High Lonesome BirdTours St. Paul Trip 2016

May 21st - 25th, 2016

Leader and Photos: Stephan Lorenz

Least Auklets at their colony on St. Paul island

The High Lonesome BirdTours trip to St. Paul Island this year was successful beyond expectations. Not only did we get great looks at all the seabirds, ranging from auklets, murres, puffins, and kittiwakes, we also managed to time our arrival just right to catch up with a slew of vagrant birds. The list of shorebirds that were found on the island during our stay included dozens of Wood Sandpipers, several Long-toed Stints, Common Greenshank, Common Snipe, and a breeding plumaged Curlew Sandpiper (quite rare in Alaska). A Brambling was also a nice find, but was trumped (I think we all agreed) by a stunning male Siberian Rubythroat which we all managed to see well, even in the scope!

Another welcome rarity was a male Tufted Duck spotted among the common Northern Pintails on Salt Lagoon during our first evening on the island.

The seabird cliffs of course never disappoint with Least, Parakeet, and Crested auklets in full swing, plus the Pribilof speciality, Red-legged Kittiwake. We studied the kittiwake in flight, exploring a nesting ledge and finally got really close on the mudflats for exceptional photo opportunities.

On the bays surrounding the island we found a pair of Ancient Murrelets, Pigeon Guillemot, Harlequin Ducks, and a flock of King Eiders that contained a breeding plumaged male.

We also took time to enjoy the northern fur seal rookeries where the “beach masters” had already arrived and scoped more distant Steller’s sea lions. On land, the Arctic foxes were common and we even saw the herd of reindeer on two occasions.

All in all, our time on the island passed all too quickly, but we took home a treasure chest of memories (and memory cards). I hope we can do it all again soon. Thank you for joining us for this trip of a lifetime. Sincerely, Stephan

Trip List:

1. Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) - a few in the Anchorage area
2. Gadwall (*Anas strepera*) - Westchester Lagoon Anchorage
3. American Wigeon (*Anas americana*) - Westchester Lagoon
4. Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) - Anchorage area
5. Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*) - a single drake at Westchester Lagoon was pretty rare for the area
6. Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) - Westchester Lagoon
7. Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*) - Anchorage area and common on St. Paul Island
8. Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca*) - we saw the American subspecies in Anchorage and several “Common” Teal A. c. crecca on St. Paul plus the odd intergrade or two
9. Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) - great scope views of a male on Salt Lagoon St. Paul Island was a good addition
10. Greater Scaup (*Aythya marila*) - Westchester Lagoon Anchorage area
11. Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*) - Westchester Lagoon Anchorage
12. King Eider (*Somateria spectabilis*) - several scoped on St. Paul Island with one breeding plumaged male standing out from the crowd
13. Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) - common on St. Paul Island
14. Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*) - common on St. Paul Island

15. Bufflehead (*Bucephala albeola*) - two seen on St. Paul Island
16. Red-necked Grebe (*Podiceps grisegena*) - Anchorage area
17. Northern Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*) - seen well on nesting ledges and in flight on St. Paul Island

18. Red-faced Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax urile*) - great views of nesting birds on St. Paul Island where it is the common cormorant
19. Pelagic Cormorant (Phalacrocorax pelagicus) - a few on St. Paul Island
20. Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) - one seen daily on St. Paul Island where it is uncommon
21. Pacific Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*) - several seen on St. Paul Island, mostly in flight
22. Lesser Sand-Plover (*Charadrius mongolus*) - a great vagrant species to catch up with during the first evening on St. Paul Island where a breeding plumaged female showed well on Salt Lagoon
23. Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) - regularly seen on St. Paul Island
24. Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*) - we found two birds on the northern tip of St. Paul Island and eventually had great scope views
25. Wandering Tattler (*Tringa incana*) - a skittish bird seen in flight on Big Lake St. Paul Island
26. Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*) - Anchorage area
27. Common Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*) - one bird showed everyday on St. Paul Island preferring the close shore of Salt Lagoon and offering fantastic photo opportunities, another vagrant species to add to our list

28. Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*) - Anchorage area
29. Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*) - we saw up to ten birds per day on St. Paul where this shorebird from Eurasia was almost common this year much to our delight

