

# Alaska

**13–29 June 2008**

**Participants:**

**Derek and Karenina Bennett**

**Roger and Sue Bird**

**Paul and Andrea Kelly**

**Steve Minton**

**Derek Parkin**

**Sandy and Sheila Robertson**

**Trevor and Carol Skipper**



**Aleutian Tern**

**Leaders:**

**James Smith and Paul Kelly**

The third Birdfinders tour of Alaska tour was blessed with fine weather, fantastic birding, spectacular mammal watching and never-ending stunning scenery. We were also very lucky not to get bogged down by the weather related delays apparently suffered by several other tour groups, and indeed poor weather rarely affected our daily plans.

**Day 1:** The tour began in earnest in Anchorage with five of us arriving from different points of the compass on June 12<sup>th</sup> and the main body of the group flying in late on the evening of June 13<sup>th</sup>. From the airport it was a relatively short drive to the quaint Alaskan town of Eagle River, which would serve as a hub for much of the tour and a far better alternative to staying in downtown Anchorage. Rain dampened the arrival of the later group but it mattered little as it was already late and we were keen to get to our comfortable motel.

**Day 2:** Our first full morning in Alaska dawned grey and rainy with periodic heavy showers, not really the best way to start the tour but spirits were high and soon to be given a major boost when we found a female Harlequin Duck and a couple of American Dippers on a fast-flowing local river. The mature vegetation by the river also held Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler and Alder Flycatcher. It later transpired that Steve had inadvertently photographed a Boreal Chickadee in this spot, one of only handful seen on this year's tour. With the rain easing off we headed for the Parks Highway, stopping for a perched raptor by the road, which we soon lost, but we did soon find Wilson's Snipe, Boreal Chickadee, American Robin, Violet-green Swallow and Gray Jay, all in the swampy Mat-su Valley. A little further north a sudden cry of 'owl' brought the vehicles screaming to a halt. Incredibly, Trevor had a spotted a fluffy juvenile Northern Hawk-owl from the van at 60 mph! Remarkably by this busy road we watched three begging juveniles and an adult Northern Hawk Owl before time restraints forced us to move on. Paul had already achieved his major target on the first full day of the tour! A Northern Hawk-owl seen and photographed would surely be a tough act to follow. We continued our journey north stopping occasionally for scenic and birding interludes

finding species such as Bonaparte's Gulls, Solitary Sandpiper, Swainson's Thrush, Northern Waterthrush and several more Gray Jays. As we arrived for two nights at Cantwell another owl family greeted us; a pair of Great Horned Owls and their downy young directly behind our delightfully situated and rather charming B&B. Another family of Gray Jays spent time around the bins at the rear of the building offering amazing photographic opportunities. The tour was off to a cracking start!

**Day 3:** It was really all about mammals on our full day in Denali National Park and we tallied Dall Sheep, Carabou, Moose, Arctic Ground Squirrel, and Snowshoe Hare. The highlight though, was six Grizzly Bears in the park including a mother and two well-grown cubs observed for long periods from the safety of the park's buses. Birds were scarce this year and some very heavy showers in the middle of the day didn't improve our chances of finding them. However, we did have excellent views of Golden Eagle, Willow Ptarmigan and found a Say's Phoebe's nest which seemed a little out of place near last year's Gyr Falcon eerie! Sadly, no Gyr Falcons were present this year, though later at a different site Paul did spot an intriguing perched distant raptor, which we couldn't assign to species, but Gyr Falcon was certainly on the short list of possibilities! The day in Denali ended with an exceptionally close Moose near the visitor's center and decent views of Varied Thrush for a lucky few in the parking lot. Our hosts back at Cantwell very kindly put together a tasty barbeque supper, rounding off a superb day in the Denali region.

**Day 4:** A day on the Denali Highway is a mouthwatering prospect for any birder and today was no exception. We had barely started our journey when a Porcupine by the road forced us to stop, which in turn produced Olive-sided Flycatcher, Wilson's Warbler, Grey-cheeked Thrush and the first of many White-winged Crossbills seen during the tour. As the day developed, we made frequent stops by the numerous picturesque lakes that supported Horned Grebes, White-winged Scoters, Long-tailed Ducks, Buffleheads, Northern Pintails, and Red-necked Phalaropes. Passerines represented by American Tree Sparrows, Fox Sparrows, Blackpoll and Arctic Warblers graced much of the journey. Towards the end of the day careful scanning of some rather sizeable roadside lakes produced lots of waterfowl especially Lesser Scaup and a nice male Eurasian Wigeon amongst its American cousins. In the event it was the only Eurasian Wigeon of the tour. We settled down for a fine buffet supper and a good night's rest at a fabulous riverside lodge.

