

Tropical Birding Tours

*Alaska: Photo Tour with
Custom Pre-Extension to Homer for Bald Eagles*



Tour Guide: Ben Knoot

*All photos in this report were captured by the guide Ben Knoot unless otherwise stated.



Tour Itinerary

June 4th.....	Anchorage
June 5th.....	Anchorage to Homer
June 6th.....	Homer
June 7th.....	Homer to Anchorage
June 8th.....	Anchorage to Nome
June 9th.....	Nome
June 10th.....	Nome
June 11th.....	Nome
June 12th.....	Nome
June 13th.....	Nome to Anchorage
June 14th.....	Anchorage to Barrow
June 15th.....	Barrow
June 16th.....	Barrow
June 17th.....	Barrow
June 18th.....	Barrow
June 19th.....	Barrow to Anchorage
June 20th.....	Guests Departure

Tour Introduction

Alaska, the “Last Frontier”. This tour focuses primarily on photographing breeding tundra birds and mammals. To accomplish a wide breadth of species, this tour covered **FOUR** major areas. Over the course of two-and-a-half weeks we visit Boreal Conifer Forests, Lake Parks, two types of Tundra (Rocky and Boggy) and the coastal town of Homer.

This was a special tour as two of the guests requested a custom pre-tour extension to Homer with the goal of photographing Bald Eagles. We took an afternoon, a full day and a quick morning to see what sort of images we could capture. For the most part, we had decent weather. A bit of rain and clouds here and there but honestly, we didn’t complain to much as all in all we had a pretty successful time down south of Anchorage.

The first section of the main tour is Anchorage. It contains mostly Boreal Conifer Forests, Lakes, Ponds, and Marshlands that we visit for some great birds like; American Three-toed Woodpecker, Orange-crowned Warbler, Greater Scaup, Red-necked Grebe, Spruce Grouse, and Varied Thrush...just to name a few!

Our first stop from Anchorage was Nome. Nome sits right on the coast and has just four main roads to drive. Comprised mostly of rocky tundra, there is also some areas of scree, cryptic tundra, and of course, tundra ponds close to the coastal shoreline. Nome hosts a variety of terrific shorebirds in its tundra like; Pacific Golden Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit and Western Sandpiper. In the more shrubby areas we can find; Bluethroat, Arctic Warbler and two kinds of redpoll. The pools offer a few waterfowl but nothing that can’t generally be found and photographed better in Barrow. And of course, two types of ptarmigan are the icing on this wonderful cake!

After a brief stop in Anchorage, we travel to Barrow, now renamed “Utqiagvik” for Boggy Tundra. There really isn’t much else here habitat wise so this is primarily for water loving tundra breeders like all three eiders, Pacific and Red-throated Loon, and this is our best area for breeding Snowy Owl. There are a few shorebird specialties like Pectoral Sandpiper and Dunlin. Other predators like Pomarine and Parasitic Jaeger patrol the skies and terrorize tundra breeders like Greater White-fronted goose and Arctic Terns. Barrow is a pretty unique place and I loved our time here. After we were done with Barrow, we traveled back to Anchorage for one last lovely dinner and then said our goodbyes.

Area #1 (Custom Pre Tour Extension) - Homer

Homer was a custom request from two of the guests this year. We spent the entire time aiming to photograph Bald Eagles but also tried to take advantage of any other species we found. Not only did we pick up **Bald Eagle** but we also grabbed; **Black-legged Kittiwake**, **Harlequin Duck**, **Glaucous-winged Gull** and a beautiful **Moose**! The weather overall was “meh” but we still managed some fun stuff when we had a burst of sunshine or at least a high enough overcast day to not make the images look completely washed out. Once we concluded our time here with all of the amazingly fun restaurants and our fantastic hosts of our BnB we hit the road back to Anchorage to meet up with our other two friends to start the main tour.



