



*Tufted Puffins at St Paul (Craig Robson)*

## ALASKA

**31 MAY/4 JUNE – 16/19 JUNE 2014**

**LEADER: CRAIG ROBSON**

The seventh Birdquest tour to this amazing and beautiful land, was another fantastic experience. As usual, there were numerous special birds, with some of the most memorable being: Emperor Goose, Steller's, Spectacled and King Eiders, Harlequin Duck, Barrow's Goldeneye, Red-faced Cormorant, Gyr Falcon, Black Oystercatcher, Hudsonian Godwit, Black Turnstone, Surfbird, Rock Sandpiper, Bristle-thighed Curlew, Sabine's Gull, Red-legged Kittiwake, Aleutian Tern, Long-tailed Jaeger, Marbled, Kittlitz's, and Ancient Murrelets, Parakeet, Least, Crested and Rhinoceros Auklets, Horned and Tufted Puffins, Snowy Owl, Northern Hawk-Owl, American Three-toed Woodpecker, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, two distinct forms of Pacific Wren, Varied Thrush, Pine Grosbeak, White-winged Crossbill, Sooty Fox Sparrow, and the impeccable Smith's Longspur. Eurasian rarities and rare North American breeding birds were really forthcoming this year, with: Bewick's Swan, Common Snipe, Bar-tailed Godwit, Wood and Common Sandpipers, Long-toed and Red-necked Stints, Ruff, Vega Gull, Common and Oriental Cuckoos, Arctic Warbler, Bluethroat, Alaska (or Eastern Yellow) Wagtail, and Brambling. Among the mammals that we found were Grey Wolf, Brown (or Grizzly) Bear, Sea Otter, Minke, Humpback, Grey and Killer Whales, Moose, Caribou (or Reindeer) and Musk Ox. We had good weather everywhere (even sunshine at St Paul), and smooth-running logistics, enabling us to reach a very good total of 192 birds and 27 mammals.

Having made our way to Anchorage, all participants gathered late on the first evening at the Coast International Inn in Anchorage, ready for the pre-tour extension to St Paul in the Pribilof Islands. Before our flight the following lunchtime, we had time to explore some nearby birding hotspots. Starting outside our hotel at Lake Spenard, we scoped Pacific Loon, and an unexpected Hooded Merganser was a write-in. A ten minute taxi ride whisked us to Westchester Lagoon and the nearby coastal path. The mudflats here are a great place to view Hudsonian Godwit and Surfbird, and we found both easily. A tame pair of Short-billed Dowitchers were neat, and a male Blue-winged Teal was our second unexpected duck. Singing Orange-crowned Warblers and White-crowned and Lincoln's Sparrows added some variety.

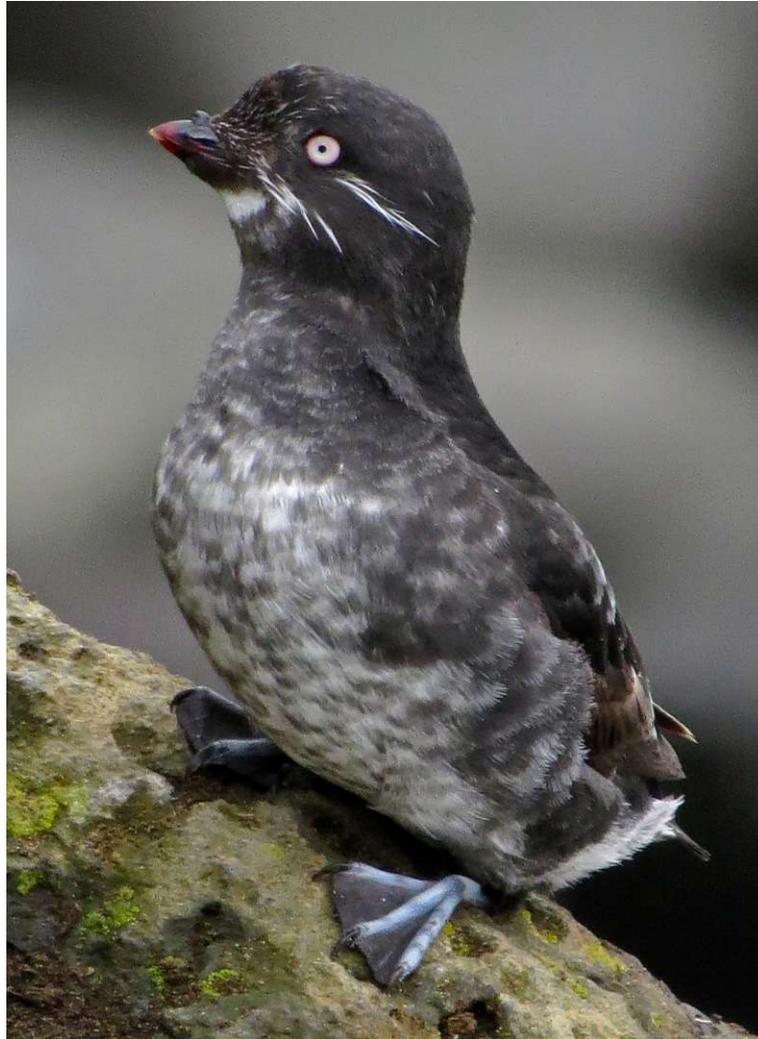


*A superb Crested Auklet on one of the many cliffs at St Paul (Craig Robson)*

Around mid-day we headed for the airport and took a flight to St Paul Island, via Dillingham. As we neared St Paul, the anticipation rose and we arrived safely through the low cloud to typically grey and cool conditions. We had the best part of three whole days at St Paul, allowing us to fully explore much of the island. We ate three very enjoyable and varied meals every day at the Trident Factory canteen - surprisingly one of the best food venues during the tour, and were comfortable and cosy in the airport hotel. We were led by all three expert guides on the island: Scott Schuette, Cory Gregory, and Glen Davis. They really gave us fantastic service, that helped make our trip to St Paul an unforgettable experience.

