



Drumlin Farm Wildlife Sanctuary

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Alaska: Denali, Nome & the Kenai Peninsula

May 28 – June 8, 2020



Strickland Wheelock

Kathy Seymour

Protecting the Nature of Massachusetts

On our tour of Alaska's premier birding destinations you will see birds and mammals found nowhere else in the United States, visit spectacular glaciers, fjords, mountains, and tundra, and take in the lifestyle of hardy native cultures. We will sample the best of it: Anchorage's ponds and marshes; boreal forest, spruce bogs, and open tundra in Denali National Park and the Alaska Range; the Kenai Peninsula's fjords and spruce-hemlock forest; and Nome's high arctic tundra. We will witness hundreds of thousands of birds migrating northward and settling into their breeding grounds. Shorebirds will be proudly displaying their summer plumage, waterfowl will be showing off their brilliant colors, pelagic species will be decked out in their finest formal wear, and passerines will be singing heartily. Not to be ignored are mammals most of us have only seen in books and movies – Orca, Brown (Grizzly) Bear, Musk Ox, Reindeer, Dall Sheep, Northern Fur Seal, Sea Otter and more. The backdrop for these unbelievable birds and mammals is an alien and utterly breathtaking landscape. In other words, this promises to be a trip of a lifetime!

Thursday, May 28

Our tour begins in Anchorage. After gathering at our hotel in the afternoon, we will bird nearby Westchester Lagoon for shorebirds, ducks, grebes, loons, and gulls for a great introduction to many local nesting species in spiffy breeding plumage. Possibilities include Black-billed Magpie, Violet-green Swallow, Hudsonian Godwit, Barrow's Goldeneye, and Mew Gull.

Lodging - Anchorage

Friday, May 29

Today we head for the vast wilderness north of Anchorage. In just thirty minutes, we will leave the city behind for Chugach State Park's half million acres of pristine forest. The Eagle River Nature Center provides trails through mixed conifer and deciduous forest to a viewing platform on shrub-lined Eagle River. This is a wonderful vantage point to enjoy a parade of birds and wildlife including Wilson's Snipe, Western Wood-Pewee, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Canada Jay, Varied Thrush, Lincoln's Sparrow, Orange-crowned Warbler, Moose, and American Beaver.

We will continue north on the George Parks Highway, birding along the way. Much of the drive passes through unspoiled wilderness, and campgrounds, rest areas, and side roads provide access to vast tracts of black spruce forest that are home to Spruce Grouse, Northern Goshawk, Merlin, Canada Jay, Bohemian Waxwing, Boreal Chickadee, Varied Thrush, Blackpoll Warbler, and White-winged Crossbill. Bogs and riparian thickets shelter Olive-sided Flycatcher, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Common Redpoll, and Arctic Warbler. As we get closer to Denali National Park, advantageously placed rest stops offer spectacular views of the iconic mountain and the Alaska Range on clear days.

After checking in, we'll visit the National Park Visitor Center which has engaging natural history exhibits and trails through boreal forest where we'll look for nesting songbirds like Canada Jay, Boreal Chickadee, Varied Thrush, Common Redpoll, and White-winged Crossbill.

Lodging – McKinley Creekside Lodge

Saturday, May 30

We will depart early for Denali National Park, the third largest park in the United States. The park is close to 6 million acres, nearly the size of Massachusetts. Since private vehicles are not permitted on most of the park road, we will join a bus tour with a focus on spotting wildlife, while providing narrative on the park's natural history. We will travel through broad river valleys and over multiple high mountain passes, with diverse habitats – wet meadows, alpine tundra, spruce woodlands, riparian shrub, gravel river bars, rocky cliffs, and talus slopes. If we are lucky enough to have a clear day, we will enjoy magnificent views of Denali, North America's tallest mountain at 20,310'.