30. Hudsonian Godwit (*Limosa haemastica*) - two or three birds at a distance along the coastal trail in Anchorage
31. Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) - a reliable individual on Salt Lagoon St. Paul Island provided great study opportunities
32. Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) - a single bird on St. Paul Island
33. Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*) - after the bird had been “missing” we returned one more time and found it in the spot where it had been observed, a gorgeous rarity going into breeding plumage
34. Long-toed Stint (*Calidris subminuta*) - several this year on St. Paul Island, seen every day with great scope studies and photo opportunities
35. Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) - two birds flew past us as we were looking for the Common Snipe on St. Paul
36. Rock Sandpiper (*Calidris ptilocnemis*) - the most common shorebird on St. Paul Island

37. Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*) - surprisingly there is a small breeding population of this minute shorebird on St. Paul Island, we had great direct comparisons to its Old World counterpart the Long-toed Stint

38. Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) - flushed at Tim's Pond, great views of the white underwings and trailing edges
39. Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*) - common on St. Paul
40. Red Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) - one bird was seen very close at Webster Lake St. Paul
41. Long-tailed Jaeger (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) - hovering above the dunes on St. Paul
42. Common Murre (*Uria aalge*) - common on cliffs
43. Thick-billed Murre (*Uria lomvia*) - abundant on cliffs
44. Pigeon Guillemot (*Cepphus columba*) - seen at sea around St. Paul
45. Ancient Murrelet (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*) - distant but good views of two birds in Gorbach Bay St. Paul
46. Parakeet Auklet (*Aethia psittacula*) - abundant, we enjoyed their screeching and antics on the cliffs
47. Least Auklet (*Aethia pusilla*) - abundant, we got especially close for photos at the Antone Breakwall
48. Crested Auklet (*Aethia cristatella*) - several were already on the cliffs at Reef and we enjoyed scope studies of this distinct alcid

49. Horned Puffin (*Fratercula corniculata*) - common especially on Ridge Wall where many pairs had staked out their burrows
50. Tufted Puffin (*Fratercula cirrhata*) - very close views of this common species at Reef where their tufts were blowing in the breeze
51. Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) - abundant
52. Red-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa brevirostris*) - this Bering Sea endemic is very common on St. Paul and we observed one inspecting a potential nesting ledge and saw many roosting on the mudflats at Salt Lagoon

53. Bonaparte's Gull (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*) - seen from the coastal trail in Anchorage
54. Mew Gull (*Larus canus*) - abundant in the Anchorage area
55. Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) - seen in the Anchorage area
56. Slaty-backed Gull (*Larus schistisagus*) - up to two adult birds seen very well on Salt Lagoon St. Paul, not always a guaranteed species
57. Glaucous-winged Gull (*Larus glaucescens*) - the common large gull on St. Paul Island
58. Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*) - a single seen on Salt Lagoon St. Paul Island
59. Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*) - common in the Anchorage area
60. Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) - in flight in Anchorage
61. Black-billed Magpie (*Pica hudsonia*) - Anchorage
62. Pacific Wren (*Troglodytes pacificus*) - very common this year on St. Paul Island, this large Pribilof form can be uncommon in some years and it was great to see so many, the mild winter was definitely beneficial for them

63. American Dipper (*Cinclus mexicanus*) - Wow! It eventually sat right in front of us blinking with its distinct white eyelid, great views in the Anchorage area and a great start to the trip
64. Siberian Rubythroat (*Calliope calliope*) - the songbird vagrant of the trip, a male at Hutchinson's Hill St. Paul Island was eventually seen well by all with great photos and scope views
65. Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) - after some waiting the bird plopped down right in front of us at Hutchinson's Hill, a fine male and a great bonus to the bird above

66. European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) - Anchorage
67. American Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*) - seen briefly on St. Paul Island
68. Lapland Longspur (*Calcarius lapponicus*) - abundant on St. Paul Island where their territories seem to consist of two square feet
69. Snow Bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) - very common on St. Paul
70. Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*) - a male was seen well in the Marunich area on St. Paul Island, another vagrant bird from Asia
71. Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch (*Leucosticte tephrocotis*) - the large Pribilof form is common on St. Paul Island and can easily be mistaken for an American Robin in terms of size

Mammal List:

Northern Fur Seal - hundreds of breeding males had already arrived
Steller Sea Lion - a dozen on aptly named sea lion rock
Arctic Fox - the blue phase is common on St. Paul

The St. Paul Island Team

A pair of Tufted Puffins at the Reef colony

Horned Puffins on St. Paul Island

Parakeet Auklet