



 **Mass Audubon**
Drumlin Farm Wildlife Sanctuary
208 South Great Road ▲ Lincoln, Massachusetts 01773
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Alaska: Gambell Extension

May 23-27, 2020



Strickland Wheelock

In conjunction with High Lonesome Bird Tours

Protecting the Nature of Massachusetts

Gambell is a Siberian Yupik village of about 650 people located on the northwest tip of St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea. Although part of Alaska, St. Lawrence is only 35 miles off the coast of the Chukchi Peninsula (Siberian Russia). Most of the village income is derived from walrus hunting and the sale of raw or carved ivory and artifacts. Native carvings and artifacts are available for purchase (cash only) which benefits the local economy.

On most days, Siberia is clearly visible in the distance and, since it is on the other side of the International Date Line, you are actually looking at tomorrow. For birders, the amazing potential for high Arctic and Asian vagrants is Gambell's primary draw. Most of the Asian species recorded in North America have been seen in Gambell and its environs. Huge colonies of Parakeet, Least and Crested Auklets nest on cliffs within walking distance. Northwest Point provides a "super-highway" for migrating seabirds passing very close to the island, including Arctic and Yellow-billed Loons, Dovekie, Emperor Goose, Ivory Gull, and many other seabirds and ducks. Three-centuries-old boneyards often hide vagrant passerines, with past sightings including Eurasian Bullfinch, Hawfinch, and Common Cuckoo. The marsh about two miles from town is superb for shorebirds and typically yields several of the Asiatic species.

Day 1, Saturday, May 23

We'll meet in Anchorage at the Coast International Hotel at 6:30 PM for dinner downtown at Orso, one of the finest restaurants in Alaska. Before or after dinner, we'll do an hour or so of birding at Westchester Lagoon. Breeding Hudsonian Godwits typically gather in small numbers. Mew Gulls, Arctic Terns, Red-necked Grebes, and Greater Scaup nest in the lagoon as well.

Night in Anchorage

Day 2, Sunday, May 24

We will depart early for the airport for our morning flight to Nome. Once in Nome we will transfer to Bering Air and, weather permitting, have a midday departure for Gambell, arriving in time for a late lunch. After lunch, we will jump right into the island birding routine, exploring hotspots by foot and ATV, chasing down any rarities reported.

A birding trip to Gambell is exciting, full of possibilities, and a true adventure – which means there are some logistical and physical challenges. Gambell has an Arctic maritime climate, and is usually cold (28-40°F) and often overcast; fog, rain, snow, and wind can occur in rapidly changing combinations. Significant weather delays are always possible getting on and off the island since the airport operates on visual flight rules. We recommend purchase of a travel insurance policy to cover additional costs incurred due to weather or mechanical delays. The flight to Gambell has tighter baggage weight restrictions than larger aircraft; you will be able to leave excess luggage at Bering Air or at the hotel in Anchorage.

All transportation on the island is on four-wheel ATVs. It is important to keep your warm layers with you on the flight since the transfer to the Inn, though short, can be quite invigorating! While birding, two people will share an ATV. Before heading out the first time, you will receive instruction on operation and safety.

Lodging is at the Sivuqaq Inn (Sivuqaq is the Yupik name for the island). All rooms are double occupancy with shared baths. Meals are family style prepared by the High Lonesome chef. Alcohol is not permitted anywhere on the island; drinks are limited to water, coffee, tea, and soft drinks.

Days 2-4, Sunday - Tuesday, May 24-26

Throughout our stay in Gambell, we will continually canvas the most productive birding sites, at times splitting up, staying in radio contact to maximize our potential for locating exciting birds. Since most of the sites are close to the Inn and participants can cover ground quickly in shared ATVs, it is easy to return to the inn for a warm drink and a snack.

Usually we will start our day with a sea watch at Northwest Point just outside of town. This is an excellent place to observe the great variety and quantity of seabirds, eiders, ducks, and alcids that stream by the point. In addition to birds, Gray Whales often pass close to shore. Depending on ice conditions, we might see up to four species of seals, or even a walrus, if we are lucky. Boneyards, sites used for centuries to dispose of whale, walrus, and sea lion carcasses, offer protective cover to vagrant passerines that move through in late May and early June. The Near Boneyard is only a couple hundred yards from the inn, and often harbors Red-necked Stint and Common Ringed Plover. Marshes and lakes a few miles south of the village offer great potential for both nesting and vagrant shorebirds. Large colonies of alcids cover the mountain cliffs at the eastern edge of town, with rare breeding Dovekies (Asian subspecies *stejnegeri*) generally found among them. The mountainside can also be productive for interesting land birds.

Nights at Sivuqaq Inn

Day 5, Wednesday, May 27

We will have time for some final birding on the island before flying back to Nome and then on to Anchorage. The tour ends at the Anchorage airport.

Additional Information

High Lonesome Bird Tours is running a similar trip after ours. Their website has a detailed itinerary, bird highlights, packing information and past trip reports. Much of the information is relevant to our trip.

<https://highlonesometours.com/tour/alaska-2020-spring-migration-in-gambell-the-siberian-express/>

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.

Although ATVs allow us to reach prized birds quickly, there will still be a good deal of walking as we canvas productive sites for birds. The entire town is situated on loose beach gravel which can be tiring to walk on.

Significant weather delays are always possible getting on and off Gambell since the airport operates on visual flight rules. We recommend purchase of a travel insurance policy to cover additional costs incurred due to weather or mechanical delays.

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 \$3400; Non-member \$4080

Single Room Supplement: \$350

Deposit: \$750 due with registration

Final payment is due March 23, 2020.

This trip is offered in conjunction with High Lonesome Bird Tours. Registration and payment are processed through Drumlin Farm. Trip communications will be directly from High Lonesome.

Fee covers lodging, round trip flights from Anchorage to Gambell, meals from dinner on May 23 through breakfast on May 27, ground transportation, ATVs, land use permits, and entrance fees. Participants are responsible for personal supplies and alcoholic beverages.

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.

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: Gambell 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:

Kathy Seymour

781-259-2207

kseymour@massaudubon.org

Name(s) _____ Member no. _____

Address _____

Telephone Cell _____
Daytime _____
Evening _____

E-mail address _____

Would you like to receive our quarterly Birders Connection email? 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!