**Day 5:** The morning dawned cool with excellent visibility. We'd planned a pre-breakfast birding session near Tangle River, which turned out to be an excellent move as we were treated to two hours of absolutely stunning tundra birding. Around us Hudsonian Whimbrels, Long-tailed Skuas and American Golden-plovers were all breeding, and it didn't take us too long to find our main quarry. After seeing several close Lapland Longspurs we quickly located a fine male Smith's Longspur, and later saw a three more males, though no females. Roger's keen telescope scanning picked-up a quartering Short-eared Owl, which later gave good views closer to the road and was seen soaring with a Bald Eagle and Northern Harrier. After a fine buffet breakfast we regrettably left the Tangle River area and took a little time to marvel at the landscape from what is arguably the most scenic birding highway in North America. The journey back to Eagle River was long but peppered by some very nice stops en route which included seeing Pine Grosbeak, Red-tailed (Harlan's) and Rough-legged Hawks, breeding Pacific Loons, Northern Flicker, American Three-toed Woodpecker, Western Wood-pewee, breeding Rusty Blackbirds and a Solitary Sandpiper. A further two Northern Hawk-owls and an absurdly close adult Bald Eagle graced the Glenn Highway as we set sail for Eagle River where we arrived in good time for a fun supper at a favorite restaurant.

**Day 6:** With our final destination being Seward, much of today was dedicated to roadside birding on the journey south through the Kenai Peninsula. Just south of Anchorage, Potter Marsh gave us great looks at Canvasbacks, Red-necked Grebes, Mew and Glaucous-winged Gulls and Arctic Terns, plus incredible views of Lincoln's Sparrow, Orange-crowned Warbler and Northern Waterthrush. Each stop produced a nice selection of new birds for the trip including Wandering Tattler, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Pine Siskin, Townsend's Warbler, Great Northern Diver and even a distant but identifiable Rock Ptarmigan. A longer stop at summit lake gave us wonderful views of Common Redpolls, Pine Siskins and three glorious Pine Grosbeaks 'gritting' by the side of the main road. The lake itself held Common Merganser, Greater and Lesser Scaup and a very photogenic Wandering Tattler. The day closed with an excellent spot by Sue – it was our first Black Bear of the tour at Tern Lake! A fast drive into Seward brought us to our comfortable motel and some excellent waterfront dining.

**Day 7:** Today dawned cloudy but calm, and no fog – all great conditions for our scheduled boat cruise that was one of the most anticipated days of the tour. Not only did we have great weather (the absence of sun in parts being a plus for this trip), but we were fortunate enough to have a young enthusiastic Captain on board who really knew her birds and how to find them. But the trip wasn't just about birds. Indeed our first stop just outside the harbor revealed two very confiding Sea Otters! Incredibly, over 30 Bald Eagles could be seen sitting on the mudflats at the head of Resurrection Bay. Not too much farther into the journey, we came across our first alcids with good views of Pigeon Guillemots and Marbled Murrelets. The latter would serve as an important reference point for identifying the very similar Kittlitz's Murrelets later in the day. Cruising out into more open water we enjoyed views of Bear Glacier, part of the Harding Ice field and constantly encountered excellent seabirds along the way including Horned and Tufted Puffins, Red-faced and Pelagic Cormorants, Common Guillemots (Common Murres in the US), and the first of many Humpback Whales. Captain Andrea used her navigational skills to bring us up close to Parakeet and Rhinoceros Auklets around the Chiswell Islands, and later Brünnich's Guillemots (Thick-billed Murres) on just one cliff in the Beehive Islands. We hadn't gone too much further before the Captain spotted another very special bird – Ancient Murrelet. In fact, we found quite a few small groups of these as we cruised into the NW Fjord, also coming across the occasional Pacific Diver. Reaching the head of the fjord we were impressed with the Captain's ability to avoid large chunks of glacial ice and simultaneously spot small parties of Kittlitz's Murrelets! Most were quite close to shore, and we ultimately had wonderful views. With highly satisfactory views of the murrelets we could relax, have an excellent lunch on board, and watch the 'calving' of Aialik Glacier at leisure. It had already been an incredible trip and could hardly get better, but it did. On the way back to Seward Sue stumbled into the main cabin and promptly announced "wakey, wakey; there's Orcas up ahead". Only minutes later, the first family groups of Orca began passing our boat, some of them incredibly close. Two or three pods were involved, perhaps numbering 40+ animals. The Captain had switched off the boat's engine only serving to make the experience even more intimate. It was just breathtaking watching and listening to these amazing mammals as they passed close to our boat. On the way back to the harbor, we found more Humpback Whales, several flocks of White-winged Scoters and one large flock of the Black Scoters. After nine hours at sea we decided to rest our bins and relax before enjoying another great waterfront supper.

