



# Dutch Harbor Trip Report

June 19th - 22nd, 2018

Report and Photos: Stephan Lorenz



The absolute trip highlight was this juvenile Short-tailed Albatross seen on the Chelan Banks.

*This year's trip to Dutch Harbor not only yielded the hoped for alcids, but also held several bonuses and surprises. Unalaska Island combines an interesting mix of Aleutian breeding birds with a few species spilling in from the mainland plus a plethora of seabirds. During our time on land, we tracked down Rock Ptarmigan, Rock Sandpiper, American Dipper, Black Oystercatcher, Snow Bunting, Fox Sparrow and more. As usual the island was bright green by this time of year and we spent considerable time admiring the diversity of wildflowers. Our day at sea was the most exciting of the trip and we scored Kittlitz's and Marbled murrelets before even leaving the bay. The highlight of the day, or the trip for that matter, came within ten minutes after arriving at the Chelan Banks. A behemoth of a dark albatross heaved into view and it took just a one second glance through the binoculars before the shout of Short-tailed Albatross went up. The bird drifted out of view, but frantic chumming brought it back in and we enjoyed more than an hour with this rare bird, sometimes as close as thirty feet! The Laysan Albatross were not ignored and of course our outing got us close to hundreds of Whiskered Auklets. Red-legged Kittiwakes also followed the boat, a huge bonus in these waters. All in all another fantastic trip to one of the less visited birding locations in Alaska.*



Up to four Red-legged Kittiwakes following the boat were a big bonus.

June 19th, 2018 Anchorage to Dutch Harbor

We left Anchorage in the late afternoon and arrived in Dutch Harbor right on schedule. After collecting the rental van we drove to the Grand Aleutian Hotel, settled into our comfortable room, and enjoyed our first dinner together at Amelia's.



A vociferous Pacific Wren offered quite a show.

June 20th, 2018 Dutch Harbor: Overland Drive and Summer Bay

With our pelagic outing not scheduled until the following day, we used our first full day on the island to explore the local birding opportunities. We started by the small wetland and lake in town and found the only Least Sandpipers of the trip, a rare breeding bird here. Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches and Lapland Longspurs proved to be abundant during our visit and of course there were nearly always a dozen Bald Eagles in view. We headed to the island's interior and higher elevations along the

Overland Road, stopping at the Agamjik Bay Trailhead. Here, we found nesting American Pipits and several Snow Buntings, but best of all was a nesting pair of Rock Sandpipers that showed extremely well. This species can be difficult to find here during the summer. Further along, another strategic stop netted us an American Dipper and our first Pacific Wren. Before lunch, we explored the coastline a bit, finding Red-breasted Mergansers, Harlequin Ducks, and many Pigeon Guillemots. We had a quick, but tasty lunch at the Signature Cafe before moving on to the Sitka Spruce Park. Here, an extrovert Song Sparrow of the massive Aleutian subspecies came in to the Fox Sparrow call. Walking up to the next set of spruces, we eventually found the Fox Sparrow, here the Sooty subspecies, and enjoyed unparalleled photo opportunities of a Pacific Wren to boot. We headed back through town to spend more time in the Summer Bay area. During the drive there we made several dedicated stops and finally a Rock Ptarmigan came flying in. The bird offered two very close and prolonged flybys. At Summer Bay we scoped a sizeable flock of Harlequin Ducks and discovered a male Barrow's Goldeneye, a bit of a surprise find in the Aleutians. Back at the hotel, we treated ourselves to the Wednesday night seafood buffet.



A pair of Rock Sandpipers showed well on the tundra.

## June 21st, 2018 Dutch Harbor: Pelagic Trip to Chelan Banks and Baby Islands

Due to winds and currents we planned to leave for the pelagic at ten in the morning. This allowed for a leisurely breakfast at eight and then we made our way to the Carl E. Moss small boat harbor. The Miss Alyssa was ready for us to board. We met Jimmer and went through the safety briefing before steaming out of Captains Bay. In the sheltered inshore waters we ticked Pigeon Guillemot, Marbled and Kittlitz's murrelets, and the first Common and Thick-billed murre. Further out, Tufted Puffins were common and we could see at least a half-dozen spouts of distant Humpback Whales. We motored to the Chelan Banks in fairly rough conditions, but all of us were in high spirits. We stopped on the Chelan Banks and prepared some chum. Northern Fulmars drifted in right away and before we even got really started and huge, dark albatross rose into view from the swells. It took a second of a glance before realizing it was indeed the rare Short-tailed Albatross. Frantic scanning and directions ensued as the bird drifted from view, but a short chase with the boat and vigorous chumming brought it back in and for the next hour or so it leisurely followed the boat, giving several close flybys (down to twenty feet at times!) and sat on the water behind the boat for minutes on end. Two or three Laysan Albatross joined, offering a great size comparison.



