



ALASKA
THE LAST FRONTIER
JUNE 2 – 15, 2024
ST. PAUL ISLAND PRE-TOUR
MAY 29 – JUNE 2, 2024

Main Tour

Price: \$6895 per person
Based on double occupancy
\$1915 single room supplement

St. Paul Pre-tour

Price: \$3795 per person
Based on double occupancy
\$730 single room supplement

Guide: Nathan Goldberg

Maximum group size is 7 participants

Check out the trip website here: redhillbirding.com/alaska

To register, fill out the booking form here: redhillbirding.com/bookingform

Welcome to the last frontier of North American birding! We are excited to begin our adventures to Alaska at Red Hill Birding. The Great Land (Aleut translation of Alyeska) is like nowhere else in the United States both in terms of immensity and abundant wildlife. We will enjoy spectacular scenery and mammals, all while seeking out some of North America's most-wanted birds.

Our survey of Alaska begins with a pre-trip to St. Paul Island. Located in the heart of the Bering Sea and this largest of the Pribilof Islands will be our base for three nights. We will busy ourselves seeking out nesting seabirds (over 200,000 nest on the island's cliffs!), shorebirds, and if we are lucky, an Asian vagrant or two. It is also home to the world's largest concentration of breeding Northern Fur Seals, which is sight not to be missed.

The main tour is made up of three parts. Part one will include time around Anchorage and the nearby Kenai Peninsula. Here we will delight in the birds of the boreal forests and maritime Alaska. A boat trip out to the Kenai Fjords National Park will be a tour highlight for birds and mammals. For part two, we will fly north to the town of Nome on the Seward Peninsula. For birders, Nome is a must-visit location for its unique birds, iconic mammals, and rugged landscapes. We will devote three days to exploring this region. Finally, our tour will visit Utqiagvik (formerly Barrow) to relish in the land of the midnight sun. The northernmost city in the United States, we will be surrounded by tundra and wetlands full of shorebirds and waterfowl busy during the short breeding season. Bordered by the Arctic Ocean to our north, we will also spend time sea watching. If we are lucky, a certain all-white bear might make an appearance.

For the main tour, we will stay at one location each in Seward, Nome, Utqiagvik, and Anchorage. On this tour, internal flights are necessary to reach Nome and Utqiagvik, and to St. Paul if you are joining the pre-trip. (*See pricing details for note on internal flight cost details*). Anchorage will serve as our hub for these flights. The lodging on this tour is comfortable considering the remoteness of the locations we are visiting. We are partnering with hotels to that have history of working with birders.

It is an impossible task to even skim the surface of potential bird highlights for this tour. In Seward and Anchorage, we will be on the lookout for Kittlitz's Murrelet, Horned and Tufted Puffin, Red-faced Cormorant, Parakeet Auklet, Red-necked Grebe, Spruce Grouse, Chestnut-backed Chickadee and Pine Grosbeak. In Nome, we will search for Willow and Rock Ptarmigan, Pacific and Arctic Loon, Long-tailed and Parasitic Jaeger, Bristle-thighed Curlew, Pacific Golden Plover, Aleutian Tern, Gyrfalcon, Arctic Warbler, Bluethroat, White Wagtail and much more, including many breeding shorebirds. In Utqiagvik, we will look for King, Steller's and Spectacled Eiders, Yellow-billed Loon, Slaty-backed Gull, Sabine's Gull, Pomarine Jaeger, Red Phalarope, Red-necked Stint, Snowy Owl and Hoary Redpoll.

ST. PAUL ISLAND PRE-TOUR ITINERARY

Day 1, Wed, May 29. Arrival day for St. Paul extension. Night: Anchorage

Today is a dedicated arrival day into Anchorage for those joining the extension. Although there is no scheduled birding on the day, it will be hard not to notice you are in a different world even at your hotel. A quick check of Lake Spenard (walking distance from hotel) could yield Red-necked Phalarope, Red-necked Grebe, Barrow's Goldeneye, and more. We will gather in the evening for an orientation and a welcome dinner.

Day 2, Thu, May 30. Flight to St. Paul Island and evening birding. Night: St. Paul

After some morning birding around the hotel, we will board our flight to St. Paul Island. After landing and checking in to our hotel, we will get our first chance for some birding around the island, nicknamed "The Galapagos of the North" due to its biological richness. Some common birds we will keep an eye out for include Harlequin Duck, King Eider, Rock Sandpiper, Lapland Longspur, and the Aleutian Islands subspecies (*umbrina*) of Gray-crowned Rosy Finch. If time allows, we will also have our first visit with one of the Northern Fur Seal colonies closest to town.