**Day 8:** The morning began with a pre-breakfast walk around Seward. We first grappled with the large, dark, long-billed local race of Song Sparrow, sometimes called 'Kenai' Song Sparrow and barely recognizable compared to birds in eastern North America. In the same area we had good views of 'Sooty' Fox Sparrow, whilst elsewhere about town we found

Varied Thrush, Steller's Jay, Northwestern Crow, Red Crossbill, and a pair of Chestnut-backed Chickadees tending a nest. A search for a possible heard-only Northern Pygmy-owl after breakfast proved fruitless, but was worth keeping in mind for future trips as the habitat looked very good. Beginning our northward journey back to Eagle River, a nice scenic overlook by the road gave us exquisite looks at a male Townsend's Warbler along with more distant views of Varied Thrush and Olive-sided Flycatcher. Tern Lake had breeding Great Northern Divers (and of course Arctic Terns!) but Paul and Andrea, and Steve decided to run on a little further and came back with exciting reports of Merlins tending fledged young and good numbers of White-winged Crossbills both of which stayed around long enough for the remainder of the group to see. As it happened, our next site was Skilak Lake Road about 20 miles down the road towards Homer. A couple of the local road crew had mentioned that this might be a good place to find Spruce Grouse, a bird still very much on our wish list. Sadly, we couldn't find any grouse but we did have a great close encounter with a young Black Bear eating dandelions by the road! We saw Pine Grosbeaks on the road itself, and found an American Dipper and several Common Goldeneyes on the Kenai River after a short hike downslope. Steve reported brief views of a grouse, which would likely have been Spruce Grouse in this area. After a short stop for coffee, a steady drive all the way back to Eagle River brought us home in good time for a meal at an excellent local restaurant and another good night's rest.

**Day 9:** The summer solstice found us heading as far north as we would on this particular itinerary. In the morning we flew to Nome from Anchorage International Airport having a remarkably smooth flight and an on-time arrival, all of which was pretty amazing considering the flights on the previous five days had been prevented from landing in Nome because of fog! Well there was no fog for us and we arrived to crisp Arctic sunshine. While the leader collected the rental vehicle, the group notched up a pair of Northern Shrikes, Red-throated Diver and Glaucous Gull in the immediate surroundings of the airport – not bad for starters! After lunch we had plenty of time for exploring some sites along the Council Road, not too far from town. The first redpolls that we saw was a party of three Arctics, which seemed astounding, as we only saw two certain Arctics during our entire stay in Nome the previous year. Over the next three days we would encounter almost as many Arctic Redpolls as Commons in what was clearly a bumper year for the species. Other notables included four Slaty-backed Gulls and a Vega Gull amongst several hundred Glaucous Gulls on the Nome River, plus a pair of Taverner's Cackling Geese there. Red-throated Divers were plentiful, and Pacific Divers only slightly less so. We also had good views Long-tailed and Arctic Skuas, and a Short-eared Owl by the road. We also notched up our first Common Eiders of the trip, along with seven handsome Harlequin Ducks. The eiders were of the distinctive Pacific form (sometimes called 'Pacific Eider'), *Somateria mollissima v-nigra*. We retired to our comfortable hotel in Nome and enjoyed a relaxed evening meal in town.

**Day 10:** With 72 miles on dirt roads in prospect, we left Nome bright and early and headed northwards into the tundra along the well known Kougarok Road, stopping only for Musk Ox, Carabou, numerous Short-eared Owls, a light-phase Rough-legged Hawk and a very bold male Willow Ptarmigan on the road. Despite these rather pleasant distractions we still arrived at Coffee Dome in good time and geared up for a strenuous hike up hill through knee-deep wet tundra. Our goal was to reach the drier tundra on top of the hill, optimum habitat for a number of shorebirds including Bristle-thighed Curlew. Most of our party made it to the hilltop at their own pace and, after seeing and hearing several Hudsonian Whimbrels, we heard the distinctive call note of a Bristle-thighed Curlew and watched in awe as a calling male flew straight overhead and landed just down slope from us. There we enjoyed good scope views as it foraged in the tundra. Feeling highly satisfied, we relaxed amidst a