Our main targets here were the breeding seabirds. At this time of year, the birds are just arriving and finding their space on the cliffs, and we spent many hours on various cliff tops, marvelling at the antics of the various cormorants, auks, fulmars and kittiwakes. Perhaps pride of place went to the localized Red-legged Kittiwakes that were seen daily in small numbers among the commoner Black-leggeds. But how could we forget the thousands of busy Least Auklets and the superbly endowed Parakeet and Crested Auklets, let alone the superb Tufted Puffins. We also had some great close-ups of the striking Red-faced Cormorants, and some busy ledges bustling with Common and Thick-billed Murres (or Common and Brünnich's Guillemots). Northern Fulmars were present in a variety of plumages and already paired and nesting. Arctic Foxes, which were

seen all over the island, are well known seabird nest predators, and we watched several creeping down the less steep cliffs. Northern Fur-Seals were already on their breeding grounds, and the colonies out-of-bounds, but we still had many great views of the rather aggressive males proudly defended their territories. Looking offshore we managed to locate small numbers of Pigeon Guillemots, good numbers of Harlequin Ducks and King Eiders (though the latter nearly all females), and were astounded one evening by a distant swarm of Red Phalaropes, estimated to contain over 6000 birds.



*Least Auklets are abundant at St Paul (Craig Robson)*

We also had plenty of time to explore the rest of the coastline and the interior of this fascinating island, including the many wetlands. During our many wanderings we were constantly surrounded by delightful Lapland Longspurs, with smaller numbers of Snow Buntings and impressive Grey-crowned Rosy Finches, the only common passerines on the island. A single 'Pribilof' Wren (the endemic *alascensis* subspecies of Pacific Wren) put on a good display, but we were sorry to hear that they had undergone a serious decline after recent harsh winters. Rock Sandpipers were abundant and displaying everywhere, and other shorebirds here included Least Sandpiper, tame Wandering Tattlers, Semipalmated Plovers, Wilson's Snipe, and many tame Red-necked Phalaropes.

A good variety of waterfowl included another of the highlights of our visit in the shape of a nice Emperor Goose. It was also good to see a good number of Aleutian Cackling Geese, a scarce form, and there were multiple sightings of Eurasian Teal and many fabulous Long-tailed Ducks. Our latest visit to St Paul was probably one of the best, to date, for Eurasian rarities, with Bewick's Swan, Common Snipe, Bar-tailed Godwit, Wood and Common Sandpipers, Long-toed and Red-necked Stints, Ruff, Vega Gull, Common and Oriental Cuckoos, and Brambling. Other island rarities included Double-crested Cormorant, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Northern Wheatear and Savannah Sparrow.

Our final day at St Paul was a lovely sunny one, and we returned to Anchorage very contented. It was a quick turnaround back in town, as first thing the following morning we were back at the airport and boarding another flight, this time heading north to Nome.



*Bristle-thighed Curlew on its breeding grounds near Nome (Craig Robson)*

We had almost three full days to explore the three roads that lead out from Nome into quite different wilderness areas. Our first full days birding began with an early start and a lengthy drive along the remote Kougarok Road, in search of this region's most notorious breeding bird, the threatened Bristle-thighed Curlew. This is a busy time of year for tour groups, but fortunately we were the only ones present on this particular morning. With no-one else around we were able to carefully approach this rather confiding species, and get some really excellent views. On our way out to the site we had been lucky enough to see a Grey Wolf cross the road right in front of our vehicle. It paused by the roadside to try and figure us out, before trotting off into the low hills, and relative safety. Further along the roadside we also enjoyed views of American Beaver and Rusty Blackbird. Slowly working back down the highway towards town, after our exploits at the curlew site, we prioritized Bluethroat and Arctic Warbler, obtaining some excellent views of both species, already setting up breeding territories in their very limited North American range. Scanning the many crags brought some nice perched scope and flight views of Golden Eagles, Willow Ptarmigan was seen right by the roadside, and we also saw Taverner's Canada Goose, Sandhill Crane, Northern Harrier, some lovely American Golden Plovers, a very brief Short-eared Owl, bridge-nesting American Cliff and Tree Swallows, Northern Water-thrush, Golden-crowned Sparrow and Red Fox Sparrow.



*A singing male Bluethroat along the Kougarok Road (Craig Robson)*

The Council Road received most of our attention, as it passes Safety Sound, one of Alaska's most famous birding hotspots. With action on both sides of the road (the sea on one side, the lagoon on the other), it was often slow going as we paused to check through the great numbers of birds present. Out to sea, we had a close fly-by Emperor Goose, some nice White-winged Scoters and Harlequin Ducks, Pigeon Guillemot, and even a superb Grey Whale on our last morning, cruising just offshore. Along the beach we viewed a small colony of lovely Aleutian Terns that were starting to display and organise themselves, as well as the much commoner Arctic Terns. We were also very lucky to witness a calling Bristle-thighed Curlew fly in off the sea and head directly inland. On and around the lagoon, great numbers of waterfowl included Pacific and Red-throated Loons, 100s of Whistling Swans, good numbers of Snow Geese, Black Brants, a single male Eurasian Wigeon, lots of Common Eiders, a pair of King Eiders, a good-sized flock of Black Scoters, a few Canvasbacks and Buffleheads, and Sandhill Cranes. There were numerous flocks of staging shorebirds, with particularly high counts of Western Sandpiper (250+) and Bar-tailed Godwit (40+). A superb breeding-plumaged Red-necked Stint was picked out, and other highlights amongst the waders were Pacific Golden Plover, breeding Semipalmated Sandpipers, a couple of nice Black Turnstones, our first Pectoral Sandpipers, and a ridiculously tame pair of Long-billed Dowitchers. Glaucous Gulls were breeding in good numbers too. Passerines were rather few in open areas, but included some colourful Alaska Wagtails (the *tschutschensis* form of Eastern Yellow Wagtail), and the usual Lapland Longspurs. A Brown Bear was picked-out as it roamed the far shore of the lagoon, and we also enjoyed a couple of Red Foxes. Willow and Dwarf Birch scrub along the roadsides on the way to the sound held singing Grey-cheeked Thrush, Northern Waterthrush, American Yellow Warbler, and White-crowned, American Tree and Red Fox Sparrows. A few herds of incredible Musk Ox were also seen. All in all, our wanderings along the Council Road did us proud!

Along the Teller Road we drove to higher levels, where breeding Rock Ptarmigan, superb Long-tailed Jaegers, and Northern Wheatears breed. In a research area, we were fortunate to be shown a Red Knot on its nest, and we had some brief looks at the mainland *tschuktschorum* race of Rock Sandpiper. The amazing barren, rocky, bumpy montane 'tundra' was really something. Displaying Hudsonian Whimbrels were noted over the moors along the early stretches of the road.