Days 3-4, Fri-Sat, May 31 – Jun 1. Full days birding St. Paul Island. Nights: St. Paul

We will take the next two days to fully explore the island. Our days will be spent birding in the morning after breakfast, taking lunch back in town, and birding again in the evenings until dinner. The option to head back out after dinner will often be a possibility. We will be birding in stark, but beautiful landscape of open tundra, marshes, lakes, seaside cliffs, and open ocean.

The main draw to St. Paul Island is the seabird colonies, where we hope to find up to 8 nesting alcid species, including Parakeet, Least, and Crested Auklets, Thick-billed Murre, and both Tufted and Horned Puffins. Other highlights amongst the cliffs include Red-faced and Pelagic Cormorants, Northern Fulmar and Red-legged Kittiwake. Scanning the Bering Sea could yield Pigeon Guillemot, Ancient Murrelet and Short-tailed Shearwater. Moving to the interior of the island, we will explore, wetlands, marshes and arctic tundra amidst the rugged landscape of rocky hills and ridges. We will run into expected breeders like Snow Bunting and the Pribilof Island subspecies (*alascensis*) of Pacific Wren, while the marshes can be home to many breeding ducks including Green-winged (European) Teal, and Northern Pintail. We could even run into Steller's Eider! More than 60 species of shorebirds have been recorded on St. Paul and we will be looking for breeding and migrant shorebirds like Semipalmated Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit, and Pacific Golden-Plover. We will also be on the lookout for rare shorebirds like Terek Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper and Common Snipe.

On the forefront of everyone's mind is the potential for an Asian/European vagrant to make an appearance. Late May and early June can be a good time for spring migrant overshoots to be present on the island. We will have a local guide for the entirety of the trip that knows the best places to check and will have access quick updates regarding rare birds on the island. Some rarities that have been

recorded over the years include Eyebrowed Thrush, Gray-streaked Flycatcher, Siberian Rubythroat, Olive-backed Pipit, Hawfinch, and many others.

Day 5, Sun, Jun 2. Flight back to Anchorage and start of main tour. Night: Anchorage

We will have a final morning of birding the island. We might check the seabird colonies again or follow up on any missing targets or rarities. In the afternoon after lunch, we will board our flights and return to the mainland where we will meet the rest of our group for the start of main tour.

MAIN TOUR ITINERARY

Day 1, Sun, Jun 2. Flights to Anchorage; start of main tour. Night: Anchorage

Today is a dedicated arrival day for main tour participants and an arrival day for those coming in from the pre-tour to St. Paul Island. Although there is no scheduled birding on the day, it will be hard not to notice you are in a different world even at your hotel. A quick check of Lake Spenard (walking distance from hotel) could yield Red-necked Phalarope, Red-necked Grebe, Barrow's Goldeneye, and more. We will gather in the evening for an orientation and a welcome dinner with the just-returned St. Paul pre-tour group. They will surely whet our appetite for Alaskan birding.

Day 2, Mon, Jun 3. Birding Anchorage area. Night: Anchorage

After breakfast, we will spend the day exploring Anchorage. Today will be at a relaxed pace and allow us to soak in some of the wonderful local birds and beautiful scenery of the Cook Inlet region. We will visit nearby marshes and boreal forests that are home to Red-necked Grebe, Hudsonian Godwit, Black-backed and American Three-toed Woodpeckers, Spruce Grouse, Boreal Chickadee and more. If we hear any reports of nearby Northern Hawk-Owls, we will make a concerted effort find them.

Day 3, Tue, Jun 4. Transfer to Seward. Night: Seward

From our hotel in Anchorage, we will load up the vans to make the drive to Seward alongside the Turnagain Arm before cutting south on the scenic Seward Highway. The scenery will be spectacular and as we veer south, we will see the forest change with taller Sitka Spruce and Western Hemlocks beginning to dominate in a lush environment more typical of the temperate rainforests of southeastern Alaska. We will have multiple stops to bird along the way to look for new birds unique to this area for the tour including Rufous Hummingbird, Steller's (Coastal) Jay, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, American Dipper, and Fox (Sooty) Sparrow. We will arrive in the afternoon to check in and unpack before enjoying a wonderful meal near our hotel in the coastal town of Seward.