Laysan Albatross

Surprisingly several Red-legged Kittiwakes also started to follow the boat, a big bonus here, and a handful of Short-tailed Shearwaters rounded out the expected tubenoses. After the Chelan Banks, we headed towards the Baby Islands and had a delicious lunch of beef stew and homemade bread en route. Once we neared the pass it didn't take too long before the first small flocks of Whiskered Auklets burst into the flight. After an hour of following the skittish birds all of us ended up with good views. Other alcids present included Crested and Parakeet auklets, many Ancient Murrelets, and brief Cassin's Auklets. During the return journey we stopped in the Malga Bay and had all three species of cormorants plus some stunning Common Eiders on the shoreline. It took another two hours before we rounded the point and steamed back to port. We were all a bit tired from the bumpy seas, but completely elated with so many rare sightings, what a day! We enjoyed a very late dinner at the Grand Aleutian Hotel before heading for a well-earned night's sleep.



Bald Eagles are abundant in Dutch Harbor.

June 22nd, 2018 Dutch Harbor to Anchorage

We rested a bit and met for breakfast at eight. After breakfast, we had just enough time to drive up to Ballyhoo Hill where clouds obscured most of the view. A Rock Ptarmigan that sat very close, allowing

better views and photo opportunities was most welcome. We headed back to check out, packed up, dropped off the rental, and left Dutch Harbor right on time. It was yet another immensely successful trip and we sincerely hope to see all of you on future trips.



Whiskered Auklet

#### Bird List:

1. Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca*) - three seen in flight Summer Bay
2. Greater Scaup (*Aythya marila*) - seen on lake near Summer Bay
3. Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima*) - great views of several pairs during our pelagic trip as we motored into Amalga Bay
4. Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) - good numbers offshore during the first full day on the island

5. Barrow's Goldeneye (*Bucephala islandica*) - a very rare bird in the Aleutians, but we scoped a male very well before it took off in Summer Bay
6. Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*) - uncommon but seen every day
7. Rock Ptarmigan (*Lagopus muta*) - one bird seen well in flight along road to Summer Bay and during our last morning seen well sitting on Ballyhoo Hill
8. Laysan Albatross (*Phoebastria immutabilis*) - at the Chelan Banks we chummed in at least four birds
9. Short-tailed Albatross (*Phoebastria albatrus*) - the bird of the trip with a juvenile showing for more than an hour down to thirty feet on the Chelan Banks during our pelagic
10. Northern Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*) - common during pelagic trip at Chelan Banks, mainly dark-morph bird with a few light-morphs seen
11. Short-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus tenuirostris*) - a few with especially close views while chumming at Chelan Banks
12. Red-faced Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax urile*) - several seen well during pelagic
13. Pelagic Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*) - numerous during pelagic
14. Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) - several seen well during pelagic
15. Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) - abundant
16. Black Oystercatcher (*Haematopus bachmani*) - seen on rocky shorelines with a pair flying back and forth past the hotel
17. Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) - one at high point in Overland Road
18. Rock Sandpiper (*Calidris ptilocnemis*) - a pair of these scarce nesting birds seen very well along Overland Rd. near trailhead
19. Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*) - two in wetland in town
20. Wilson's Snipe (*Gallinago delicata*) - heard only
21. Common Murre (*Uria aalge*) - numerous during pelagic
22. Thick-billed Murre (*Uria lomvia*) - several seen well during pelagic
23. Pigeon Guillemot (*Cephus columba*) - abundant and seen daily
24. Marbled Murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*) - a pair as we were leaving Captains Bay during pelagic
25. Kittlitz's Murrelet (*Brachyramphus brevirostris*) - difficult to see from shore but up to a half-dozen seen closely at start of pelagic as we were leaving Captains Bay
26. Ancient Murrelet (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*) - dozens of birds between Akutan and Unalga Islands
27. Cassin's Auklet (*Ptychoramphus aleuticus*) - we picked out two birds during pelagic, but both flew off quickly
28. Parakeet Auklet (*Aethia psittacula*) - a single among the large alcid flocks
29. Whiskered Auklet (*Aethia pygmaea*) - we saw hundreds once we reached the pass
30. Crested Auklet (*Aethia cristatella*) - a handful recorded among the large auklet concentrations

31. Horned Puffin (*Fratercula corniculata*) - seen in great numbers during the pelagic and daily from shore
32. Tufted Puffin (*Fratercula cirrhata*) - very common during the pelagic
33. Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) - common
34. Red-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa brevirostris*) - another surprise during the pelagic, this species is rare in the area, but up to four followed us closely while chumming on the Chelan Banks
35. Glaucous-winged Gull (*Larus glaucescens*) - common
36. Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) - common, incredibly large in Alaska
37. Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*) - common
38. Pacific Wren (*Troglodytes pacificus*) - one seen very well singing in full view spruce stand near town
39. American Dipper (*Cinclus mexicanus*) - one seen stream along Overland Rd.
40. American Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*) - seen in the higher tundra along the Overland Rd.
41. Lapland Longspur (*Calcarius lapponicus*) - abundant
42. Snow Bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) - several seen in higher tundra along Overland Road
43. Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) - common
44. Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca*) - one observed singing on the edge of spruce stand
45. Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*) - fairly common
46. Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch (*Leucosticte tephrocotis*) - very common, a large and colorful subspecies
47. Common Redpoll (*Acanthis flammea*) - heard only Sitka Spruce Park

#### Mammals Trip List:

Humpback Whale - many in the bays, including breaching  
 Harbor Porpoise - seen briefly while returning from pelagic  
 Harbor Seal - several peeking from the water  
 Steller's Sea Lion - good views during pelagic  
 Sea Otter - lots  
 Red Fox - Overland Road  
 Arctic Ground Squirrel - common