Gyr Falcon was difficult this year and required a return visit to the lower section of the Kougarok Road. Here we located a pair resting on a distant hilltop and spent a long time getting as close a view as was possible. In Nome itself, at the harbour, we were extremely fortunate to find a late male Spectacled Eider that had been present for a while, and it hung-out there throughout our stay. We normally only get to look for this incredible bird at Barrow.



*A wonderful male Spectacled Eider at Nome Harbour (Craig Robson)*

Returning to Anchorage once more, we picked up another vehicle, and spent some time exploring Lake Spenard & Hood more thoroughly. Our first Barrow's Goldeneyes came in the form of two females, both Red-throated and Pacific Loons were present, as well as Bonaparte's Gulls, and there were the usual Red-necked Grebes, Spotted Sandpipers, Black-billed Magpies and Myrtle Warblers etc. A Downy Woodpecker was carrying food.

The following morning saw us travelling down to Seward, with various stops en route. First we visited Hillside Park on the outskirts of Anchorage. The coniferous and mixed Boreal forests here brought the briefest glimpses of American Three-toed Woodpecker and Varied Thrush, while we enjoyed a much better show from Olive-sided Flycatcher, Boreal and Black-capped Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Hermit and Swainson's Thrushes, Townsend's and Orange-crowned Warblers, and White-winged Crossbill. Potter Marsh yielded our first Harlan's Hawk (surprisingly treated as a regional form of Red-tailed), some tame Lincoln's Sparrows and our first Wilson's Warbler (though another, further along the road, would show much better). Various lakes held little apart from a nesting Great Northern (or Common) Loon.

Once in Seward we began exploring nearby birding sites, with a visit to Lowell Point. It was a rather dull afternoon, but this didn't stop the antics of two displaying male Rufous Hummingbirds (how can this tiny bird survive so close to the Arctic Circle!?), and we also enjoyed our first looks at Marbled Murrelet, some close Pelagic Cormorants, and a loafing flock of Surf Scoters just offshore.



*An awesome male Killer Whale (Craig Robson)*

The main reason for our visit to Seward was to explore the Kenai Fjords, and we boarded our vessel the following morning after breakfast for a full day cruise, via the Chiswell Islands, to the awesome Northwestern Glacier. Stunning scenery and relatively fine weather meant that we spent much of the nine hours on deck. Seabirds were once more the main focus of our attentions. The odd Red-faced Cormorant and Parakeet Auklet were called by the captain amongst the Chiswells' throng of auks, murrelets and puffins, but we stayed focused on three particular targets: Kittlitz's and Ancient Murrelets and Rhinoceros Auklet. Five Kittlitz's showed well in calm waters close to glaciers, while groups of Rhinoceros Auklets were passed at close range on the approaches. Ancient Murrelet kept us hanging on tenterhooks until the very last chance. Other bird highlights were



*Loafing Harbour Seals (Craig Robson)*

Peregrine Falcon, Black Oystercatcher, and close Pigeon Guillemots. Oceanic mammals were common and we had great views of three whale species, the usual Humpbacks and Killer's, as well as two Minke's that we chased to very close range. Several groups of Dall's Porpoise bow-rode, we were shown colonies of Northern Sea-Lions, numerous ice-loafing Harbour Seals, incredible Sea Otters, and even some coastal River Otters. The incredible glaciers are retreating at an alarming rate, and it is sad to think that the ice-fields that feed them may not be there for much longer.



*Approaching the Northwestern Glacier (Craig Robson)*

On our final morning in Seward we hiked from Lowell Point to Tonsina Point. This interesting trail brought us good views of Steller's Jay, Varied Thrush, Chestnut-backed Chickadee and Sooty Fox Sparrow, and our first Golden-crowned Kinglets. One of the main reasons for walking the trail was to find a mainland race (*stevensoni*) of Pacific Wren, and see at first hand the great differences from the Pribilofs form. Eventually we found a couple, and had very close views of one collecting food from beneath conifer bark (treecreeper-style), before carrying it away to chicks in a hidden nest. Leaving Seward, we paused at a salmon stream to the north, where American Dipper and Bald Eagle were very tame. Then we headed for Skilak Lake. It was rather quiet, but had our only Pine Grosbeaks of the tour, a Grey Jay family, and two wonderful North American Porcupines.

During the next day we made our way up to Denali National Park and Preserve, and there were some great highlights along the way. There was little of note before lunch. A quiet lake held a few Ring-necked Ducks, and there was our first Rough-legged Hawk, Belted Kingfishers and Alder Flycatchers. During a walk through Boreal forest at Byers Lake, we were entertained by a very showy American Three-toed Woodpecker, we scoped Trumpeter Swans and Belted Kingfisher, and there were numerous singing Blackpoll Warblers. We paused at a pull-out for our first looks at awesome Mt McKinley, before the final stretch to the park. We were not expecting to get much else out of this travel day but then Tony did a great job of spotting a Northern Hawk-Owl, our only one of the tour, perched on a spruce-top. Luckily it was right by a pull-out, so we were able to disembark and get some great scope views! A roadside Moose also entertained us at point-blank range.



*Northern Hawk-Owl near Denali and awesome Mt McKinley (Craig Robson)*



The following day we headed down to the Denali National Park and Preserve and boarded our bus for our day out in this extraordinary wilderness area. We spent the whole day travelling through the park and back, as far as the Eielson Visitor Centre. There were several amazing Brown (or Grizzly) Bears, lots of Caribou (or Reindeer), including mature males, herds of Dall Sheep, and another tame Red Fox. Birds were not prominent though we did see Golden Eagle, and a nice flock of Bohemian Waxwings, which were almost feeding on the ground at times. Fine weather enabled us to actually see the summit of Mt McKinley, which is quite an achievement in this moody wilderness!



*A superb male Smith's Longspur along the Denali Highway (Craig Robson)*

The following day was spent traveling the length of the scenic Denali Highway taking us past miles and miles of spruce-dominated Taiga, and some of the most vast and rich wetland areas that we saw on the whole tour, all with a spectacular mountainous backdrop. There were not many bird highlights, but the scenery was simply stunning. A noisy Lesser Yellowlegs mobbed us in order to protect its two fluffy chicks. The incredibly wide range of wetlands, particularly small lakes along the highway held our first male Buffleheads and more Barrow's Goldeneyes. Our only Say's Phoebe of the trip was seen flycatching and then alighting on its nest at some cabins, and we had some great close-up views of Blackpoll and other warblers, our best yet views of Red Fox Sparrow, and some rather brief views of a Great Grey (or Northern) Shrike. A long hike across 'blanket bog' eventually brought us great close-up views of two stunning males and a female Smith's Longspur, one of the most sought-after birds of the tour. The few mammals, included an excellent Hoary Marmot and, just before reaching our accommodation at Paxson, yet another Brown Bear.