Day 4, Wed, Jun 5. Boat trip to Kenai Fjords National Park. Night Seward

A highly anticipated day on the itinerary, we will spend a full day birding and wildlife watching aboard a boat exploring the far reaches of the Kenai Fjords National Park. With good weather, the trip is 9 hours long, and takes us to the remote Northwestern Fjord. Heading out on Resurrection Bay, we will look for Surf and White-winged Scoters, Common Murre, Pigeon Guillemot, Marbled Murrelet, and Pelagic Cormorant. Once in the glacier waters outside of Resurrection Bay, the highlight will be thousands of seabirds including Parakeet and Rhinoceros Auklets, Tufted and Horned Puffins, Black-legged Kittiwake, Red-faced Cormorant, and much more. We will keep a sharp eye open for the elusive Kittlitz's Murrelet, which is a big target for the trip. In more open water off the national park, we have a chance at some true pelagic species like Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel, and Sooty Shearwater. Marine life abounds in this region, and we have good chances of seeing Humpback Whale, Orca, Dall's Porpoise, and Steller's Sea Lion. Back in sheltered waters, the antics of the playful Sea Otters provide entertainment. The scenery and birding should be about as stunning as it gets on this tour. Lunch will be provided aboard, and we will have our dinner back on dry land in Seward.

Day 5, Thu, Jun 6. Seward to Anchorage. Night: Anchorage

After breakfast at the hotel, we will take our time birding around the coast of Seward before returning north to Anchorage. Birding around Seward, we hope to catch up with any local species we might have missed including Black Oystercatcher, Wandering Tattler, and Varied Thrush. We will leisurely make our way north for the night in Anchorage. Some highlights on the drive back could include Trumpeter Swan, White-winged Crossbill, Golden-crowned Sparrow, Pine Grosbeak, and Wilson's Warbler. We will have an evening to re-pack and recharge before the next leg of our journey.

Day 6, Fri, Jun 7. Anchorage to Nome. Night: Nome

After breakfast, we will load up and take our scheduled flight to the Seward Peninsula and the small town of Nome. After check-in and picking up our van, we will load up and make our way to a nearby afternoon destination, such as the Nome River mouth. Some potential highlights of the afternoon could include Bar-tailed Godwit, Long-tailed Jaeger, Aleutian Tern, Pacific Loon, and Eastern Yellow Wagtail. We will end the evening in town and enjoy a meal together in preparation for some of the best birding of the trip.

Days 7-9, Sat-Mon, Jun 8-10. Full days birding Nome. Nights: Nome

We will devote three full days for and exploring and birding Nome. The region comprises tundra, upland grasslands with rocky outcroppings, alder thickets, and rugged coastline. Birding in the area is accessible by a few long, dirt roads that connect Nome to other towns. We will be birding long stretches of Council Road, Kougarok Road, the Nome-Teller Highway, all legendary birding roads, as well as the town of Nome itself. We will also spend time on the watching the sea in hopes of spotting eiders, Yellow-billed Loon, Emperor Goose, Brant, and others. Where we bird will depend on conditions, current sightings, and target species.

Highlights for our time in Nome are numerous. Some of the birds we hope to find include Arctic Loon, Willow and Rock Ptarmigan, Long-tailed and Parasitic Jaeger, Pacific Golden-Plover, Bristle-thighed Curlew, Gyrfalcon, Bluethroat, Arctic Warbler, White Wagtail, Northern Wheatear, and Hoary Redpoll. We will of course be on the lookout for rarer birds and vagrants, such as Red-necked Stint and Brambling. Most of our time will be spent birding the roadside, but there will be one longer (~3 hour) hike off-trail to search for the rare breeding Bristle-thighed Curlew. They have a limited breeding range, and this hike gives us the best chance to see this species. Mammals are also a big draw in Nome and we hope to find Moose, Reindeer, Muskox, and Brown “Grizzly” Bear. We even have a shot at rarer mammals such as Canada Lynx and Gray Wolf.

Day 10, Tue, June 11. Morning birding in Nome and transfer to Anchorage. Night: Anchorage

We will have a final morning in Nome to explore near town and/or search for any missing targets we might still have. Possible locations include town, the Nome River mouth and Cape Nome. After lunch and checking out, we will take an early afternoon flight back to Anchorage. We will have time in the evening to unwind and re-pack before dinner.

Day 11, Wed, Jun 12. Anchorage to Utqiagvik. Night: Utqiagvik

After breakfast, we will take a flight to the far northern town of Utqiagvik, which will be our home for the next two nights. Snow Buntings will greet us on arrival and maybe a Snowy Owl will be seen on the outskirts of town, or a Red Phalarope spinning on a newly opened pool of water. It’s a different world up here. In the afternoon, we will head out birding in a similar fashion as we did in Nome. A few dirt roads leading out of town can be productive for numerous high-arctic specialties, including Spectacled and Steller’s Eiders, Pomarine Jaeger, Lapland Longspur, and many breeding shorebird species. We will keep an eye out for vagrants like Little Stint.

