

Arctic Tern (C) *Sterna paradisaea* — (1) Our cruise photographer saw one individual as we entered Bartlett Cove but we failed to find it again, despite scanning. They were then found around the icy bits at the head of Tracy Arm.

LOONS: GAVIIDAE — (3)

Red-throated Loon (C) *Gavia stellata* — (1) Seen in flight, passing the front of the ship, in Glacier Bay.

Pacific Loon (U) *Gavia pacifica* — (1) Six seen in flight in beautiful breeding sheen, at a distance over ice near one of the glaciers in Glacier Bay.

Common Loon (U) *Gavia immer* — (1) One spotted with the scope, during one of our first whale spottings on the 9th, while transiting out of Peril Straits into more open water.

SHEARWATERS AND PETRELS: PROCELLARIIDAE — (1)

Sooty Shearwater (C) *Ardenna grisea* — (1) We found one individual at sea on the 12th, skimming the waters in classic shearwater style and then landing on the water for excellent views.

CORMORANTS: PHALACROCORACIDAE — (2)

Double-crested Cormorant (C) *Phalacrocorax auritus* — (1) We saw several adults fly from their roost/nest area on Glacier Bay's Marble Islands.

Pelagic Cormorant (U) *Phalacrocorax pelagicus* — (3) Seen on the outer coast areas of Saint Lazaria NWR outside of

Sitka, and also on the days in Icy Strait and the Inian Islands. Their iridescent colors were stunning, seen perched by the 100 on islands and outer coast rocks.

BITTERNS, HERONS, AND ALLIES: ARDEIDAE — (1)

Great Blue Heron (U) *Ardea herodias* — (3) We watched two in the quiet bay by the meet-up spot where we gathered to meet each other at the start of the cruise. We saw them on a few other days, often in quiet waters at the back of coves, and one memorably, on the ice sculptures near Le Conte Glacier.

HAWKS, KITES, AND EAGLES: ACCIPITRIDAE — (3)

Sharp-shinned Hawk (U) *Accipiter striatus* — (1) Cathie observed one walking around Sitka which has many conifer trees, often aligned with more open areas, perfect hunting areas.

Bald Eagle (C) *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* — (8) Common and widespread, we often heard them first, chirping. We watched two as we waited to board the ship in Sitka, harassing a Steller's Sea Lion with fish. We watched one get attacked and flip over on its back, mid-air, to fend off an aggressive Peregrine. We saw them in various stages of nesting, including large juveniles almost ready to fledge. An iconic and common bird for Southeast Alaska!

Red-tailed Hawk (U) *Buteo jamaicensis* — (2) One was seen in our days in Sitka, then hikers walking up through the woods of Salt Chuck Bay spied another.

KINGFISHERS: ALCEDINIDAE — (1)

Belted Kingfisher (C) *Megaceryle alcyon* — (2) One was seen at Glacier Bay by the docks, giving off its loud rattling call as it repositioned. Another was seen along a coastal walkway in Juneau.

WOODPECKERS AND ALLIES: PICIDAE — (1)

Hairy Woodpecker (U) *Picoides villosus* — (1) Recorded in Sitka ahead of our embarkation.

FALCONS AND CARACARAS: FALCONIDAE — (1)

Peregrine Falcon (U) *Falco peregrinus* — (1) We had highly memorable views of a very swift and focused Peregrine escorting a Bald Eagle out of the area it was hunting near Gloomy Knob. The message was clear and the eagle gave way. This individual did not match the typical Peale's race thought to be in the area, but was more aligned with the widespread *anatum* race, leading to extensive discussion. Turns out this has been well documented in a 2015 paper by Stephen B. Lewis, but nice to find our own documentation!

TYRANT FLYCATCHERS: TYRANNIDAE — (1)

Western (Pacific-slope) Flycatcher (C) *Empidonax difficilis* — (3) Seen and heard on our days in Sitka including the walk at the National Historic Park, and then later on a hike at Salt Chuck Bay.

JAYS AND CROWS: CORVIDAE — (3)

Steller's Jay (C) *Cyanocitta stelleri* — (2) Seen in Sitka, and then Amy got good looks on a walk she did with native guides while we stopped in Petersburg.

American (Northwestern) Crow (C) *Corvus caurinus* — (6) Common, seen almost daily, multiple times a day and particularly active feeding along the tidal zone and shorelines, often 10-30 in groups seen at one time.

Common Raven (C) *Corvus corax* — (7) Common, though seen mainly in pairs or pairs with young recently fledged. They are highly vocal and personable in Juneau, almost shouting a welcome to us as the boat positioned at the dock. In Sitka and on some of the shore hikes we encountered family groups with vocal young.

CHICKADEES AND TITMICE: PARIDAE — (1)

Chestnut-backed Chickadee (C) *Poecile rufescens* — (1) Excellent views of a family feeding in deciduous shrubs and trees at close range, near the National Historic Park in Sitka.

SWALLOWS: HIRUNDINIDAE — (3)

Tree Swallow (C) *Tachycineta bicolor* — (3) The most common of swallows encountered, still seen only in small number in coastal areas.

Violet-green Swallow (U) *Tachycineta thalassina* — (2) Seen in Sitka, and then at Glacier Bay near Bartlett Cove.

Barn Swallow (C) *Hirundo rustica* — (1) A few individuals at Glacier Bay, Bartlett Cove.

KINGLETS: REGULIDAE — (1)

Golden-crowned Kinglet (U) *Regulus satrapa* — (2) Seen in the conifer trees of Sitka and then a small flock was observed as we finished up our loop hike, at Glacier Bay.