Early the next morning we birded near the accommodation. There was still no sign of the elusive Spruce Grouse, but we had further views of Trumpeter Swan (nesting), Barrow's Goldeneye, American Dipper, Boreal Chickadee and Grey Jay. There were few stops during the drive back to Anchorage, but at one we had fantastic close-up views of a noisy breeding pair of Solitary Sandpipers. Other highlights during the drive were a pair of Western Ospreys, Harlan's (or Red-tailed) Hawk, Northern Flicker, and Boreal Chickadee. Of course, the scenery was as stunning as ever.



*One of the 15 Snowy Owls that we counted at Barrow (Craig Robson)*

Those of us that remained were off early the following day, flying first to Fairbanks and Deadhorse, Prudhoe Bay, before reaching Barrow on the North Slope and Arctic Ocean. We had a couple of



*A stunning Sabine's Gull at Barrow (Craig Robson)*

days to explore this amazing place and even with 24 hour daylight, it was not long enough!! The vast pack-ice still hugged the coastline and coastal fog made it difficult to view the patches of open ocean, or any Polar Bears that might have been roaming out there! Inland on the tundra however, birdlife teemed. Numerous

displaying Pectoral Sandpipers boomed their way across the terrain in every direction and there were numerous Pomarine Jaegers searching for Lemmings – the latter apparently enjoying their best year since 2008. High lemming numbers also meant lots of Snowy Owls, and we logged 15, including 12 seen from one spot!! The many thawing pools and lakes held Red-throated and Pacific Loons, Greater White-fronted Geese, numerous lovely Long-tailed Ducks, and swirling Red and Red-necked Phalaropes. We found all four species of eider, with four pairs of Spectacled, at least six Steller's, and a pair of King all showing on multiple occasions at ridiculously close range. Two stunning Sabine's Gulls in breeding plumage totally took our breathe away. There were lots of other breeding shorebirds, with displaying Long-billed Dowitchers and Baird's Sandpipers being particularly noteworthy, while local rarities included another Red-necked Stint in full plumage, and there was even a stray Audubon's Warbler. The commonest passerines at Barrow were Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting, the latter nicknamed 'Barrow Sparrow'.



*A young American Three-toed Woodpecker just about ready to fledge (Craig Robson)*

Returning to Anchorage, we paid another visit to Hillside Park, where we were very fortunate to find a pair of American Three-toed Woodpeckers busily feeding a noisy full-grown chick in their nest-hole, and had some further views of Varied Thrush, and a family of Golden-crowned Kinglets.

Back at our now all too familiar home-from-home, the Coast International Inn, we enjoyed our final dinner together. It really had been a highly successful adventure across a land of unparalleled natural beauty, where true wilderness still reigns supreme. Surely one of the most exciting birding and mammal watching destinations on the North American continent if not anywhere in the world?!



*A cracking male King Eider at Barrow (Craig Robson)*

## SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

**Rock Ptarmigan** *Lagopus muta* Great views of 2 pairs along the Teller Rd, Nome. One of the females was on a nest.

**Willow Ptarmigan (W Grouse)** *Lagopus lagopus* Close-up views of roadside birds, especially around Nome.

**Greater White-fronted Goose** *Anser albifrons*

**Snow Goose** ◇ *Chen caerulescens* Still good numbers at Nome, with up to 45 or so.

**Emperor Goose** ◇ *Chen canagica* A single scoped at St Paul (thanks Glen), and a close fly-by at Safety Sound.

**Lesser Canada Goose** ◇ *Branta [canadensis] parvipes* Supposedly the common form around Anchorage.

**Aleutian Cackling Goose** ◇ *Branta [hutchinsii] leucopareia* 12-18 of this rare form were seen well at St Paul.

**Taverner's Cackling Goose** ◇ *Branta [hutchinsii] taverneri* The common form at Nome.

**Black Brant** ◇ *Branta [bernicla] nigricans* The largest numbers were at Nome (60+), with just a few at other sites.

**Pale-bellied Brent** ◇ *Branta [bernicla] hrota* c.8 at Safety Sound, Nome. Some may have been intergrades.

**Trumpeter Swan** ◇ *Cygnus buccinator* Several in the Denali-Paxson-Anchorage zone.

**Whistling Swan** ◇ *Cygnus columbianus* Scattered sightings but 150+ at Safety Sound.

**Bewick's Swan** ◇ *Cygnus bewickii* Three at St Paul, where it is very rare.

**Gadwall** *Anas strepera*

**Eurasian Wigeon** *Anas penelope* A male at Safety Sound, Nome.

**American Wigeon** *Anas americana*

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*

**Blue-winged Teal** *Anas discors* A superb male at Westchester Lagoon.

**Northern Shoveler** *Anas clypeata*

**Northern Pintail** *Anas acuta*

**Eurasian Teal** *Anas crecca* Small numbers were seen at St Paul where it largely replaces the following species.

**Green-winged Teal** *Anas carolinensis*

**Canvasback** *Aythya valisineria* c.8 were seen on Safety Sound, Nome



*A male Rock Ptarmigan along the Teller Road, Nome (Craig Robson)*

**Ring-necked Duck** *Aythya collaris* Just a few scattered sightings.

**Greater Scaup** *Aythya marila* The commonest scaup, and one of the most frequently recorded species on the tour.

**Lesser Scaup** *Aythya affinis*

**Steller's Eider** ♦ *Polysticta stelleri* Four males and two females at Barrow. Great views.

**Spectacled Eider** ♦ *Somateria fischeri* A surprise male at Nome Harbour and then four pairs at Barrow. All confiding.