magnificent panorama and enjoyed finding more good birds in this beautiful habitat including (Lesser) Sandhill Cranes, Short-eared Owls, breeding Long-tailed Skuas, American Golden-plovers, Western Sandpipers and Lapland Longspurs. The only other views of Bristle-thighed Curlew proved to be two distant flying birds and we felt privileged to have found our main quarry straight away and birders arriving later may not have been so lucky. The rest of the day was dedicated to a relaxed drive back to Nome with frequent stops along the way. Highlights included more Taverner's Cackling Geese, more Short-eared Owls and Rough-legged Buzzards, some very confident Arctic Redpolls and superb views of Pacific Golden-plovers on territory close to breeding American Golden-plovers. We also several close encounters with Eastern Yellow Wagtails, a male Northern Wheatear, Northern Shrikes and a few Arctic Warblers. The final stop of the day proved to be something of an anti-climax as a stakeout for nesting Gyr Falcons didn't look entirely convincing with a well-grown chick in a nest looking much more like a Rough-legged Buzzard than a Gyr Falcon. With no adults in sight and dinner calling back in Nome, we decided to press on with Gyr Falcon eluding us once again.

**Day 11:** The infamous Nome fog greeted us in the early hours of the morning but was soon to burn off. First stop was Nome River Mouth where some careful scanning produced small numbers of Semipalmated and Western Sandpipers, some of them in fine breeding plumage. Fifteen Black Brants, and another good assortment of gulls including Slaty-backed and a smaller bird, which was tentatively identified as a Thayer's Gull, were also present. New birds for the trip included two flighty Aleutian Terns, a summer-plumaged Dunlin and a brief Bar-tailed Godwit. Sadly, there wasn't any sign of a Red-necked Stint (one of the targets for Nome) so we decided to continue searching along the Council Road, and in doing so found our first Black Turnstones along with more Dunlins and the smaller peeps and two (Lesser) Sandhill Cranes. On reaching Safety Sound the tide was high and few shorebirds were present, even the divers were distant though we could clearly identify eight Pacific and a couple of Great Northern Divers. A flock of 45 small dark geese flying past, first thought to be Brant, actually turned out to be Cackling Geese almost certainly of the form *minima*. Further along the Council Road we found large numbers of Tundra Swans and Black Brants, American Wigeons and a small party of Canvasbacks but the real highlights was close up views of many Aleutian Terns nesting in the dunes right by the road. Slightly more surprising was an out-of-range Greater Snow Goose, which flew in and landed on the beach, staying around for good photo opportunities. Next we looked at the Solomon Mines area hoping for singing Bluethroats but came up empty. However, two hunting Rough-legged Buzzards, Arctic Warbler, Grey-cheeked Thrush and White-crowned Sparrows provided some nice compensation. A little further up the same valley, a lone Slaty-backed Gull looked a little out of place perched on a rock in the middle of the Solomon River well inland from the coast. Climbing higher up the Council road we ultimately reached extensive patches of remaining snow and our final destination for the day – Skookum Pass. The impressive vista yielded few birds at first until a pair of American Pipits flew over heading towards one of the higher peaks. Almost at the same time, a sudden call of "Snow Bunting" saw the group split, some going after the pipits whilst others stayed close to the vehicle and had excellent views of a full summer plumaged male Snow Bunting, actually one of a pair feeding young in a nest. Patient scanning of the tundra eventually revealed more American Pipits, three Northern Wheatears, a Horned Lark and a pair of Surfbirds with recently fledged downy young, the latter easily the highlight of the species on show here. Another excellent day closed with a straight drive back to Nome and an open agenda for the evening in which most of us settled for an early supper and an early night!