One of the most exciting elements of a trip to Denali is the opportunity to view seldom-seen iconic mammals including Brown (Grizzly) Bear, Moose, Dall Sheep, Caribou, and potentially even Gray Wolf. Plenty of smaller mammals are also possible, such as Red Fox, Collared Pika, Hoary Marmot, and Arctic Ground Squirrel. Rocky cliffs with open expanses of tundra, which are quite prevalent along the park road, are excellent for Golden Eagle, Gyrfalcon, Rock Ptarmigan, and Northern Wheatear. Other possibilities include Long-tailed Jaeger, Willow Ptarmigan, Say's Phoebe, Arctic Warbler, and, if we are lucky, Northern Hawk Owl.

Lodging – McKinley Creekside Lodge

Sunday, May 31

Today we will explore the western portion of the Denali Highway. A highway in name only, its 135-miles are primarily gravel, lightly traveled, and offer awe-inspiring views of the Alaska Range towering over wildflower-covered tundra. Birding opportunities are limitless.

Boreal forest and spruce bogs spread for miles from the western terminus of the highway. We will scour this area for Northern Hawk Owl, Bohemian Waxwing, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Rusty Blackbird, Blackpoll Warbler, Fox Sparrow, Pine Grosbeak, and White-winged Crossbill. As we head east, creek crossings provide opportunities for Harlequin Duck, Wandering Tattler, American Dipper, and Cliff Swallow. Shrubby willow and alder thickets are frequented by Alder Flycatcher, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Wilson's, Orange-crowned, and Arctic Warblers, and Lincoln's and Golden-crowned Sparrows. In areas of alpine tundra and rocky cliffs, we'll scan for Golden Eagle and Gyrfalcon, American Pipit, Northern Wheatear, Rock Ptarmigan, Collared Pika, and Hoary Marmot.

In the afternoon, we will return to Anchorage on the Parks Highway, stopping to pick up missing target species and to enjoy mountain views along the way.

Lodging – Anchorage

Monday, June 1

This morning we fly to Nome, on the southern shore of the Seward Peninsula in northwestern Alaska, just south of the Arctic Circle. It is not possible to drive to Nome, but once there, more than 300 miles of roads provide access to sea, rivers, ponds, lakes, wetlands, mudflats, coastal and alpine tundra, willow and alder thickets, and spruce forest. This combination of location, habitat diversity, and accessibility creates a birder's

paradise. A critical migratory stopover site, the Seward Peninsula attracts Asiatic vagrants along with a plethora of more common species. More exciting still is the fact that species from the other side of the Bering Strait commonly nest right alongside typical North American tundra breeders! A few breeding highlights are Bristle-thighed Curlew, Arctic Warbler, Bluethroat, Bar-tailed Godwit, Aleutian Tern, Gyrfalcon, Yellow Wagtail, and Golden-crowned Sparrow. Impressive mammals are found throughout the area; Moose, Grizzly Bear, Reindeer, and Musk Ox are seen regularly.

Nome, with 3,500 residents and multiple restaurants, hotels, and stores, is the commercial hub of the peninsula and has a bustling frontier atmosphere. About half the residents are native Inupiaq Eskimos, who maintain their cultural traditions and are known for their fine ivory carvings, music, and dance. The discovery of gold in the late 1890's drew many fortune seekers to the remote area, laying the foundation of present day Nome.

Once we have checked in at our lodging, we will head off to Safety Sound for the balance of the afternoon. The protected waters of the sound shelter masses of gulls and terns – generally Arctic Tern, Black-legged Kittiwake, Glaucous, Glaucous-winged, Herring and Mew Gulls with the occasional Aleutian Tern and Slaty-backed, Sabine's, or Black-headed Gull. Red-throated and Pacific Loons, Tundra Swan, and Sandhill Crane all occur in good numbers. Mudflats teem with a plethora of shorebirds, especially Semipalmated and Western Sandpipers. Peregrine Falcon and all three jaeger species patrol the area. Yellow Wagtail, Lapland Longspur, Parasitic and Long-tailed Jaegers, Whimbrel, Bar-tailed Godwit, and Short-eared Owl breed on the coastal tundra. The area is known for rarities, with somewhat regular visits from Emperor Goose, Steller's, Spectacled, and King Eiders, Yellow-billed and Arctic Loons, and Red-necked Stint.