**King Eider** ♦ *Somateria spectabilis* 34+ at St Paul, and pairs at Safety Sound and Barrow.

**Common Eider** *Somateria mollissima* 60+ at Safety Sound and small numbers at Barrow. The form seen is *v-nigra*.

**Harlequin Duck** *Histrionicus histrionicus* Max. 300 seen at St Paul.

**Surf Scoter** ♦ *Melanitta perspicillata* A nice flock of seven at Lowell Point, Seward.

**White-winged Scoter** ♦ *Melanitta deglandi* 18 logged near Nome.

**Black Scoter** *Melanitta americana* 25+ at Safety Sound and a pair at Tangle Lakes.

**Long-tailed Duck** *Clangula hyemalis* A lovely sight (and sound), especially in the Arctic tundra.

**Bufflehead** ♦ *Bucephala albeola* Three at Safety Sound and five along the Denali Highway.

**Common Goldeneye** *Bucephala clangula* A dozen or so in Anchorage on the first day and just one more seen.

**Barrow's Goldeneye** ♦ *Bucephala islandica* Small numbers at scattered sites.

**Hooded Merganser** *Lophodytes cucullatus* A first year male at Lake Spenard was a rarity write-in.

**Common Merganser** *Mergus merganser* A female with 12 small chicks near Seward.

**Red-breasted Merganser** *Mergus serrator*



*Barrow's Goldeneyes (Craig Robson)*

**Red-throated Loon (R-t Diver)** *Gavia stellata* Widespread, with one on a nest near Nome.

**Pacific Loon** ♦ **(P Diver)** *Gavia pacifica* Quite common and widespread. Probably 25+ at Barrow.



*Long-billed Dowitchers at Safety Sound (Craig Robson)*

**Great Northern Loon (Common L, G N Diver)** *Gavia immer* A few, with one on a nest at Tern Lake.

**Northern Fulmar** *Fulmarus glacialis* The variety of plumages in the Pacific birds at St Paul was interesting to see.

**Red-necked Grebe** *Podiceps grisegena*

**Pelagic Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax pelagicus* A few off St Paul, and then common in the Seward area.

**Red-faced Cormorant** ◊ *Phalacrocorax urile* Wonderful views at St Paul and a few during the Kenai Fjords cruise.

**Double-crested Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax auritus* A vagrant at St Paul, and c.8 during the Kenai Fjords cruise.

**Western Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* A pair along the Glenn Highway.

**Bald Eagle** *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* Pretty common and widespread. Even one at St Paul.

**Northern Harrier** *Circus hudsonius* Widespread and frequent in suitable habitat.

**Red-tailed Hawk** ◊ *Buteo jamaicensis* A total of three 'Harlan's' Hawks were seen during the tour.

**Rough-legged Buzzard** ◊ (R-I Hawk) *Buteo lagopus* Singles on the way to Denali and Tolsona.

**Golden Eagle** *Aquila chrysaetos* A total of seven seen including one being mobbed by the next species.

**Merlin** *Falco columbarius* One at Westchester and another mobbing a Golden Eagle along the Denali Highway.

**Gyr Falcon** ◊ *Falco rusticolus* A difficult year. Only distant (though prolonged) scope views of a pair obtained.

**Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus* Singles in the Chiswell Islands and on the way to Denali.

**Sandhill Crane** *Grus canadensis* Scattered sightings, but most frequently seen near Nome.

**Black Oystercatcher** ◊ (American B O) *Haematopus bachmani* Two during the Kenai Fjords cruise.

**Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva* A few at Nome where they breed in coastal areas.

**American Golden Plover** *Pluvialis dominica* Great views inland from Nome and in the Barrow area.

**Semipalmated Plover** *Charadrius semipalmatus* Well scattered sightings.

**Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago* A single at St Paul was a write-in.

**Wilson's Snipe** *Gallinago delicata*

**Short-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus griseus* A very tame pair at Westchester Lagoon, where it breeds.

**Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* A pair at Safety Sound. <14 singing and displaying at Barrow.

**Hudsonian Godwit** *Limosa haemastica* 42 near Westchester Lagoon.



*Solitary Sandpiper (Craig Robson)*

**Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica* 50+ at Nome where they are a bit of a speciality.

**Hudsonian Whimbrel (H Curlew)** *Numenius hudsonicus* A couple near Nome and a pair near Tangle Lakes.

**Bristle-thighed Curlew** ◊ *Numenius tahitiensis* One flew inland over Safety Sound. Superb views by Kougarok Rd.

**Greater Yellowlegs** *Tringa melanoleuca* Just one near Westchester Lagoon.

**Lesser Yellowlegs** *Tringa flavipes* Frequent, including 1 with 2 chicks along the Denali Highway, and 1 at Barrow.

**Solitary Sandpiper** *Tringa solitaria* We found a very excited pair, along the Glenn Highway.

**Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola* 2 seen well at St Paul.

**Wandering Tattler** *Tringa incana* Several at St Paul and in the Seward area.

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* One on the shoreline at St Paul.  
**Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularius*  
**Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres* Three at St Paul, two at Safety Sound, and two at Barrow.  
**Black Turnstone** ◊ *Arenaria melanocephala* Two seen well at Safety Sound.  
**Surfbird** *Aphriza virgata* Six in breeding plumage were seen from the coastal trail near Westchester Lagoon.  
**Red Knot** *Calidris canutus* An incubating bird was shown to us by researchers along the Teller Road, near Nome.  
**Semipalmated Sandpiper** *Calidris pusilla* Common. Single vagrant at St Paul. Nest with 4 eggs near Nome.  
**Western Sandpiper** *Calidris mauri* Single at St Paul, 100s at Safety Sound, and just a few at Barrow.  
**Red-necked Stint** *Calidris ruficollis* Nice breeding-plumaged birds at Safety Sound and Barrow.  
**Long-toed Stint** *Calidris subminuta* One at St Paul. Seen very well, but only in flight, with toes protruding!!  
**Least Sandpiper** *Calidris minutilla* A few at St Paul (some displaying), and a couple along the Denali Highway.