**Day 12:** It was time to bid farewell to Nome, but not before we tried one more optional outing along the Council Road. Our flight back to Anchorage wasn't due to depart until early afternoon leaving enough time for one last attempt at some of the species still missing from our Nome targets. The day had dawned grey and overcast but was near windless with excellent visibility. Conditions looked good, so we headed for the Nome River mouth once again. A Tundra Swan greeted at the river bridge, but after only a couple of minutes scanning Sue picked up a very interesting 'peep'. Although distant, the brick red head and throat clearly belonged to a Red-necked Stint and kudos went to Sue for such a commendable find. A little more scanning revealed at least three other Red-necked Stints all feeding close together, so we walked down the riverbank for closer looks. Like many of the shorebirds in Nome, these birds were skittish and by the time we'd reached an appropriate viewpoint only one Red-necked Stint remained. However, this bird did give extended views alongside a Semipalmated Sandpiper for direct comparison and was well and truly 'grilled' by our party. Also in the estuary, a fine Ruddy Turnstone, the first and only one of the tour, and a fly over Bar-tailed Godwit. More than pleased, we headed for Safety Lagoon spotting Arctic and Long-tailed Skuas, Short-eared Owls and a huge flock of Arctic and Common Redpolls along the way. By the time we'd reached the sound it was raining quite heavily but it didn't deter our upbeat spirits. Clambering out of the vehicle, no sooner had we set up our scopes on Safety Sound bridge, a heavy looking diver flew in from the sea giving a fantastically close fly past and heading inland into Safety Sound, eventually landing at the rear of the lagoon. It was a Black-throated Diver (Arctic Loon) of the Siberian form, sometimes known as 'Green-throated Diver' and another one of our targets for the morning. The size of the bird was surprisingly obvious in flight, looking far heavier than the Pacific Divers than we'd seen in Nome, and in addition, the gleaming white patch at the rear of the flanks stood out like the proverbial beacon and was visible at considerable range as the bird flew into land at the rear of the sound. As if that wasn't enough, Roger found a small flock of 'peeps' that included a further two Red-necked Stints, and another Bar-tailed Godwit was found by Trevor, this one on a sand bar in the middle of the sound. With the rain now hammering down, we enjoyed our last looks at close Pacific Divers and some Aleutian Terns before heading back to Nome. Closer to town, the weather had cleared enough for a quick look at Hastings Creek which actually revealed a good number of shorebirds and, remarkably, a further three Red-necked Stints! After a virtual dearth of these handsome stints over the previous three days, nine birds in one morning was nothing short of miraculous! Although not joining us for this morning's outing, Paul, Andrea and Steve had done some serious bird finding of their own discovering a handsome singing male White Wagtail in the town of Nome close to the harbor. Although not a recognized split from White Wagtail, the sub-specific form *M.a. ocularis* is sometimes referred to as East Siberian Wagtail. White Wagtails are rare in North America, though the Nome area does have a reputation for producing them. Nice birding from Paul, Andrea and Steve! With that we loaded up and headed for the airport. Northern Shrikes were again seen around the terminal buildings, the last notable birds of another superb visit to Nome. With an on time departure back to Anchorage, the journey was enlivened by a short stop at Kotzebue just inside the Arctic Circle which included spectacular views of the Arctic Pack Ice as we approached the runway. Just as impressive, we enjoyed fine views of the snow-covered peak of Mt McKinley as we approached Anchorage. We landed in good time for a smooth drive back to Eagle River and a fine supper at our favorite restaurant. We also said our goodbyes to Sandy and Sheila.

**Day 13:** For some of our party it was time to begin the final stage of the Alaska tour with a three-day trip to the Pribilofs, but it was also time to say our goodbyes to Trevor and Carol and Derek who'd planned to fly home today. However, there was time for some excellent

birding in Anchorage and in the morning we visited Westchester Lagoon finding close Red-necked Grebes, Blue-winged Teal, Canada Geese, Barrow's Goldeneye and both Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs – all at very close range. The adjacent mudflats at Cook Inlet held good numbers of returning shorebirds including over 120 Short-billed Dowitchers, 80 Hudsonian Godwits, and even a Surfbird! A smattering of gulls included some American Herring and about 25 Bonaparte's Gulls. We were again very fortunate in having an on-time departure for St Paul, the only interruption being a brief stop in Dillingham to refuel. On arrival in St Paul, we were greeted by our guide Cameron Cox and quickly shown to our rooms. Not all of the luggage had made it on the first flight, but came in about half an hour later on the second flight and with that we put on our warm gear and headed out into the field. At the town harbor we found our first Red-legged Kittiwakes, about eight birds in a large flock of Black-legged Kittiwakes, and also saw Slaty-backed, Glaucous, Glaucous-winged and a hybrid (Glaucous-winged × Slaty-backed) Gulls. After dinner, we came across the first of many moulting Arctic Foxes, and enjoyed some very close Rock Sandpipers by the road to Northeast Point. This area was to remain our focus for the rest of the evening as we scanned in vain for a previously reported White-billed Diver. However, we enjoyed some good passages of Short-tailed Shearwaters just off Hutchinson Hill, our group rising admirably to the challenge of picking them out from the much more numerous dark-phase (plus intermediate and white phase) Northern Fulmars. Nearby Webster Lake held several Eurasian Teal and two Grey Phalaropes, one in pure winter plumage and one in full summer dress!