Bald Eagle - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Bald Eagle (both) - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot





Bald Eagle (both) - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot





Bald Eagle - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot

Area #2 (Main Tour) - Lake Parks and Trails around Anchorage

We have more than a full day around Anchorage in between coming back from Nome and leaving for Barrow as well as a few hours just before the tour begins. We typically visit a few parks, maybe a lake or two and during our time at these locations, we were able to find: **Spruce Grouse, Red-necked Grebe, American Three-toed Woodpecker, Red-throated Loon, Greater Scaup, Orange-crowned Warbler, White-crowned Sparrow and Lesser Yellowlegs**. Our time in Anchorage is more like filler time for this tour but it does often have some great targets for us, especially the grouse, grebes and woodpecker. Other things we likely encounter are chickadees, kinglets and other small birds but overall this area is more for passing time while we move in between our two main locations, Nome and Barrow (Utqiagvik).



Spruce Grouse- Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Red-throated Loon - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



American Three-toed Woodpecker - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Lesser Yellowlegs - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Red-necked Grebe - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Red-throated Loon - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Orange-crowned Warbler - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot

Area #3 (Main Tour) - Nome

Nome is essentially three, maybe four main roads that are excellent for a variety of photographic opportunities. Rocky and grass tussock style tundra and riverside shrubbery is mixed with rocky hillsides which is great for us as it provides us with plenty of birds to photograph. The shrubby stuff holds birds like; **Hoary and Commonly Redpoll, Bluethroat, Blackpoll, Wilson's and Arctic Warbler, Fox Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Northern Waterthrush, Northern Shrike and Rusty Blackbird**. These birds are some of our smallest targets on the entire tour and some of our only passerines believe it or not. The 'typical tundra' that we go through in Nome gives us some great opportunities to photograph a variety of breeding shorebirds. Some of these birds can be found in Barrow as well but most are more easily photographed here. Birds like; **American and Pacific Golden Plover, Semi-palmated Plover, Whimbrel, Western Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit, Wilson's Snipe, Willow Ptarmigan, Lapland Longspur, Long-tailed and Parasitic Jaeger**. A few other randomly photographed species were **Rock Ptarmigan**. And of course, can't forget about the lumbering **Musk Ox!** Passerines like **Northern Wheatear and Eastern Yellow Wagtail** are always really nice additions to our tour but are usually much more difficult where as the common **Gray-cheeked Thrush** is a near daily participant in the morning, and late afternoon chorus. This year we also had a pretty wonderful photoshoot with a **Green-winged Teal**.



American Golden Plover - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Blackpoll Warbler - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Northern Waterthrush - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



American Golden Plover - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Common Redpoll - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Eastern Yellow Wagtail - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Northern Wheatear - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Rusty Blackbird - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Northern Shrike - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Common Redpoll - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Common Redpoll - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Long-tailed Duck - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Rock Ptarmigan - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Bluethroat - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Green-winged Teal - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Pacific Golden Plover - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Bluethroat - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Golden-crowned Sparrow - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Long-tailed Jaeger - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Hoary Redpoll - Photo by guide: Ben Knot



Wilson's Snipe - Photo by guide: Ben Knot



Semi-palmated Plover - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Pacific Golden Plover - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot

Area #4 (Main Tour) - Barrow 'Utqiagvik'

Barrow is nick-named 'the top of the world' and even though that isn't quite accurate, it certainly feels like it when you arrive. The now named **Utqiagvik** sits at the end of the road in terms of the northern for the United States. It is cold, mostly cloudy and spits rain just about every other day and sits on a layer of permafrost. Almost entirely Boggy Tundra with thousands upon thousands, maybe even millions of tundra pools and coastal floating ice which just happens to be the perfect place for breeding ducks, shorebirds and a few other random predators like jaegers and the iconic Snowy Owl...it also happy to be a photographers paradise. Over the course of our time here we managed; **Spectacled, Steller's and King Eider, Pacific and Red-throated Loon, Lapland Longspur, Snowy Owl, Dunlin, Pectoral, Baird's, Western and Semi-palmated Sandpiper**, our third and final jaeger, the **Pomarine Jaeger, Tundra Swan, Long-tailed Duck, Black Guillemot, Snow Bunting, Red and Red-necked Phalarope, Greater White-fronted Goose**. We also had several more 'rare' encounters with a **Temminck's** and **Red-necked Stint**. We also tried our luck with a Polar Bear tour. We weren't able to see any bears but we did enjoy a nice drive up to Point Barrow (officially the end of the road) and managed a quick view though no photos of **Sabine's Gull**. Overall, we had an excellent time in Barrow, but were all ready to head back to anchorage and catch our flights home the next day.



