



Alaska: Nome & The Seward Peninsula (5 days)



Bristle-thighed Curlew Photo Stephan Lorenz

Nome is a frontier town along the southwestern corner of the massive Seward Peninsula. The town is exceptionally remote and only accessible by air. The Seward Peninsula itself is dominated by vast areas of trackless wilderness, containing mountains, tundra, wetlands, lagoons, rivers, alder thickets, and small areas of boreal forest. This variety of habitats harbors some of the densest and most diverse birdlife in all of Alaska, a spectacle of waterfowl,

shorebirds, raptors, warblers, sparrows, thrushes, and more that has to be experienced to be believed. The days of the gold rush have faded, although a few small mining operations remain active, and Nome now offers unparalleled access to the Alaskan wilderness. In addition to comfortable accommodations, plenty of restaurants and stores, more than 200 miles of maintained gravel roads offer relatively easy access to all habitats, including far-flung tundra locations. Several species with limited nesting ranges in Alaska and North America can be readily found in Nome, most notably Arctic Loon, Bristle-thighed Curlew, Red-necked Stint, Bar-tailed Godwit, Slaty-backed Gull, Bluethroat, Eastern Yellow and White Wagtails, Northern Wheatear, and Arctic Warbler. Nome also supports vast numbers of migrating and nesting shorebirds with highlights including American and Pacific Golden-Plovers, Black-bellied Plover, Rock Sandpiper, Wandering Tattler, Black Turnstone, Surf-bird, Red Knot, Whimbrel, and Buff-breasted Sandpiper. In recent years our tours have recorded a fine selection of Eurasian shorebird rarities including Great Knot, Gray-tailed Tattler, Lesser Sand-Plover, Ruff, and Wood and Common Sandpipers. The offshore waters, bays, and lagoons also offer great chances for waterfowl and all four species of eiders are possible alongside Harlequin and Long-tailed Ducks, and four species of scoter, including the rare Stejneger's Scoter. Nome is also one of the best places for loons with all five species possible: Red-throated and Pacific are common while Yellow-billed and Arctic Loons occur in small numbers. In the interior, cliffs and rugged mountains support excellent raptor populations with Golden Eagle, Rough-legged Hawk, Short-eared Owl, Gyrfalcon, and Peregrine Falcon all nesting. Lower lying tundra holds plenty of Willow Ptarmigans, while upland areas hold the scarcer Rock Ptarmigan. Away from the coastline, alder thickets are filled with warblers, sparrows, finches, and thrushes including Varied and Gray-cheeked Thrushes, Northern Waterthrush, Orange-crowned, Yellow, Blackpoll, Yellow-rumped and Wilson's Warblers, American Tree, Fox, White-crowned, Golden-crowned and Savannah Sparrows, and Common and Hoary Redpolls. Add to that Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting plus chances for Pine Grosbeak, White-winged Crossbill, Bohemian Waxwing, and even Spruce Grouse for a full Alaskan birding experience. Of course, this vast wilderness supports good numbers of large mammals with Muskox, Moose, Reindeer, Brown "Grizzly" Bear all regularly seen (even Wolf and Lynx are possible) while some of the smaller mammals include American Beaver, North American Otter, and more.

TOUR AT A GLANCE...

Day 1	Meeting at Anchorage Airport for flight to Nome Night: Nome
Day 2	Kougarok Road Night: Nome
Day 3	Teller Road Night: Nome
Day 4	Council Road Night: Nome
Day 5	Safety Sound and flights back to Anchorage

TOUR IN DETAIL...

Day 1: We will meet at the Anchorage Airport from where we will take a late morning or midday flight to Nome. After lunch and checking into our comfortable accommodations in Nome, we will set out on our first foray towards the Nome River mouth and Safety Sound lying towards the east of town. The lagoon and mudflats fringing the Nome River mouth form one of the most productive birding areas close to Nome and this spot has hosted a number of rarities over the years. In recent years we have lucked into Red-necked Stint, Great Knot, Ross's Gull, and others here, but even without the presence of a rarity, this location is always busy with waterfowl and shorebirds. After a fine introduction to the birds of Nome, we will have dinner and prepare for the following full day.