**Day 14:** The day began cold and foggy with a strong NW wind. We enjoyed good views of some of the cliff nesting seabirds including Crested, Parakeet and Least Auklets and Brünnich's Guillemots but with conditions being far from ideal, we elected for a close look at a colony of Northern Fur Seals, and then for some seawatching off East Landing. The latter proved to be a good move as Sue picked out a storm-petrel virtually immediately. It was a Fork-tailed Storm-petrel with one, then two and eventually three birds giving prolonged views just 150 meters offshore with a flock of about 200 feeding Northern Fulmars. For just about all us these had to be the best views of Fork-tailed Storm-petrel that we'd ever had. Just before lunch, we headed up to the local quarry for what would be the first of several frustrating visits in pursuit of the local endemic form of Winter Wren. The quarry was full of singing Snow Buntings and Grey-crowned Rosy-finches, but the wren eluded all but one of us. It was Karenina who nailed an excellent photo of the species and took home a splendid prize! We ate lunch at the local cafeteria for sumptuous amounts of good, freshly cooked food in what was generally agreed to be the best and most reasonably priced food of the entire tour. Afterwards, we turned down the option of a siesta and went back to East Landing for more seawatching. Although the species composition was much the same, in the improving light the views of the Fork-tailed Storm-petrels were even better. Also notable here, a Slaty-backed Gull, and Paul found a Wandering Tattler on the beach. In the afternoon, we headed for the Northernmost point of the Island and had little trouble in locating a long staying, injured, but still very fine looking male King Eider, plus an excellent side-by-side comparison of Red-faced and Pelagic Cormorants. The remainder of the day was given over to viewing more seabirds and another, unsuccessful try for the local Winter Wren.

**Day 15:** Another cold foggy start, so foggy in fact that Cameron our guide, was actually worried about our chances of getting off the island later in the day. As the morning developed we were encouraged to see the weather steadily improve. We spent the morning at Northeast Point looking once again in vain for the White-billed Diver. On the drive out there we did see a Grey Phalarope, and a walk around Webster Lake produced a couple of Eurasian Teal and several family parties of Northern Pintail. Our luck was out on the diver however, so after lunch we chose to spend time at our favorite seawatching spot and had really excellent views

of Fork-tailed Storm-petrels once more. A final visit to the quarry yielded a fine male Snow Bunting, but alas, no Winter Wren. The flight home was slightly delayed as the pilots decided to shuttle some folks over to St George who'd been stranded on St Paul for three days! But when we eventually left the 2½ hour direct flight was trouble free and again we had great views of Mt McKinley coming into Anchorage.

**Day 16:** After a final night in Eagle River, we called in at the always impressive Eagle River Nature Centre. We began with extended views of a Red-breasted Nuthatch and then enjoyed this excellent preserve, which has a good reputation for woodpeckers. It didn't disappoint producing Hairy, Downy and American Three-toed Woodpeckers and what was very likely a drumming Black-backed Woodpecker – sadly not seen. Birds seen from a nicely constructed boardwalk out into a beaver swamp included Greater Yellowlegs, Wilson's Snipe and Belted Kingfisher, and a Merlin flew over the center itself. In the spruce woodland, Varied Thrush, Boreal Chickadee and White-winged Crossbill were all present. With that it was time to head for Anchorage and to say our goodbyes to Paul and Andrea who were catching an earlier flight than the main group. This left enough time for a short visit to Kincaid Park. Although we didn't find anything new for the tour, we did have superb views of Bald Eagles, 'Red' Fox Sparrows, Alder Flycatchers and Yellow Warblers, and a cow and calf Moose. After a relaxed lunch, we parted company at Anchorage International Airport, whilst I went on for more afternoon birding at Westchester Lagoon. On the incoming tide, the small islands in the lagoon filled up with close roosting Short-billed Dowitchers and Hudsonian Godwits bringing a bird filled end to this year's Birdfinders tour of Alaska.

Thanks go to all our participants, and especially to Paul Kelly who were especially helpful in driving the second vehicle and made numerous helpful contributions towards the smooth running of the tour.

**James P. Smith** Amherst, MA.