



# Adak: Aleutian Specialties & Asian Vagrants



Whiskered Auklets Photo Stephan Lorenz

Adak Island is a remote outpost in the central Aleutian Islands, but readily accessible from Anchorage which lies nearly 1,200 miles northeast of Adak. This relatively large Aleutian island, roughly 274 square miles in size, has been accessible to birders since the early 2000s after the closure of a sizeable naval base. Taking advantage of the extensive remaining infrastructure, which includes miles of good roads and comfortable accommodations, we can now explore this

rugged and wild island easily. The island sits amidst the productive confluence of the Bering Sea to the north and Pacific to the south and this rich pelagic environment supports millions of seabirds most notably the range-restricted Whiskered Auklet which we will seek via a short pelagic boat trip. Other marine birds easily seen on Adak include Ancient, Marbled, and Kittlitz’s Murrelets, Laysan Albatross, Short-tailed Shearwater, and a smattering of other alcids. During the spring, Adak Island is also a fantastic place to find migrating Arctic and Yellow-billed Loons, Gyrfalcon, Aleutian Tern, and Common Eiders. The island also hosts an endemic subspecies of Rock Ptarmigan, Rock Sandpiper, Black Oystercatcher, Pacific Wren, Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch, Snow Bunting, and Lapland Longspur. Due to its far-flung westerly location (roughly 445 miles east of Attu Island), Adak Island receives a healthy dose of Eurasian migrants and vagrants with early spring being an ideal time to find scarce shorebirds and waterfowl. In recent years, we have seen a variety of rare visitors to the ABA area during our tours, including Whooper Swan, Taiga and Tundra Bean-Geese, Smew, Tufted Duck, Eurasian Wigeon, Eastern Spot-billed Duck, Long-billed Murrelet, Lesser Sand-Plover, Ruff, Terek Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Wood Sandpiper, Temminck’s Stint, Common Snipe (likely breeds), Eyebrowed Thrush, Eastern Yellow Wagtail, Hawfinch, Rustic Bunting, Brambling and many other Asiatic vagrants are possible. Of course, the number and variety of rare and vagrant species are highly weather dependent, and even a handful of these species would be an exceptional trip, but the potential and unpredictability make for adventurous and exciting daily outings.

TOUR AT A GLANCE...

Day 1	Arrival in Anchorage and welcome dinner Night: Anchorage
Day 2	Anchorage to Adak Island flight Night: Adak
Day 3	Adak Island Night: Adak
Day 4	Adak Island Night: Adak
Day 5	Adak Island Night: Adak
Day 6	Adak Island return flight to Anchorage and tour ends

TOUR IN DETAIL...

**Day 1:** This is an arrival day in Anchorage and we will meet in the evening for a welcome dinner. Time permitting, we may do some local birding in Anchorage.

**Day 2:** We will get ready for a midday flight from the Anchorage airport to Adak Island, a 3-hour journey, and arrive on the island in the mid-afternoon. After settling in, getting our gear ready, we will begin the initial exploration of the island.

**Day 3-5:** Over the course of our three full days here, we explore the main birding spots thoroughly. Some sites that have proven particularly productive in the past will be checked regularly for migrant and vagrant species. We will also follow up on any reports of rare and unusual species. One morning or afternoon, depending on weather, we will take a half-day pelagic boat trip to look for Whiskered Auklets in particular and we may see other pelagic species, but Whiskered Auklets favor narrow island passes where most other pelagic species are scarce. (The pelagic boat tour is weather and availability dependent and while we do everything we can to organize a boat tour we cannot guarantee it.)



**Wood Sandpiper Photo Stephan Lorenz**

Here is a short sample of some of the hotspots we cover during our time on this rugged and scenically stunning island:

Near the main town of Adak lies the Contractor's Marsh and this wetland is excellent for shorebirds and waterfowl. Usually, Common Snipes are present alongside Wilson's Snipe, allowing for great comparisons of these similar species. Pacific Golden-Plovers prefer the mossy flats nearby and Gyrfalcons are often in the vicinity. Some of the vagrant shorebirds here have included Ruff and Wood Sandpiper, plus the open water has attracted Tundra Bean-Goose and Tufted Duck. Nearby, we can find small stands of planted Sitka spruce, ironically named "Adak National Forest" but despite the modest size of these "forests", a number of passerines have been found sheltering here and we will check these spots regularly. Also near town lie a series of

ponds parallel to the airstrip and these are best for waterfowl like Eurasian Wigeon, Tufted Duck, and with great luck Smew.

Further from town lies the large Clam Lagoon, this tidal body of water is home to the largest concentration and diversity of birds on Adak. Kittlitz's and Marbled Murrelets are present in good numbers, waterfowl are along the edges while shorebirds feed on the mudflats. This is also a good area for Aleutian Tern, jaegers, gulls, including Glaucous-winged and Black-headed Gulls. This general area harbors several wetlands and freshwater ponds which we will carefully check. The coastline here also tends to be the most productive for loons, eiders, cormorants, grebes, and other seabirds.

Beyond a ridge covered in low maritime tundra lies Lake Andrew, a vast freshwater lake that occasionally holds waterfowl and loons. From here it is a short journey to the old Loran station on the flanks of Mount Adagdak and this high viewpoint offers good chances for scoping Laysan Albatross and Short-tailed Shearwater, although it is a bit wind dependent. The dense tundra here is also a favored spot for Rock Ptarmigan, although during certain years the species is amazingly abundant and seen everywhere on the island, and cliff faces are favored by Pacific Wrens. In addition to the aforementioned locations, we will also check the harbor areas, various creeks, and valleys where we are sure to find the abundant Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch, Snow Bunting in rockier areas, and Song Sparrow in sheltered spots. The town and buildings often provide shelter for vagrant species and we make sure to explore the various neighborhoods.

For the pelagic outing, we make arrangements to use a small charter fishing boat. Unfortunately, we never know until we get to Adak whether the boat will be available due to factors beyond our control. Weather is also a factor, though we will be there long enough to allow us to get out on one of the days. If we get out, we are able to get very close to Whiskered Auklets that are calling and displaying. The cost of the pelagic tour will be negotiated at the time and you should budget \$400 cash.

**Day 6:** We continue our exploration of Adak and recheck many of the hotspots in the morning to see if anything else has dropped in. We will then prepare for our afternoon flight and return to Anchorage where the tour ends.