



USA - Alaska: Dutch Harbor and the Whiskered Auklet 2024

June 20th - 24th, 2024 (5 days)



Whiskered Auklet by Stephan Lorenz

Trip report compiled by Tour Leader: Stephan Lorenz

Tour Summary

Besides a flight delay when trying to leave Dutch Harbor and Unalaska, the tour was a resounding success with one of the best days out at sea we had in a long time. We spent ten hours at sea motoring from Dutch Harbor to the Baby Islands where we saw many Whiskered Auklets among 11 other species of alcids. We also bumped into a flock of 50,000 Short-tailed Shearwaters that streamed past the boat for minutes on end. We chanced upon a bonus Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel that showed close to the boat. The Chelan Banks were productive and we had three dozen Laysan and Black-footed albatross and then were inundated by Red-legged Kittiwakes with a conservative estimate of 40 birds, many of which gave incredibly close views. On land, we found a wide variety of shorebirds, waterfowl, and passerines with Harlequin Duck, Rock Ptarmigan, Black Oystercatcher, Rock Sandpiper, Red-throated Loon, Red-faced Cormorant, American Dipper, vagrant Brambling and White-winged Crossbills. Marine mammals were plentiful and we saw Harbor Seal, Steller Sea Lion, Harbor Porpoise, and Humpback Whale.



Red-legged Kittiwake by Stephan Lorenz

Tour in Detail

Our midday flight from Anchorage to Dutch Harbor left right on time and we arrived at the small airport on Amaknak Island. We collected the vehicle and then checked in. A short birding outing before dinner was productive and we found a Golden-crowned Sparrow and the first Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches. We observed unusually high numbers of Marbled Murrelets in bays and assumed that the late spring and calm conditions contributed to what we observed.



Laysan Albatross by Stephan Lorenz

After a leisurely breakfast, we transferred to the small boat harbor where we boarded the Miss Alyssa for our day on the water. We had incredible luck with the weather with calm conditions throughout the day. The birding started right away in Unalaska Bay where we found many alcids, most notably the only Thick-billed Murre of the day, and countless Marbled Murrelets plus many Kittlitz's Murrelets. We made a small detour into Malga Bay of Unalga Island where we had close studies of Common Eider and Red-faced Cormorants. Once we reached the vicinity of the Baby Islands things started to heat up and we quickly found small numbers of Whiskered Auklets, some of which showed relatively well close to the boat. An enormous flock of Short-tailed Shearwaters was moving north, truly impressive as we motored among hundreds of birds. We also caught up with most other alcid species here, notably Crested and Parakeet Auklets and at the last chance a Cassin's Auklet flew past. As we motored away from the islands we chanced upon a Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel resting on the water, a rare find for this trip. We reached the Chelan Banks mid-afternoon and were greeted by a single Red-legged Kittiwake that passed over high above us. Fortunately, a bird returned, and after we threw out some chum at least two dozen came in, the highest number we have ever recorded here. The Red-legged Kittiwakes stayed with the boat for about an hour, diving in among the Northern Fulmars and Short-tailed Shearwaters. Our chumming efforts soon attracted several albatross and we finished with nearly twenty Laysan and a dozen Black-footed behind the boat. We gave chumming a break and enjoyed a well-earned lunch on board before turning for home.

We spent an enjoyable day on land birding around Dutch Harbor and Unalaska Island. We found Rock Ptarmigan, Black Oystercatcher, Rock Sandpiper, a surprise Red-throated Loon, and a vagrant Brambling. For the last full day, we spent time in the museum and the following day added locally scarce White-winged Crossbill to the list. We finally left the island in the afternoon.



Rock Sandpiper by Stephan Lorenz

Trip List (57 species): <https://ebird.org/tripreport/254233>



Black Oystercatcher by Stephan Lorenz



Fox Sparrow by Stephan Lorenz