



Alaska 2022: Nome & Denali: Alaska Gold Rush Tour Report

June 6th - June 17th, 2022 (11 days)



Emperor Goose by Stephan Lorenz

Trip report compiled by Tour Leader: Stephan Lorenz

Tour Summary

Our adventure took us from the subarctic in Nome where we explored tundra, wetlands, lagoons, shoreline, and riparian thickets to the vast boreal forest and alpine tundra of the Denali area. We managed excellent views of all Nome specialties, including Emperor Goose, Eurasian Wigeon, Rock Ptarmigan, Bristle-thighed Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit, Black Turnstone, all three jaegers, Sabine's Gull, Aleutian Tern, Arctic Loon, Northern Goshawk, Gyrfalcon, Northern Shrike, Arctic Warbler, Bluethroat, Northern Wheatear, Eastern Yellow Wagtail, and lots of nesting shorebirds, sparrows and warblers. Locally rare species and sightings in Nome included Stejneger's Scoter, Gray-tailed Tattler, and a Brambling. The birding highlights in the Denali area and Fairbanks included Trumpeter Swan, Barrow's Goldeneye, Spruce Grouse, Hudsonian Godwit, Northern Hawk-Owl, Boreal Owl, American Three-toed and Black-backed Woodpecker, Boreal Chickadee, Bohemian Waxwing, White-winged Crossbill, and a beautiful Smith's Longspur. We also saw a good selection of large mammals with Brown Bear, Moose, Reindeer, Thinhorn Sheep, Muskox, and Red Fox all seen well.



Northern Hawk-Owl by Stephan Lorenz



Bristle-thighed Curlew by Stephan Lorenz

Tour in Detail

We met at the Coast Inn in Anchorage for a welcome dinner and after discussing plans for the following day and talking about some logistics, we enjoyed a delicious meal. The next morning we had a leisurely departure to the Anchorage airport where our flight to Nome left on time. We settled into our hotel in Nome and made an initial birding foray along the Council Road towards the productive Nome River Bridge, enjoying an excellent selection of Nome specialty species.

The next day, we spent along the Council Road with stops along Hastings Creek, Cape Nome, and Safety Sound, which as usual was packed to the brim with birds. We traveled as far as the Solomon River, enjoying good views of riparian and tundra species along the way, culminating with a Gyrfalcon on a nest.



Aleutian Tern by Stephan Lorenz

Today we tackled the Kougarok Road which despite some heavy winds was busy with birds. We reached mile seventy-two right around lunchtime and walked up the hill after a picnic lunch. Within fifteen minutes, a Bristle-thighed Curlew flew right over us, although it took some dedicated searching until we eventually found a Bristle-thighed Curlew on the ground. With such success, we drove back towards Nome, recrossing the spectacular wilderness.