Day 2: We will leave Nome after an early breakfast and drive north into the interior of the Seward Peninsula. The scenic Kougarok Road follows the Nome River Valley before reaching the stunning Salmon Lakes area and crossing the Kougarok Mountains. Our main goal for the day is to reach the nesting grounds of the scarce Bristle-thighed Curlew, which will require a 140-mile round-trip through beautiful wilderness. We will make many stops along the way and the Kougarok Road is excellent for raptors, including nesting Golden Eagle and sometimes Gyrfalcon, plus Merlin and Rough-legged Hawk. The alder thickets and dense shrubs along sheltered slopes support Arctic Warbler and Bluethroat alongside every possible nesting species of warbler, sparrow, and thrush in the Nome area. Before reaching the curlew area we will make a stop at the Pilgrim River where we have chances for Rusty Blackbird and Northern Goshawk. We have to complete at least a one-hour hike to reach the best area for the Bristle-thighed Curlew and the search for this rare bird can range from an hour to several, depending on where the birds are setting up territories. During the journey back to Nome, we will keep an eye out for any mammals.

Day 3: After another early breakfast, we will drive northwest towards the small community of Teller, another 140-mile round trip. The alder thickets and stream crossings not far from Nome are excellent for Northern Shrike and American Dipper. Halfway towards Teller, we will carefully search an area of upland tundra where we can often find nesting Rock Sandpipers and Red Knots. Rock Ptarmigans are more prevalent here, replacing the widespread and common Willow Ptarmigans. This area is also excellent for Northern Wheatear, Snow Bunting, and American Pipit while nearby we can find Pacific and American Golden-Plovers and a small population breeding Black-bellied Plovers. After winding its way through rugged, remote hills, the road ends in the small community of Teller where White Wagtails breed in some years and the nearby spit that juts into the bay is an excellent place for gulls and seabirds with loons, eiders, Horned Puffin, Pigeon Guillemot, and Thick-billed Murre likely. If there is still ice in the bay we have a good chance to observe seals. During the return journey, we will again keep our

eyes open for mammals and the wild tundra along the Teller road is a great place to spot Brown “Grizzly” Bears, Red Fox, and herds of introduced Reindeer.

Day 4: Today we set out east and then northeast as we explore the Council Road thoroughly. This road traverses the greatest diversity of habitats in Nome, including the wetlands and lagoons of Safety Sound, bare, alpine tundra as the road crosses a low mountain pass, wet low-lying tundra, alder thickets along the Solomon River, and even a slice of boreal forest. Starting the day along the Nome River mouth and Safety Sound we will scan the open water for eiders and scoters while scouring the mudflats and shoreline for shorebirds. The highest diversity of both can be found along the shore of the large Safety Lagoon which can hold Lesser Sand-Plover among the more expected shorebirds. During the right wind direction, Sabine’s Gulls can be present in good numbers along with Red and Red-necked Phalaropes, Surfbird, Black Turnstone, and Rock Sandpiper. The lagoon is a haven for Brant and we will carefully search for Emperor Geese, although this species has been scarce in Nome in recent years. The far eastern end of the lagoon is filled with Tundra Swans and this is a good area to search for Arctic Loon, a rare nesting species here. Once we leave the lagoon area we again head into tundra where Gyrfalcon is possible and Northern Wheatear and Snow Bunting occur along a high pass in the road. If time permits we will reach the end of the road where a small stand of boreal forest is accessible. During recent tours, we have found Spruce Grouse, Bohemian Waxwing, Pine Grosbeak, and White-winged Crossbill here, but these species are unpredictable and Boreal Chickadee and Rusty Blackbird are more likely. During the journey back to Nome, we will take our time to scan for mammals and any bird species still missing.

Day 5: After some final birding at the Nome River mouth and at Cape Nome we head back to town to pack up, taking an early afternoon flight back to Anchorage where the tour ends.



White Wagtail Photo Stephan Lorenz