Snowy Owl - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Pacific Loon (both) - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot





King Eider (both) - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot





Spectacled Eider (both) - Photo by guide: Ben





Red-necked Phalarope - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Red Phalarope - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Pectoral Sandpiper (display flight) - Photo by guide:





Spectacled Eider (both) - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot





Red-throated Loon - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Tundra Swan - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot

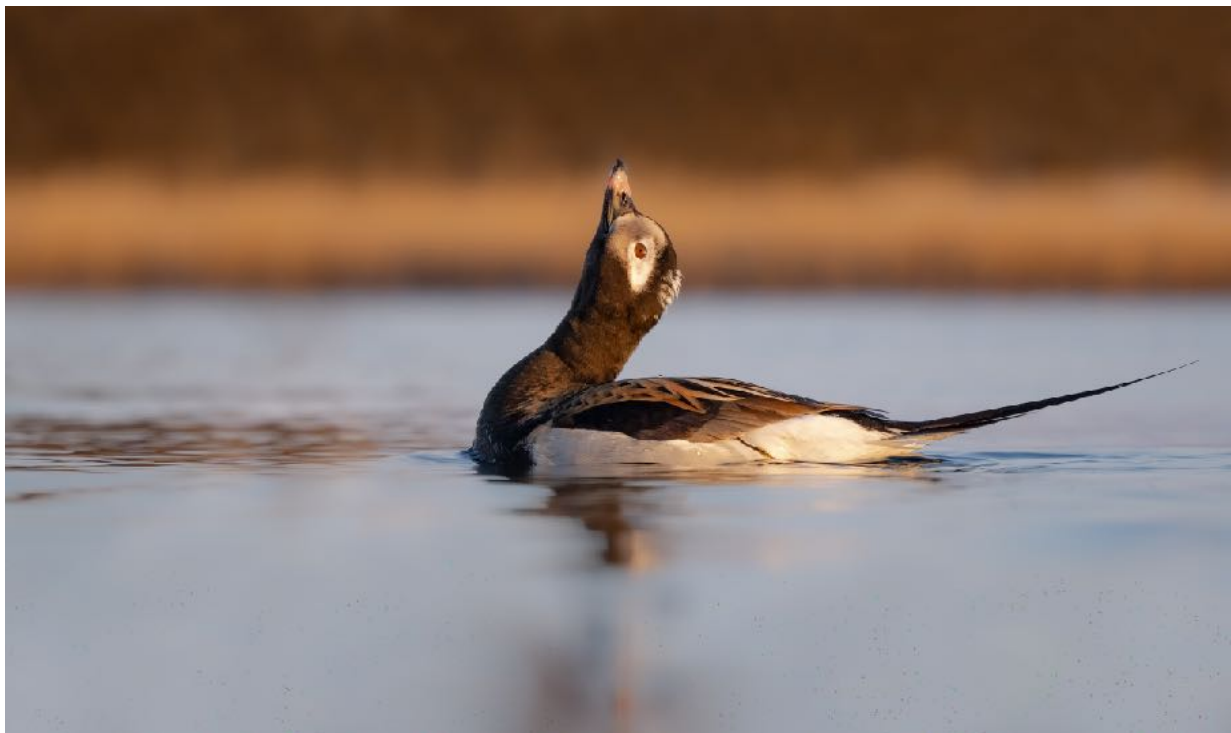


Lapland Longspur (both) - Photo by guide: Ben Knot





Steller's Eider - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Long-tailed Duck - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Red-necked Stint - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Temminck's Stint - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Pomarine Jaeger - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Western Sandpiper - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Dunlin - Photo by guide: Ben Kroot



Semi-palmated Sandpiper - Photo by guide: Ben Kroot

Guests Top 5 Favorites