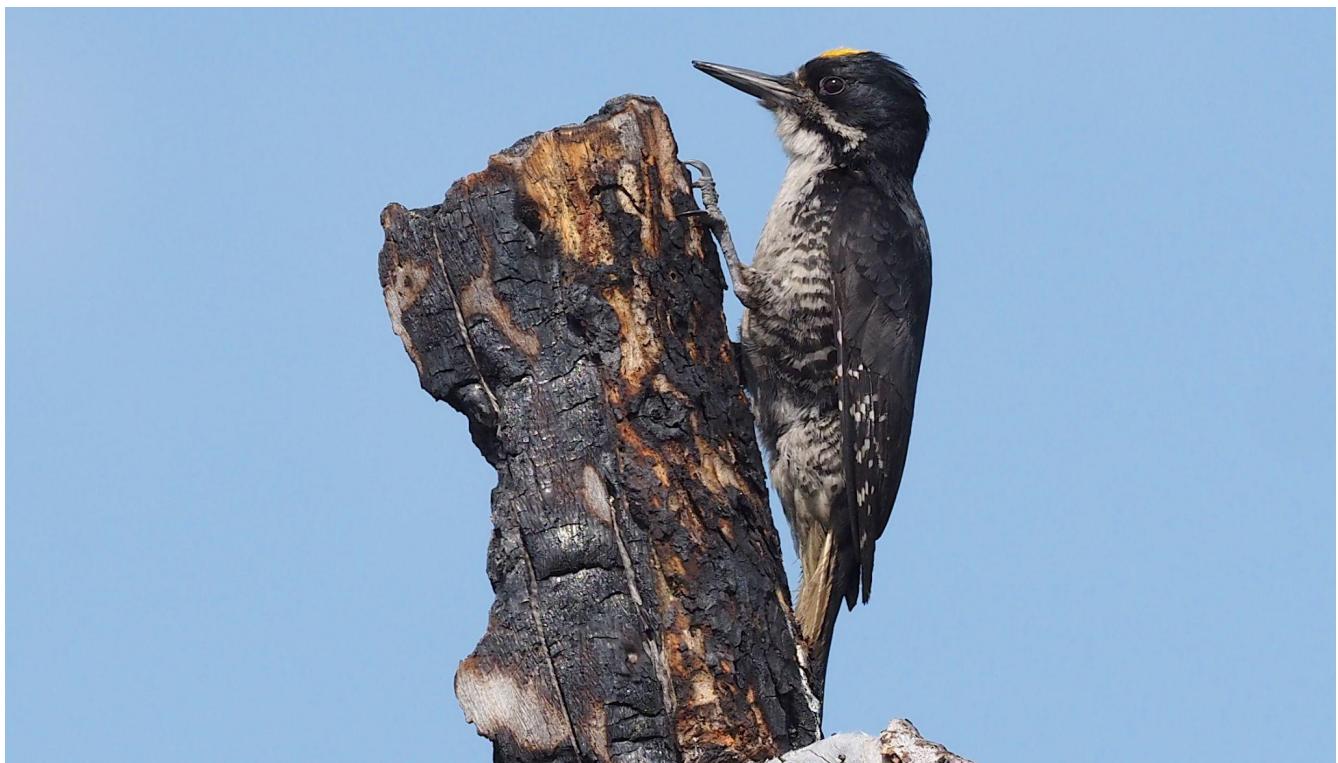


Willow Ptarmigan by Stephan Lorenz

For the final full day in Nome, we traveled northwest towards Teller. We explored some upland tundra where we found Rock Ptarmigan after an extensive search. For the remainder of the day, we slowly birded the tundra along the road, finding many specialty species, including the sought-after Bluethroat and Northern Wheatear. A stretch of tundra holding about forty Long-tailed Jaegers was memorable.

Our final morning in Nome was short, but very productive. We returned to the Nome River and the Hastings Creek area where we finally had good views of an Eastern Yellow Wagtail, the last Nome specialty we had been missing. We also saw our only Brown Bear on the trip here. Another birding group alerted us to the presence of a Stejneger's Scoter and we ended up with great views of this uncommon species as a proper finish to our birding in Nome. The flight back to Anchorage was on time and we enjoyed a delicious seafood dinner in downtown Anchorage.

The following day, we drove from Anchorage to the Denali area with a stop for woodpeckers and Spruce Grouse along the way. We settled into our comfortable rooms with great views over the river and enjoyed a delicious, local dinner.



Black-backed Woodpecker by Stephan Lorenz

We left early for the Denali National Park and spent the rest of the morning traveling forty miles along the park road, seeing many of the iconic mammals of the park. After a picnic lunch, we set out towards Fairbanks where we enjoyed a productive afternoon of birding various habitats. Highlights in Fairbanks included Hammond's Flycatcher (a first for the tour), Bohemian Waxwing, and White-winged Crossbill all topped by an incredible Boreal Owl at a nest.

After such an eventful day, we started with a slightly later continental breakfast and then traveled south and east along the famous Denali Highway. The landscape was incredible and we soon found several boreal specialties new for the list. After a dedicated search, we located a Northern Hawk-Owl that eventually offered great, close views. We reached our lodge after a picnic lunch and settled in.

We spent the day exploring the remainder of the Denali Highway, enjoying many photographic opportunities of several familiar species. In the late afternoon, a walk on the tundra resulted in prolonged studies of a male Smith's Longspur. The following day we returned to Anchorage and had amazing views of Denali along the way. We could even see the peak of North America's highest mountain, a rare sight.



Boreal Owl by Stephan Lorenz

Trip List:

1. Emperor Goose (*Anser canagicus*) - great views of a pair in Nome's Safety Sound
2. Snow Goose (*Anser caerulescens*) - a small flock noted in Nome's Safety Sound
3. Greater White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*) - a handful seen along the Kougarok Rd. in Nome
4. Brant (*Branta bernicla*) - hundreds observed in Nome
5. Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*) - common and widespread in Nome
6. Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) - many seen in the Anchorage area and Fairbanks
7. Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*) - great views of a pair along the Denali Highway