Lodging – Nome

Tuesday, June 2

Today we head northwest to Teller on Port Clarence Bay. The road passes through beautiful alpine tundra, along willow-lined rivers, and past rocky canyons and ridges, giving us a great opportunity to sample the diversity of Nome birdlife. We will hike some of the high tundra areas for nesting shorebirds like Rock Sandpiper and Red Knot, as well as Snow Bunting and Northern Wheatear. Other possibilities are Pacific and American Golden-Plovers, Parasitic and Long-tailed Jaegers, Rock and Willow Ptarmigan, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Common and Hoary Redpolls, Rough-legged Hawk, and perhaps Gyrfalcon, Golden Eagle, and Yellow Wagtail. We will likely encounter herds of Reindeer, with an occasional Musk Ox, Arctic Fox or Brown Bear adding to the excitement. At the Inupiat village of Teller we may see salmon and seal meat drying on fish racks. Just past town, we will scan expansive Grantley Harbor for Pigeon Guillemot, Horned Puffin, Common Eider, and Pelagic Cormorant. On our return, we'll visit the local landfill which could be hiding a rare Slaty-backed Gull among the Glaucous, Mew, and Vega Herring Gulls.

Lodging – Nome

Wednesday, June 3

One of Nome's most famous birding adventures is a day trip along Kougarok Road – a place where sightings of some of North America's rarest breeding birds may actually be eclipsed by dramatic mammal encounters and the vast expanse of arctic landscape. Kougarok Road heads north from Nome into higher elevations of the peninsula's interior. The road traverses the Kigluaik Mountain tundra where high, rocky domes rise above river valleys, and rapidly flowing rivers rush past gravel bars and dense riparian thickets. For birders this is the only place in North America where the rare Bristle-thighed Curlew breeds near a road. The road also provides access to other breeding species with very restricted North American ranges, such as Bar-tailed Godwit and Bluethroat, a handsome Eurasian thrush with a beautiful song.

Taking advantage of the Arctic's extended daylight hours we will spend a full day along the Kougarok Road, with a scenic picnic lunch in the field. We'll head directly for the end of the road, to be in place for an early morning (optional) hike up to the Bristle-thighed Curlew's breeding grounds – a flat ridge on top of a moderately steep, spongy tundra covered hillside. Other tundra species found here and along the road are Whimbrel (an added ID challenge), Bar-tailed Godwit, Pacific and American Golden-Plovers, Rock and Willow Ptarmigan, and Northern Wheatear.

On our return, we will thoroughly explore the tundra, thickets, ponds, lakes, and rivers we bypassed on our way out. Fast moving, rocky rivers provide scenic places to search for Harlequin Duck and American Dipper, while pristine ponds and lakes are home to swallows, loons, Red-necked Grebe, Long-tailed Duck, Tundra Swan, and other waterfowl. Wandering Tattler and Ruddy Turnstone can be found on gravel edges of both ponds and rivers. Brushy willow thickets provide cover for a diverse variety of landbirds, most notably our targets Arctic Warbler and Bluethroat, along with Yellow, Wilson's, and Blackpoll Warblers, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Yellow Wagtail, Hoary and Common Redpolls, and Golden-crowned Sparrow. Golden Eagle and Gyrfalcon nest on majestic weathered granite outcroppings that tower above the surrounding tundra. Moose, Musk Ox, and Brown Bear can be found in the open expanses along the road.

Lodging – Nome

Thursday, June 4

On our last full day of birding in Nome we will travel to the small community of Council. This roadway provides access to every habitat type found on the Seward Peninsula. Our first stop will be the rocky pier at the Cape Nome quarry that juts out into Norton Sound and is a great vantage point to scan for rarities like Yellow-billed Loon, and King and Spectacled Eiders.

We will stop again at Safety Sound, with its wealth of shorebirds, loons, terns, gulls, and ducks. There is potential for a rarity like Emperor Goose, Arctic Loon, Sabine's Gull, or Aleutian Tern, as well as many others listed in the June 1 summary.