*Baird's Sandpipers were breeding at Barrow (Craig Robson)*

**Baird's Sandpiper** *Calidris bairdii* Great close views of several at Barrow, with prolonged display flights.  
**Pectoral Sandpiper** *Calidris melanotos* 2 near Nome, and an abundant breeder at Barrow. Amazing display-flight.  
**Rock Sandpiper** ◊ *Calidris ptilocnemis* Abundant St Paul (nominate). 2 along Teller Road, Nome (*tschuktschorum*).  
**Dunlin** *Calidris alpina* Plenty of 'Pacific' Dunlins were recorded at Nome and again at Barrow where they breed.  
**Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax* A nice male at St Paul.  
**Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus*  
**Red Phalarope** ◊ (Grey P) *Phalaropus fulicarius* 6000+ were staging off St Paul. Common on the tundra at Barrow.  
**Black-legged Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla* Especially common at St Paul and around the Chiswell Islands off Seward.  
**Red-legged Kittiwake** ◊ *Rissa brevirostris* We enjoyed great views of good numbers of this smart St Paul speciality.  
**Sabine's Gull** *Xema sabini* A spectacular arctic gull, seen superbly at Barrow. At least two.  
**Bonaparte's Gull** *Chroicocephalus philadelphia*  
**Mew Gull** *Larus brachyrhynchus*  
**Glaucous-winged Gull** ◊ *Larus glaucescens* Common at St Paul and Seward; mostly hybrids in Anchorage!

**Glaucous Gull** *Larus hyperboreus* One at St Paul, and then very common around Nome and Barrow.  
**American Herring Gull** *Larus smithsonianus*  
**Vega Gull** ◇ *Larus vegae* A few at St Paul and near Nome.  
**Aleutian Tern** ◇ *Onychoprion aleuticus* We enjoyed brilliant views of around 20 breeding birds at Safety Sound.  
**Arctic Tern** *Sterna paradisaea*  
**Pomarine Jaeger (P Skua)** *Stercorarius pomarinus* Scarce early on, then common on the tundra at Barrow.  
**Parasitic Jaeger (Arctic Skua)** *Stercorarius parasiticus* Scattered.  
**Long-tailed Jaeger (L-t Skua)** *Stercorarius longicaudus* Best seen along the Teller Road, Nome. Superb.  
**Thick-billed Murre** ◇ (Brünnich's Guillemot) *Uria lomvia* Common at St Paul and also seen at the Chiswell Islands.  
**Common Murre (C Guillemot)** *Uria aalge*  
**Black Guillemot** ◇ *Cepphus grylle* A single leader-only bird at Barrow, when the fog lifted!  
**Pigeon Guillemot** ◇ *Cepphus columba* Frequent at St Paul and in the Seward area.  
**Marbled Murrelet** ◇ *Brachyramphus marmoratus* Common around Seward and easily seen well.  
**Kittlitz's Murrelet** ◇ *Brachyramphus brevirostris* Five during our Kenai Fjords cruise; one of the specialities here.  
**Ancient Murrelet** ◇ *Synthliboramphus antiquus* Just one during our Kenai Fjords cruise; but nice looks.



*An amazing Parakeet Auklet at St Paul (Craig Robson)*

**Parakeet Auklet** ◇ *Aethia psittacula* 100s seen brilliantly at St Paul, and 2 during our boat trip from Seward.  
**Least Auklet** ◇ *Aethia pusilla* A real little character, that was abundant at St Paul.  
**Crested Auklet** ◇ *Aethia cristatella* Many on the sea, but tough to find on the busy ledges at St Paul.  
**Rhinoceros Auklet** ◇ *Cerorhinca monocerata* A couple seen poorly past St Paul. c.22 seen well in the Kenai Fjords.  
**Horned Puffin** ◇ *Fratercula corniculata* Great views of many at St Paul and around the Chiswell Islands.  
**Tufted Puffin** ◇ *Fratercula cirrhata* What a bird! Great views of many at St Paul and around the Chiswell Islands.  
**Rock Pigeon (R Dove) (introduced)** *Columba livia*  
**Oriental Cuckoo** *Cuculus optatus* A vagrant write-in that we found, with Glen, at St Paul.  
**Common Cuckoo (Eurasian C)** *Cuculus canorus* A vagrant write-in at St Paul. On the same day as the last species!  
**Snowy Owl** ◇ *Bubo scandiacus* 15+ at Barrow, with 12 from one spot. The best lemming year since 2008 apparently.

**Northern Hawk-Owl** ◊ *Surnia ulula* Fantastic views of one that Tony spotted by the roadside near Denali NP.

**Short-eared Owl** *Asio flammeus* Only brief views of a single bird near Nome.

**Rufous Hummingbird** ◊ *Selasphorus rufus* Great views near Seward (4). Amazing that they survive so far north!

**Belted Kingfisher** *Megasceryle alcyon* Seen a couple of times on the way to Denali.

**Downy Woodpecker** *Picoides pubescens* A couple at Lake Spenard, including one carrying food.

**Hairy Woodpecker** *Picoides villosus* Craig and Nick had one on the last morning at Lake Spenard.

**American Three-toed Woodpecker** ◊ *Picoides dorsalis* Male at Byers Lake. Pair and youngster in nest Hillside Park.

**Northern Flicker** *Colaptes auratus* A single 'Yellow-shafted' Flicker was seen well along the Glenn Highway.

**Say's Phoebe** *Sayornis saya* One nesting on a cabin near Paxson.

**Olive-sided Flycatcher** *Contopus cooperi* One seen well at Hillside Park. Heard twice elsewhere.

**Alder Flycatcher** *Empidonax alnorum* Several seen - we were usually alerted by the distinctive voice.

**Great Grey Shrike (Northern S)** *Lanius excubitor* A single *borealis*, rather too briefly, along the Denali Highway.

**Grey Jay** ◊ *Perisoreus canadensis* We had plenty of chances to see this one in the boreal forests. Several juveniles.

**Steller's Jay** *Cyanocitta stelleri* A couple near Lowell Point, Seward, with one particularly confiding bird.



Steller's Jay near Seward (Craig Robson)

**Black-billed Magpie** *Pica hudsonia*

**Northwestern Crow** ◊ *Corvus caurinus* Several were seen well in and around Seward.

**Northern Raven (Common R)** *Corvus corax*

**Bohemian Waxwing** ◊ *Bombycilla garrulus* A flock of c.8 at Eielson, Denali NP.

**Black-capped Chickadee** ◊ *Poecile atricapillus* Widespread sightings this year.

**Boreal Chickadee** ◊ *Poecile hudsonicus* Small numbers seen well at Hillside Park, Paxson, & Tolsona Campground.

**Chestnut-backed Chickadee** ◊ *Poecile rufescens* Good views of a handful near Lowell Point, Seward.

**Sand Martin (Bank Swallow)** *Riparia riparia* Widespread, but particularly numerous at Lake Spenard & Hood.

**Tree Swallow** *Tachycineta bicolor* The most widespread hirundine.

**Violet-green Swallow** *Tachycineta thalassina* Small numbers noted on a few occasions.

**American Cliff Swallow (Cliff S)** *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota* At scattered breeding locations, mostly bridges.