8. Tundra Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*) - abundant in Nome's Safety Sound
9. Northern Shoveler (*Spatula clypeata*) - several seen in Nome and along the Denali Highway
10. Gadwall (*Mareca strepera*) - seen at the Westchester Lagoon in Anchorage
11. Eurasian Wigeon (*Mareca penelope*) - at least two seen well in Nome
12. American Wigeon (*Mareca americana*) - widespread in Nome and the Denali area
13. Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) - seen in Nome and the Denali area
14. Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*) - common and widespread in Nome
15. Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca*) - many seen in Nome and the Denali area of the American ssp.
16. Greater Scaup (*Aythya marila*) - common in Nome and along the Denali Highway
17. Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*) - two seen at Westchester Lagoon in Anchorage
18. Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima*) - numerous around Nome's Safety Sound
19. Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) - seen well in Nome at Cape Nome
20. Surf Scoter (*Melanitta perspicillata*) - small numbers offshore in Nome
21. White-winged Scoter (*Melanitta deglandi*) - several larger flocks offshore in Nome
22. Stejneger's Scoter (*Melanitta stejnegeri*) - a fantastic find the final morning in Nome
23. Black Scoter (*Melanitta americana*) - small numbers offshore in Nome, mainly in flight
24. Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*) - present in small numbers in Nome
25. Bufflehead (*Bucephala albeola*) - three seen well in Nome where the species is uncommon
26. Barrow's Goldeneye (*Bucephala islandica*) - seen very well along the Denali Highway
27. Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*) - a female with ducklings seen on the way to Denali

28. Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*) - frequent in Nome
29. Willow Ptarmigan (*Lagopus lagopus*) - great views of several in Nome and Denali NP
30. Rock Ptarmigan (*Lagopus muta*) - after searching two seen well along Teller Rd. Nome
31. Spruce Grouse (*Canachites canadensis*) - good views of a male in the Sockeye Burn area
32. Horned Grebe (*Podiceps auritus*) - seen well in Fairbanks and along the Denali Highway
33. Red-necked Grebe (*Podiceps grisegena*) - numerous on the Westchester Lagoon in Anchorage
34. Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) - a few seen in the Anchorage area
35. Sandhill Crane (*Antigone canadensis*) - common in Nome, Anchorage, and Fairbanks
36. American Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis dominica*) - breeding plumaged bird on Kougarok Rd.
37. Pacific Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*) - fairly common and widespread in Nome
38. Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) - nesting and displaying in the Nome area and also along the Denali Highway
39. Bristle-thighed Curlew (*Numenius tahitiensis*) - great views of one at mile 70 of the Kougarok Rd. in Nome where it was seen in flight calling and walking on the tundra
40. Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) - seen briefly in Nome
41. Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) - a small flock present at the Nome River bridge
42. Hudsonian Godwit (*Limosa haemastica*) - a single seen in Nome and several at the Westchester Lagoon in Anchorage
43. Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) - singles in Nome
44. Black Turnstone (*Arenaria melanocephala*) - singles in Nome
45. Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) - small numbers were seen in Nome

46. Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*) - seen in Nome where it is uncommon and along the Denali Highway
47. Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*) - a single observed in Nome
48. Semipalmated Sandpiper (*Calidris pusilla*) - common and widespread in Nome
49. Western Sandpiper (*Calidris mauri*) - numerous in Nome especially at the Nome River mouth
50. Wilson's Snipe (*Gallinago delicata*) - calling and displaying in Nome and the Denali Highway
51. Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*) - common in Nome and along the Denali Highway
52. Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularius*) - the best views were along the Denali Highway
53. Gray-tailed Tattler (*Tringa brevipes*) - an excellent find that showed well at Hastings Creek Nome
54. Wandering Tattler (*Tringa incana*) - mainly heard along rivers in Nome
55. Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*) - one seen well at Westchester Lagoon, Anchorage
56. Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*) - seen well in Nome, Anchorage, and the Denali Highway
57. Pomarine Jaeger (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) - seen well in Nome, the largest jaeger
58. Parasitic Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) - good views of a single bird in Nome
59. Long-tailed Jaeger (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) - up to forty individuals of this elegant bird at once along Teller Rd. in Nome was memorable
60. Common Murre (*Uria aalge*) - seen well off Cape Nome
61. Tufted Puffin (*Fratercula cirrhata*) - one seen distantly offshore in Nome
62. Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) - any seen at Cape Nome and the Nome River Mouth
63. Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini*) - a small group settled in right in front of us at the Nome River Mouth

64. Bonaparte's Gull (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*) - seen well at Westchester Lagoon in Anchorage
65. Short-billed Gull (*Larus brachyrhynchus*) - abundant in Nome and the Anchorage area
66. Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) - singles in Nome and Anchorage
67. Glaucous-winged Gull (*Larus glaucescens*) - a few seen in Nome and Anchorage
68. Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*) - common in Nome
69. Aleutian Tern (*Onychoprion aleuticus*) - many good views in Nome
70. Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*) - common in Nome, Anchorage, and the Denali area
71. Red-throated Loon (*Gavia stellata*) - widespread in Nome with nesting pairs on many ponds
72. Arctic Loon (*Gavia arctica*) - seen well along Council Rd. in Nome
73. Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*) - common in Nome
74. Pelagic Cormorant (*Urile pelagicus*) - seen off Cape Nome
75. Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) - several good views throughout Nome including one on a nest
76. Northern Harrier (*Circus hudsonius*) - seen well along the Denali Highway
77. Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) - great views of a bird flying overhead with prey along the Kougarok Rd. in Nome
78. Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) - one seen at the Westchester Lagoon in Anchorage and along the Denali Highway
79. Northern Hawk Owl (*Surnia ulula*) - after some patient searching we ended up with great views of one along the Denali Highway
80. Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*) - seen well in Nome
81. Boreal Owl (*Aegolius funereus*) - the detour to Fairbanks was very worthwhile to see this difficult bird on a nest