Past Safety Sound the road turns inland and climbs through tundra, following the Solomon River for a few miles. Common Raven nest in this area, and riparian willows shelter passerines, including Fox Sparrow and Gray-cheeked Thrush. Continuing

up through rocky canyons and alpine tundra, we'll reach the highest elevation of any road in the area, where we hope to encounter Golden Eagle, Rock and Willow Ptarmigan, tundra nesting shorebirds, and local passerines. As the road descends, we will enter the only boreal forest zone on the Seward Peninsula, where we will look for Pine Grosbeak, Rusty Blackbird, Northern Shrike, Canada Jay, Boreal Chickadee, and Bohemian Waxwing, as well as Musk Ox, Red Fox, and Beaver. The road ends at Council, a small community on the Niukluk River. Here we turn around for our return to Nome, enjoying the exquisite scenery as we pick up birds we may have missed.

Lodging – Nome

Friday, June 5

We will have a final morning to explore Nome and pick up any missing target species before our midday flights to Anchorage. From Anchorage, we'll bird our way south to Seward on the Kenai Peninsula.

We will visit the magnificent 2,300 acre Potter Marsh wetland just south of Anchorage. The expansive marsh, nestled against the majestic Chugach Mountains, has boardwalks and pull-offs for up-close viewing of nesting Arctic Tern, Pacific Loon, Red-necked Phalarope, Mew Gull, Sandhill Crane, Violet-green Swallow, several species of ducks and shorebirds, and a variety of other species.

Our route takes us through the Chugach Mountains with steep rock faces and turbulent rivers that eventually give way to gentle slopes of spruce forest and meadows dotted with glacial lakes and ponds which we will scan for Trumpeter Swan, ducks, loons, and grebes. Several campgrounds provide access to Fox Sparrow, Varied Thrush, finches, woodpeckers, and other breeding species. At some point we might have to bring out the blinders if we hope to reach Seward before dinner.

Near the coast we will enter the moist spruce-hemlock zone of the Pacific coastal rainforest. At the northern edge of its range, it provides habitat for birds that have a limited distribution in Alaska - Rufous Hummingbird, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, and Steller's Jay.

Lodging – Seward

Saturday, June 6

Today we have a special treat - an all-day boat trip deep into Kenai Fjords National Park. The Park occupies 760 square miles of pristine glacial landscape on the southeastern Kenai Peninsula, with dense stands of Sitka Spruce topping cliffs that rise a hundred feet or more from the bay. Numerous rocky islets provide places for thousands of seabirds and marine mammals to raise their young.

Our voyage takes us out of Resurrection Bay into the Gulf of Alaska. We will round Aialik Cape and make our way through the rocky pinnacles of the Chiswell Islands, where more than 50,000 seabirds nest each summer. Alcids are particularly well represented, with Horned and Tufted Puffins, Marbled, Kittlitz's and Ancient Murrelets, Common and Thick-billed Murres, and Parakeet and Rhinoceros Auklets. Other common

nesting species are Double-crested, Pelagic, and Red-faced Cormorants, Glaucous-winged Gulls, and Black-legged Kittiwakes. Seabirds encountered in the area include all three jaegers, Sooty and Short-tailed Shearwaters, and Northern Fulmar. Also present are Peregrine Falcon, Bald Eagle, and Black Oystercatcher. Abundant aquatic mammals complete the show, with frequent sightings of Steller Sea Lion, Harbor Seal, Dall's Porpoise, Sea Otter, Orca, and Humpback and Minke Whales. Our route takes us past three active tidewater glaciers, giving us an excellent chance of witnessing glacial calving where giant blocks of ice split from ice cliffs and crash into the sea with a thunderous roar. Unforgettable!

Both Northwestern Crow and Bald Eagle are common near the marina, giving us ample opportunity to view them before and after our trip.

Lodging – Seward

Sunday, June 7

This morning, we will explore the unique habitats of the southeastern Kenai Peninsula by land. We will search for area specialties like Spruce Grouse, Rufous Hummingbird, Pacific Wren, Steller's Jay, Chestnut-backed and Boreal Chickadees, Varied Thrush, Townsend's Warbler, White-winged Crossbill, Pine Siskin, and Fox Sparrow (subspecies *sinuosa*) in moist coastal rainforest of dense Sitka Spruce and Mountain Hemlock.