**Arctic Warbler** *Phylloscopus borealis* Around Nome, in Denali NP, and along the Denali Highway. Race *kennicotti*.

**Golden-crowned Kinglet** *Regulus satrapa* Two near Lowell Point; then a family with fledged young at Hillside Park.



*Pribilof Wren Troglodytes pacificus alascensis (Craig Robson)*

**Ruby-crowned Kinglet** *Regulus calendula*

**Pacific Wren** ♦ *Troglodytes pacificus* 1 Pribilof Wren (*alascensis*) at St Paul & 2 darker *stevensoni* near Lowell Point.



*Grey-crowned Rosy Finch at St Paul (Craig Robson)*

**Red-breasted Nuthatch** *Sitta canadensis* A single seen well at the feeder at Seward.

**Common Starling (introduced) (European S)** *Sturnus vulgaris* (NL)

**Varied Thrush** ♦ *Ixoreus naevius* We enjoyed excellent views of this real stunner on several occasions.

**Grey-cheeked Thrush** *Catharus minimus* Common around Nome and along the Denali Highway.

**Swainson's Thrush** *Catharus ustulatus* Regularly seen. Hillside Park, and the Anchorage-Denali-Paxson circuit.

**Hermit Thrush** *Catharus guttatus* Several at Hillside Park, and near Lowell Point, Seward. Subspecies *nanus*.

**American Robin** *Turdus migratorius*

**Bluethroat** *Luscinia svecica* Great views of three males along the Kougarok Road, Nome. A real stunner!

**Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe* One on St Paul, and several near to Nome.

**American Dipper** ◊ *Cinclus mexicanus* Close-ups of one near Seward, and others at Paxson & Kougarok Road.

**Alaska Wagtail** *Motacilla [tschutschensis] tschutschensis* Some stunningly bright birds were seen around Nome.

**Brambling** *Fringilla montifringilla* Two at St Paul were a nice surprise.

**Common Redpoll** *Carduelis flammea* Fairly common and widespread, even seen by our hotel in Anchorage.

**Arctic (or Hoary) Redpoll** ◊ *Carduelis hornemanni* Subspecies *exilipes* around Nome & Barrow, and also Denali NP.

**Grey-crowned Rosy Finch** ◊ *Leucosticte tephrocotis* Common at St Paul (bulky *umbrina*).

**Pine Grosbeak** ◊ *Pinicola enucleator* Five at Skilak Lake (*alascensis*).

**White-winged Crossbill** ◊ (Two-barred C) *Loxia leucoptera* Many this year. Anchorage-Denali-Paxson-Anchorage.

**Northern Waterthrush** *Parkesia noveboracensis* Widespread and often heard. A few seen well.

**Orange-crowned Warbler** *Leiothlypis celata* Widespread.

**American Yellow Warbler** *Setophaga aestiva* Surprisingly widespread this far north.

**Blackpoll Warbler** *Setophaga striata* Seen well. Particularly numerous at Byers Lake, and even found near Nome.

**Myrtle Warbler** *Setophaga coronata*

**Audubon's Warbler** *Setophaga auduboni* Craig was lucky enough to see one at Barrow.

**Townsend's Warbler** *Setophaga townsendi* Several stunners at Hillside Park and near Lowell Point, Seward.

**Wilson's Warbler** *Cardellina pusilla* Another colourful warbler. A little skulking, but many good looks.

**Rusty Blackbird** ◊ *Euphagus carolinus* A pair along the Kougarok Road, and 2 along the Denali Highway. Declining.

**Red Fox Sparrow** ◊ *Passerella iliaca* Common around Nome, and Denali-Paxson. Rich song.

**Sooty Fox Sparrow** ◊ *Passerella unalascensis* Several in the Seward area.

**Song Sparrow** ◊ *Melospiza melodia* One or two in the Seward area. Dark *kenaiensis*.

**Lincoln's Sparrow** *Melospiza lincolnii* This neat little sparrow showed well in several places.

**White-crowned Sparrow** *Zonotrichia leucophrys*

**Golden-crowned Sparrow** ◊ *Zonotrichia atricapilla* Several around Nome.

**Dark-eyed Junco** *Junco hyemalis*

**Savannah Sparrow** *Passerculus sandwichensis* Ian found 1 at St Paul. Widespread on mainland, including Barrow!

**American Tree Sparrow** ◊ *Spizella arborea* Several seen well around Nome with others along the Denali Highway.

**Lapland Longspur (L Bunting)** *Calcarius lapponicus*

**Smith's Longspur** ◊ *Calcarius pictus* Great views of two males and a female near Paxson. Beautiful bird.

**Snow Bunting** *Plectrophenax nivalis* Otherwise known as the Barrow Sparrow.



*A charming Red-legged Kittiwake at St Paul (Craig Robson)*

## MAMMALS

**Hoary Marmot** *Marmota caligata* Great views of one along the Denali Highway. Only just emerging for the summer.

**Arctic Ground Squirrel (A Souslik)** *Spermophilus parryii* Common, especially around Nome and Denali.

**American Red Squirrel (Red S)** *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*



*The extremely cute American Red Squirrel (Craig Robson)*