NUTHATCHES: SITTIDAE — (1)

Red-breasted Nuthatch (U) *Sitta Canadensis* — (1) Seen and heard in the numerous conifer trees of Sitka, ahead of the cruise

WRENS: TROGLODYTIDAE — (1)

Pacific Wren (C) *Troglodytes pacificus* — (2) Seen and heard at the National Historic Park in Sitka and then again while on our hike at Glacier Bay.

STARLINGS: STURNIDAE — (1)

European Starling (U) *Sturnus vulgaris* — (2) Seen around the towns of Sitka and Juneau.

THRUSHES: TURDIDAE — (4)

Swainson's Thrush (C) *Catharus ustulatus* — (1) Singing as we walked around the National Historic Park, Sitka, also singing in large conifer trees by the airport as we waited for our taxis.

Hermit Thrush (C) *Catharus guttatus* — (4) The most common of the thrushes, we enjoyed watching an adult feeding a fledged youngster at close range on the trail at Bartlett Cove.

American Robin (C) *Turdus migratorius* — (3) Seen and heard from Salt Chuck Bay and various moorings as we explored Icy Bay and the Inian Islands.

Varied Thrush (C) *Ixoreus naevius* — (3) Most often heard, in lush tall forests.

WAXWINGS: BOMBYCILLIDAE — (1)

Cedar Waxwing *Bombycilla cedrorum* — (1) Seen by a few members of our group ahead of the cruise in Sitka.

FINCHES AND ALLIES: FRINGILLIDAE — (2)

White-winged Crossbill (C) *Loxia leucoptera* — (1) It was great to hear this species, and catch some glimpses of them high in conifers loaded with cones, on the loop walk at Bartlett Cove, Glacier Bay.

Pine Siskin (C) *Spinus pinus* — (1) Observed in the same vicinity at as the White-winged Crossbills.

NEW WORLD SPARROWS: PASSERELLIDAE — (3)

Fox Sparrow (C) *Passerella iliaca* — (1) Loud and gaudy, hard to miss this songster on walks around Sitka.

Dark-eyed Junco (C) *Junco hyemalis* — (4) Seen on our walks in Sitka, Juneau and Petersburg.

Song Sparrow (C) *Melospiza melodia* — (3) Seen in Sitka, heard on shore from one spot as we were watching Sitka Deer, and then seen in the city lots of Petersburg, quite vocal.

NEW WORLD WARBLERS PARULIDAE — (4)

Orange-crowned Warbler (C) *Oreothlypis celata* — (4) Perhaps the most common warbler encountered, our best

views were in Sitka in deciduous shrubs atop the viewpoint with historic exhibits.

Common Yellowthroat (U) *Geothlypis trichas* — (1) Sitka, in thick shrubbery near a small stream.

Townsend's Warbler (C) *Setophaga townsendi* — (2) Seen at the National Historic Park in Sitka, and later at Glacier Bay as we walked a loop trail from the Visitor Center.

Wilson's Warbler *Cardellina pusilla* — (1) One spied in the early days in Sitka by a few of the group.

MAMMALS: 13 species

Black Bear *Ursus americanus* — (1) Seen by two of our group that took the tram up top in Juneau to hike among more open tundra and willow habitat.

Brown Bear *Ursus arctos* — (2) Excellent looks at several bears in Glacier Bay NP at multiple stops, and along the shore on one other day. We saw a bit mama bear with 3 cubs before Sergius Narrows and another bear on an island in Unsk Bay, on the same day.

Harbor Seal *Phoca vitulina* — (2) Seen in brash ice and bergie bits of Glacier Bay NP and later at Tracey Arm.

Steller's Sea Lion *Eumetopias jubatus* — (3) Glacier Bay NP, the Inian Islands, and Saint Lazaria Island

North American River Otter *Lontra Canadensis* — (1) One of our boats, the first one out on the day we cruised around brilliant blue floating ice sculptures at LeConte Glacier. Not a typical sighting – wow!

Sea Otter *Enhydra lutris* — (4) Repeated and wonderful views of this active sea mammal so at home in its environment. We saw many females with pups on their bellies, and at times big groups resting in sea kelp.

Sitka Deer *Odocoileus hemionus* — (2) Seen early on in our voyage where grassy meadows were framing the shoreline. Often in small groups, excellent views.

Minke Whale *Balaenoptera acutorostrata* — (1) A nice surprise sighting at the end of our afternoon trip out to Saint Lazaria Island, in waters off of Sitka

Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae* — (5) For many days of the cruise we were never long without seeing a spout, a tail fluke, and many blows. We found whales often in groups, and were thrilled on a couple of occasions to witness bubble feeding. On two days we had breaching whales, the ultimate thrill. Near the Inian Islands they were so plentiful where currents come in at the end of the inside passage and opening to the open ocean. They passed our small boats at close range, looking SO colossal! For any lover of whales, the summer in Alaska's inside passage is just divine.

Killer Whale *Orcinus orca* — (1) Views of one group, male and females, moving quickly in several sub-groups around us.

Harbor Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena* — (1) Seen by Cathie at Tracy Arm

Dall's Porpoise *Phocoenoides dalli* — (1) A grand finale at near the last day, swimming spectacularly alongside the ship, the last evening.

Red Squirrel *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus* — (3) Common around Sitka, and on seen on our forest walks.

Other species of note:

Seaweed Isopods, Lion's Mane Jellyfish, barnacles, mussels, snails, chitons, abundant tidepool life forms, sculpin fish