We'll bird Exit Glacier Road – the only part of Kenai Fjords National Park accessible by road. Warblers and songbirds abound in the riparian habitat, and American Dipper nests along the banks of the Resurrection River. Forested areas provide hunting grounds for Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Goshawk, Merlin, and Great Horned Owl. The road ends at the trail to Exit Glacier, a half-mile wide river of ice flowing from the Harding Icefield. A walk on the Exit Glacier trail will expose us to another aspect of the glacial geology of the region, and provide us further opportunity scan for birds and mammals.

In the afternoon we will return to Anchorage, stopping along the Turnagain Arm, scanning cliffs for Dall Sheep, checking for Beluga Whales, and possibly witnessing a bore tide rushing into the arm. After our afternoon adventures we will have a farewell dinner, finalize our checklists, and organize for our return trip home.

Lodging – Anchorage

Monday, June 8

This day concludes our amazing Alaskan journey. We will fly home with memories of a majestic foreign landscape enriched by birds, mammals, and native cultures. We will long remember the delicate tundra hiding rare breeding shorebirds, regal loons gliding on glacial lakes, eagles soaring over rocky ridges, masses of seabirds on steep cliff faces, coastal glaciers calving icebergs into the sea, and so much more!

Please note:

This is a natural history field trip – we will rise early every morning and be active all day. Participants should be able to be to walk at least 2 miles and be on your feet for 1-2 hours.

While we attempt to be true to our itinerary, all scheduled events are subject to change depending on the weather and other considerations.

Fees:

Member \$5900; Non-member \$7080

Single Room Supplement: \$1100

Deposit: \$500 due with registration

Final payment is due March 28, 2020.

Fee covers all ground transportation, lodging, entrance fees, boat trip, bus tour, and air travel within Alaska. Participants are responsible for personal supplies, snacks, and meals and travel to and from Anchorage at the beginning and end of the trip.

Cancellation Policy:

Cancellations must be made in writing or by email, and are effective upon receipt. Cancellations received up to 6 months prior to departure will be refunded in full. For cancellations less than 6 months prior to departure, the deposit is not refundable. Final payment is due 60 days prior to departure; no refunds are available for cancellations less than 60 days prior to departure. However, if we are able to fill your spot, a partial refund may be possible.

Flights:

DO NOT book your flight until we have given you the flight information for the trip leaders. Please schedule your flight to arrive no later than 30 minutes after the leaders, and for your return flight not to depart earlier than that of the trip leaders. Please provide us with your flight details.

Trip Insurance:

If you cancel for any reason, the cancellation policy will apply. If you wish to purchase trip cancellation insurance, you can search for policies at www.insuremytrip.com.

Registration Form – Alaska 2020

To register please call the registrar or fill out this form and mail it with a deposit.

Program Registration

Drumlin Farm Wildlife Sanctuary

208 South Great Road

Lincoln, MA 01773

781-259-2220

drumlinfarmeducation@massaudubon.org

For more information about the trip please contact:

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Name(s) _____ Member no. _____

Address _____

Telephone Cell _____

Daytime _____

Evening _____

E-mail address _____

Would you like to receive our monthly e-mail Birders Connection? Yes ___ No ___

I would like to join Mass Audubon: Family \$65 _____ Individual \$48 _____

Single Room Requested: Yes ___ No ___ Please note single supplement fee.

Deposit Enclosed: _____

Visa/MasterCard/Discover/American Express: _____

Exp. date ___/___

Payment by check is greatly appreciated, and enables us to use more of our funds for programming. Please make your check payable to Mass Audubon. Thank you!

