



Alaska: Dutch Harbor (4 days)



Laysan Albatross Photo Stephan Lorenz

The port of Dutch Harbor and Unalaska Island offer some of the best birding in the Aleutian Islands of Alaska. Lying on the far eastern end of the island chain, Unalaska and nearby Amaknak Island have a well-developed infrastructure supporting one of the busiest harbors in the United States. This allows for relatively easy access and a comfortable stay in the otherwise wild and rugged Aleutian Islands. While the Whiskered Auklet is the top target species of the tour there is a lot more to see. In fact, we record more species of alcids and seabirds during our Dutch Harbor Tour than any other Alaska tour, and during our pelagic boat tour, we can see Common and Thick-billed Murres, Pigeon Guillemot, Marbled, Kittlitz's and Ancient Murrelets, Cassin's, Crested, Parakeet and Least (rare) Auklets, Horned and Tufted Puffins, Layson and Black-footed Albatross, Short-tailed Shearwater, Northern Fumar, Black-legged Kittiwake, Pelagic and Red-faced Cormorants, scoters, loons, and Common Eider. In recent years, Red-legged Kittiwake has been frequently seen in small numbers and we have also recorded the endangered Short-tailed Albatross several times. The time we spend on land, exploring the

wetlands, tundra, bays, and coastline, will also be filled with birds and Unalaska harbors such notable species as Harlequin Duck, Rock Ptarmigan (*nelsoni* ssp.), Black Oystercatcher, Rock Sandpiper, Pacific Wren, American Dipper, Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch, Common Redpoll, Lapland Longspur, Snow Bunting, and the *unalaschcensis* subspecies of “Sooty” Fox Sparrow. The islands and surrounding pelagic waters are home to many mammals with Sea Otters abundant and Humpback and Minke Whales, Harbor Porpoises, Harbor Seals, Steller’s Sea Lion all frequent. Back on land Red Foxes prowl the tundra and Arctic Ground Squirrels are common. The quaint town of Unalaska also offers two museums, a historic Russian Orthodox church all with a backdrop of dramatic volcanic mountains clad in verdant maritime tundra vegetation – let’s not forget the abundant wildflowers. This diversity of birds, the potential for rarities, and unique scenery make this an ideal tour for first-time visitors or seasoned Alaska birders.

TOUR AT A GLANCE...

Day 1	Meeting at Anchorage Airport for flight to Dutch Harbor Night: Dutch Harbor
Day 2	All day pelagic boat tour to Baby Islands and Chelan Banks Night: Dutch Harbor
Day 3	All day birding on Unalaska Island Night: Dutch Harbor
Day 4	Morning birding and sightseeing around Dutch Harbor, midday flights back to Anchorage where the tour ends

***The exact itinerary will be determined by weather conditions for the pelagic and the captain will let us know what day is best to go out, so the order of the days may be reversed. But having the extra time on Unalaska Island will allow us to take advantage of the best weather window during our stay.**

TOUR IN DETAIL...

Day 1: We will meet at the departure terminal of the Anchorage Airport for the flights to Dutch Harbor, exact flight information will be provided before the tour. Upon arrival, we will make our way to the Grand Aleutian Hotel, a very comfortable place overlooking the harbor, and our home for the next three nights. We will do some initial exploration of the birding hotspots near town and can visit the Sitka Spruce Park, where planted conifers provide an unusual patch of habitat on the island and it is always worth checking if any rarities are around. Pacific Wrens are usually on territory here and the abundant Lapland Longspurs are in evidence. The protected gullies here are also home to Fox and Song Sparrows while the grassy slopes hold singing Savannah Sparrows. During past tours, we have found unusual species like White-winged Crossbill and Black-billed Magpie here. Turning our attention to the open waters of Broad and Iliuliuk Bays we have chances to scope Black Oystercatcher, Marbled and Kittlitz’s Murrelets, Pigeon

Guillemots, Harlequin Ducks, and other alcids, sometimes very close to land. We will enjoy our first dinner in Dutch Harbor and have plenty of chances to sample the excellent, local seafood.

Day 2: The captain will determine the best time for departure for the full-day pelagic to the Baby Islands and the Chelan Banks. We leave from the small boat harbor and will soon see the first murrelets with excellent views of the rare Kittlitz's. As we leave the sheltered waters Northern Fulmars and Black-legged Kittiwakes are common and murrelets and puffins increase in numbers. It takes a few hours to reach the pass between the Baby Islands and in this area of upwelling we can find thousands of Whiskered Auklets, often very close to the boat. The area also holds large numbers of Ancient Murrelets, Horned and Tufted Puffins, Parakeet Auklets alongside smaller numbers of Crested and Cassin's Auklets. Motoring around small islets will give us chances to observe Red-faced Cormorants, Common Eiders, and possible scoters or loons. The Chelan Banks lie further out and form an underwater rise that creates local upwelling. This is the best area for Short-tailed Shearwater and Laysan Albatross, which often come very close to the boat as we chum along. Black-footed Albatross occur in small numbers and we have had good views of the range-restricted Red-legged Kittiwake during the past three tours. With great luck, we may find the huge and endangered Short-tailed Albatross which we have seen several times here. We will have a full lunch or dinner onboard, depending on the timing of the outing.

Day 3: After the exciting pelagic, we turn our attention inland and explore the island for a full day. We will complete a swing past wetlands and then across the Overland Road that will give us access to higher alpine tundra and valleys. Rocky outcrops are excellent places for nesting Snow Buntings and American Pipits while water-logged tundra holds displaying Wilson's Snipe and Least Sandpipers. A pair of territorial Rock Sandpipers is usually present somewhere in the higher country and we will keep an eye out for Rock Ptarmigan here the *nelsoni* ssp. The road along the coast towards Summer Bay will offer more views of the abundant Bald Eagles (often on active nests) and Common Ravens, while stream crossings here can be excellent for American Dipper and Common Redpoll. The extensive lakes and bays hold several species of waterfowl with Mallard, Greater Scaup, Red-breasted Merganser frequent, while Green-winged "Eurasian" Teal, Ring-necked Duck, and even Barrow's Goldeneye have been seen. During June, the maritime tundra is in full bloom and we will make frequent stops to enjoy the diversity of wildflowers.

Day 4: We will do some final birding and sightseeing around Dutch Harbor and then take a midday flight back to Anchorage where the tour ends.