82. Belted Kingfisher (*Megaceryle alcyon*) - seen in flight at the Westchester Lagoon in Anchorage
83. American Three-toed Woodpecker (*Picoides dorsalis*) - a male seen well along the way to Denali
84. Black-backed Woodpecker (*Picoides arcticus*) - great views of a male along the way to Denali
85. Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) - a single bird was chasing the Northern Goshawk in Nome and another was seen along the Denali Highway
86. Gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolus*) - great views on an active nest along the Council Rd. in Nome
87. Alder Flycatcher (*Empidonax alnorum*) - seen well between Anchorage and Denali NP
88. Hammond's Flycatcher (*Empidonax hammondi*) - two seen well in Fairbanks
89. Northern Shrike (*Lanius borealis*) - good views on the edge of town in Nome
90. Canada Jay (*Perisoreus canadensis*) - seen well in Denali NP
91. Black-billed Magpie (*Pica hudsonia*) - widespread and common in Anchorage and the Denali area
92. Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) - common and widespread
93. Boreal Chickadee (*Poecile hudsonicus*) - seen well along the Denali Highway
94. Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*) - seen in Nome, Anchorage, and Fairbanks
95. Violet-green Swallow (*Tachycineta thalassina*) - good views in the Denali area
96. Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*) - seen in Nome, Denali area, and Fairbanks
97. Cliff Swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) - Nome, Fairbanks, and Denali near bridges
98. Arctic Warbler (*Phylloscopus borealis*) - great views along the Kougarok Rd. in Nome
99. Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Corthylio calendula*) - seen well along the Denali Highway
100. European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) - seen in the Anchorage area

101. Varied Thrush (*Ixoreus naevius*) - seen in Nome and the Denali area
102. Gray-cheeked Thrush (*Catharus minimus*) - common in Nome and along the Denali Highway
103. Hermit Thrush (*Catharus guttatus*) - heard only in Nome
104. American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) - common and widespread
105. Bluethroat (*Luscinia svecica*) - great views eventually of one along the Teller Rd. in Nome
106. Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) - excellent views of a pair along the Teller Rd. in Nome
107. Bohemian Waxwing (*Bombycilla garrulus*) - a pair seen in Fairbanks
108. Eastern Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla tschutschensis*) - seen well along the Council Rd. in Nome
109. American Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*) - great views along the Teller Rd. in Nome
110. Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*) - the rarity was on territory along the Council Rd. in Nome
111. Common Redpoll (*Acanthis flammea*) - common in Nome and the Denali area
112. White-winged Crossbill (*Loxia leucoptera*) - a single was seen well in Fairbanks
113. Lapland Longspur (*Calcarius lapponicus*) - abundant in Nome
114. Smith's Longspur (*Calcarius pictus*) - seen well at the eastern end of the Denali Highway
115. American Tree Sparrow (*Spizelloides arborea*) - common in Nome and along the Denali Highway
116. Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca*) - common in Nome
117. Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*) - seen along the Denali Highway
118. White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) - common throughout
119. Golden-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*) - seen well in Nome
120. Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) - common in Nome

121. Lincoln's Sparrow (*Melospiza lincolnii*) - heard only along the Denali Highway
122. Northern Waterthrush (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) - common in Nome and the Denali area
123. Orange-crowned Warbler (*Leiothlypis celata*) - widespread and common
124. Yellow Warbler (*Setophaga petechia*) - seen well in Nome several times
125. Blackpoll Warbler (*Setophaga striata*) - the best views were along the Denali Highway
126. Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Setophaga coronata*) - seen well along the Denali Highway
127. Townsend's Warbler (*Setophaga townsendi*) - heard only in Fairbanks
128. Wilson's Warbler (*Cardellina pusilla*) - seen in Nome

Mammals List:

1. Snowshoe Hare (*Lepus americanus*)
2. American Beaver (*Castor canadensis*)
3. Arctic Ground Squirrel (*Spermophilus parryii*)
4. Red Squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)
5. Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)
6. Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos*)
7. Spotted Seal (*Phoca largha*)
8. Moose (*Alces americanus*)
9. Reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus*)
10. Muskox (*Ovibos moschatus*)
11. Thinhorn Sheep (*Ovis dalli*)



Muskox by Stephan Lorenz