Alaska 2020 Checklist Highlights

Emperor Goose	Bristle-thighed Curlew	Aleutian Tern	Tree Swallow
Snow Goose	Whimbrel	Arctic Tern	Violet-green Swallow
Gr. White-fronted Goose	Bar-tailed Godwit	Red-throated Loon	Bank Swallow
Brant	Hudsonian Godwit	Arctic Loon	Cliff Swallow
Cackling Goose	Ruddy Turnstone	Pacific Loon	Arctic Warbler
Canada Goose	Black Turnstone	Common Loon	Golden-crowned Kinglet
Trumpeter Swan	Red Knot	Yellow-billed Loon	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Tundra Swan	Surfbird	Northern Fulmar	Red-breasted Nuthatch
Blue-winged Teal	Sanderling	Sooty Shearwater	Brown Creeper
Northern Shoveler	Dunlin	Short-tailed Shearwater	Pacific Wren
Gadwall	Rock Sandpiper	Red-faced Cormorant	American Dipper
Eurasian Wigeon	Baird's Sandpiper	Pelagic Cormorant	European Starling
American Wigeon	Least Sandpiper	Double-crested Cormorant	Varied Thrush
Mallard	Pectoral Sandpiper	Osprey	Gray-cheeked Thrush
Northern Pintail	Semipalmated Sandpiper	Golden Eagle	Swainson's Thrush
Green-winged Teal	Western Sandpiper	Northern Harrier	Hermit Thrush
Canvasback	Short-billed Dowitcher	Sharp-shinned Hawk	American Robin
Redhead	Long-billed Dowitcher	Northern Goshawk	Bluethroat
Ring-necked Duck	Wilson's Snipe	Bald Eagle	Northern Wheatear
Greater Scaup	Red-necked Phalarope	Red-tailed Hawk	Bohemian Waxwing
Lesser Scaup	Red Phalarope	Rough-legged Hawk	Eastern Yellow Wagtail
Steller's Eider	Spotted Sandpiper	Great Horned Owl	White Wagtail
Spectacled Eider	Solitary Sandpiper	Snowy Owl	American Pipit
King Eider	Wandering Tattler	Northern Hawk Owl	Pine Grosbeak
Common Eider	Greater Yellowlegs	Short-eared Owl	Common Redpoll
Harlequin Duck	Lesser Yellowlegs	Belted Kingfisher	Hoary Redpoll
Surf Scoter	Pomarine Jaeger	Red-breasted Sapsucker	White-winged Crossbill
White-winged Scoter	Parasitic Jaeger	Am. Three-toed Woodpecker	Pine Siskin
Black Scoter	Long-tailed Jaeger	Black-backed Woodpecker	Lapland Longspur
Long-tailed Duck	Common Murre	Downy Woodpecker	Snow Bunting
Bufflehead	Thick-billed Murre	Hairy Woodpecker	American Tree Sparrow
Common Goldeneye	Pigeon Guillemot	Northern Flicker	Fox Sparrow
Barrow's Goldeneye	Marbled Murrelet	Merlin	Dark-eyed Junco
Common Merganser	Kittlitz's Murrelet	Gyr Falcon	White-crowned Sparrow
Red-breasted Merganser	Ancient Murrelet	Peregrine Falcon	Golden-crowned Sparrow
Spruce Grouse	Parakeet Auklet	Olive-sided Flycatcher	Savannah Sparrow
Willow Ptarmigan	Least Auklet	Western Wood-Pewee	Song Sparrow
Rock Ptarmigan	Crested Auklet	Alder Flycatcher	Lincoln's Sparrow
Horned Grebe	Rhinoceros Auklet	Say's Phoebe	Red-winged Blackbird
Red-necked Grebe	Horned Puffin	Northern Shrike	Rusty Blackbird
Rock Pigeon	Tufted Puffin	Canada Jay	Northern Waterthrush
Rufous Hummingbird	Black-legged Kittiwake	Steller's Jay	Orange-crowned Warbler
Sandhill Crane	Sabine's Gull	Black-billed Magpie	Yellow Warbler
Black Oystercatcher	Bonaparte's Gull	Northwestern Crow	Blackpoll Warbler
Black-bellied Plover	Mew Gull	Common Raven	Yellow-rumped Warbler
American Golden-Plover	Herring Gull	Black-capped Chickadee	Townsend's Warbler
Pacific Golden-Plover	Slaty-backed Gull	Chestnut-backed Chickadee	Wilson's Warbler
Semipalmated Plover	Glaucous-winged Gull	Boreal Chickadee	
Killdeer	Glaucous Gull	Horned Lark	