**American Beaver** *Castor canadensis* Along the Kougarak road, Nome, and the Denali Highway.

**Northern Red-backed Vole** *Myodes rutilus* Two at Denali NP.

**Brown Lemming** *Lemmus trimucronatus* Great views of one living under the tundra boardwalk at Barrow.

**North American Porcupine** *Erithizon dorsatum* Two at Skilak Lake.

**Arctic Fox** *Vulpes lagopus* Common at St Paul.

**Red Fox** *Vulpes vulpes* Three near Nome, and a very tame one at Denali NP.

**Grey Wolf (Wolf)** *Canis lupus* Great views of one along the Kougarak Road. Rare in these parts!

**Brown Bear (Grizzly B)** *Ursus arctos* One at Safety Sound, 3 at Denali NP, and one near Paxson.

**Northern Fur Seal** *Callorhinus ursinus* Plenty at St Paul where they were coming back to the beaches to breed.

**Northern Sea-Lion (Steller's S)** *Eumetopias jubatus* A few off St Paul and c.150 in the Chiswell Islands.

**Harbour Seal (Common S)** *Phoca vitulina* A few of St Paul and 100+ on ice off Northwestern Glacier.

**Ringed Seal** *Pusa hispida* A few on the pack-ice off Barrow. The markings are not always easy to see.

**Northern River Otter** *Lutra canadensis* A group on rocks during the Kenai Fjords cruise were totally unexpected.

**Sea Otter** *Enhydra lutris* Good views of many at the Kenai Fjords.

**Common Minke Whale (Minke W)** *Balaenoptera acutorostrata* Excellent views of 2 during the Kenai Fjords cruise.

**Humpback Whale** *Megaptera novaeangliae* Six or so during the Kenai Fjords cruise; some great close encounters.

**Grey Whale** *Eschrichtius robustus* Great looks at one that was close inshore of Cape Nome.

**Dall's Porpoise** *Phocoenoides dalli* 20 or so in speedy groups around the fjords.

**Killer Whale (Orca)** *Orcinus orca* A pod of 7+ 'fish feeders' were seen well during our Kenai Fjords boat trip.

**Moose (Elk)** *Alces alces* Seven or eight of these impressive beasts.

**Caribou (Reindeer)** *Rangifer tarandus* 20+ at Denali. Signs of many at Barrow. Introduced to St Paul (150+).

**Dall Sheep** *Ovis dalli* 25 or so at Denali.

**Mountain Goat** *Oreamnos americanus* Several seen quite well in the Seward area.

**Musk Ox** *Ovibos moschatus* A few herds of these amazing creatures around Nome.



*Northern Fur-Seal at St Paul (Craig Robson)*

#### NOTES TO THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

**Whistling Swan** *Cygnus columbianus* and **Bewick's Swan** *C. bewickii*

These two forms are often lumped into a single species: **Tundra Swan** *C. columbianus*.

**Glaucous-winged Gull** *Larus glaucescens* and **American Herring Gull** *L. smithsonianus*

These two species interbreed freely in the Anchorage area and many of the gulls there are simply hybrids, with very few showing pure characters of either species.

## APPENDIX 1 - Other fauna & flora recorded

### BUTTERFLIES

Canadian Tiger Swallowtail *Papilio canadensis*

Silvery Blue *Glaucopsyche lygdamus*

Hoary Comma *Polygonia gracilis* Denali NP.

White-veined Arctic *Erebia fasciata* Denali Highway.



White-veined Arctic along the Denali Highway (Craig Robson)

### DRAGONFLIES

Northern Bluet *Enallagma annexum* Abundant at Lake Spenard & Hood.

Hudsonian Emerald *Somatichlora hudsonica* Tolsona Campground.

### PLANTS

Wood Horsetail *Equisetum sylvaticum*

Black Spruce *Picea mariana*

White Spruce *Picea glauca*

Hare's-tail Cottongrass (Tufted C) *Eriophorum vaginatum*

Blue Flag Iris *Iris setosa* Byers Lake.

Lesser Twayblade (Heart-leaved T) *Listera cordata* Byers Lake.

Alpine Foxtail *Alopecurus alpinus* St Paul.

Wild Celery *Angelica lucida* St Paul.

Cow Parsnip *Heracleum lanatum*

Frigid Colt's-foot *Petasites frigidus*

Northern Coltsfoot *Petasites hyperboreus* St Paul.

Mountain Alder *Alnus crispa* Surely one of the commonest trees/shrubs in Alaska.

Dwarf Birch *Betula nana*  
 Bluebells *Mertensia paniculata*  
 Arctic Scurvygrass (A Spoonwort) *Cochlearia [officinalis] arctica*  
 Northern Draba *Draba hyperborea* St Paul.  
 Canadian Dwarf Cornel (C Dogwood) *Cornus canadensis*  
 Swedish Dwarf Cornel *Cornus suecica*  
 Bog-rosemary *Andromeda polifolia*  
 Crowberry *Empetrum nigrum*  
 Trailing Azalea (Alpine A) *Loiseleuria procumbens* St Paul.  
 Lapland Rhododendron *Rhododendron lapponicum*  
 Bog Bilberry (B Blueberry) *Vaccinium uliginosum*  
 Arctic Lupine *Lupinus arcticus*  
 Nootka Lupine *Lupinus notkatensis* St Paul.  
 Wild Geranium *Geranium erianthum*  
 Mare's Tail *Hippuris vulgaris* St Paul.  
 Bogbean (Buckbean) *Menyanthes trifoliata*



*Bering Sea Water-Carpet at St Paul (Craig Robson)*

Alaska Springbeauty *Claytonia sarmentosa* St Paul.  
 Yellow Pond-lily *Nuphar polysepalum*  
 Few-flowered Corydalis *Corydalis pauiflora* St Paul.  
 Alaska Poppy *Papaver alaskanum* St Paul.  
 Thrift *Armeria maritima sibirica* St Paul.  
 Northern Jacob's Ladder *Polemonium boreale* St Paul.  
 Yellow Anemone *Anemone richardsonii* St Paul.  
 Snow Buttercup *Ranunculus nivalis* Barrow etc.  
 Rock Jasmine *Androsace septentrionalis* St Paul.

Chuckchi Primrose *Primula tschuktschorum* St Paul.  
Mountain Avens *Dryas octopetala*  
Shrubby Cinquefoil *Potentilla fruticosa*  
Marsh Cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*  
Cloudberry *Rubus chamemorous*  
Sibbaldia *Sibbaldia procumbens* St Paul.  
Balsam Poplar *Populus balsamifera*  
Quaking Aspen *Populus tremuloides*  
Arctic Willow *Salix arctica* St Paul.  
Net-leaved Willow *Salix reticulata* St Paul.  
Least Willow *Salix rotundifolia* St Paul.  
Brook Saxifrage *Saxifraga punctata nelsoniana* St Paul.  
Bract Saxifrage *Saxifraga bracteata* St Paul.  
Bering Sea Water Carpet *Chrysosplenium wrightii* St Paul.  
Arctic Lousewort *Pedicularis langsdorffii* St Paul.  
Woolly Lousewort *Pedicularis kanei* Barrow etc.  
Aleutian Violet *Viola langsdorffii* St Paul.



*A brilliant sunny day at St Paul! Breeding habitat for Least Auklets (Craig Robson)*