Day 12, Thu, June 13. Full day birding Utqiagvik

A full “day” birding where the sun never fully sets! We will spend the morning birding the vast tundra and beaches surrounding the town, including visiting as far up Point Barrow as we can get, the northernmost point in United States. Birding can be fantastic, and we will continue to look for specialties like King Eider, Buff-breasted, Baird’s and White-rumped Sandpipers, American Golden Plover, Sabine’s Gull, Red-throated and Yellow-billed Loons, Rough-legged Hawk, and Short-eared Owl. We will also be on the lookout for rare mammals like Polar Bear and Walrus. Rare birds are a possibility, including vagrants like Redwing and the most sought-after gull in the arctic, the Ross’s Gull. We will take lunch and dinner in the town of Utqiagvik and the opportunity for birding after dinner will be possible.

Day 13, Fri, June 14. Morning birding Utqiagvik and transfer to Anchorage. Night: Anchorage

We will have a final morning to bird before packing up and catching an afternoon flight to Anchorage. We might visit the Arctic Ocean for any migrating birds like Common Eider or Black-legged Kittiwake, or we might visit the tundra again to search for any birds we have missed and to soak in the sheer number and diversity of ducks and shorebirds that call this place home for a short breeding season

window. In Anchorage, we will have time to pack and enjoy a final meal together as a group, where we can enjoy recounting our fresh memories of the trip.

Day 14, Sat, June 15. Departure from Anchorage

Today is a dedicated travel day out of Anchorage. You may plan your departure for any time, and there will be a free shuttle to the airport. Safe travels and we hope to see you again soon!

IMPORTANT NOTES

Contact and registration information

To sign up, each participant should complete the [booking form](#). Once we receive the form, we will send you information about paying the trip deposit. If you have any questions before registering, please contact the office at info@redhillbirding.com.

Timing

The main tour will begin in Anchorage, Alaska on the evening of **Sunday, June 2, 2024, at the Coastal Inn at Lake Hood**. This is a scheduled arrival day with no planned birding, but we might do a bit of birding around town if arrivals are in at a reasonable hour. If those arriving miss any evening orientation due to late flights, there will be a secondary orientation in the morning. There is a free shuttle to the Coastal Inn at Lake Hood. You are responsible for getting yourself to the hotel. We will be contact with more information after sign-up. The main tour ends in Anchorage, Alaska on **Saturday June 15, 2024**. This is a dedicated departure day, and any flights can be scheduled for anytime.

The St. Paul Island pre-tour will begin in Anchorage, Alaska on the evening of **Wednesday, May 29, 2024, at the Coastal Inn at Lake Hood**. This is a scheduled arrival day with no planned birding, but we might do a bit of birding around town if arrivals are in at a reasonable hour. If those arriving miss any evening orientation due to late flights, there will be a secondary orientation in the morning. There is a free airport shuttle to the Coastal Inn at Lake Hood. You are responsible for getting yourself to the hotel. We will be contact with more information after sign-up. The St. Paul Island pre-tour ends in Anchorage, Alaska on **Sunday June 2, 2024, at the Coastal Inn at Lake Hood**. For those not joining the main tour, we will arrange an extra night for you at the Coastal Inn on June 2 and you can schedule your flights for any time on June 3, 2024. There are free shuttles to the airport from the Coastal Inn at Lake Hood.

Physical difficulty

This trip is **physically moderate**. While much birding will be done from roads and other easily accessible places, we will have some more strenuous hikes. The hike for the Bristle-thighed Curlew is strenuous and rather steep. At a birder's pace the hike will take 3-4 hours, which is around 2-3 miles round trip, depending on where the bird is located. There will be an option to opt out of this hike.

Other hikes won't be as lengthy or steep, but terrain off the roads may be uneven and include obstacles like thick grass hummocks, fallen logs, and rocks. Walking sticks/trekking poles are recommended if balance is an issue. Everywhere we hike, there is the potential for wet ground and we will at times be hiking through wet areas.

Our all-day boat tour of the Kenai Fjords can cross some rougher water, especially on the way back to Seward. Medication is recommended if you are prone to suffering sea sickness and a good sense of balance is helpful onboard.

Pace

The **pace** of the trip is **moderate**. The days on this trip will be long. A typical day will have us up early birding after breakfast (around 6 or 7 am) and we will often be in the field all day. We try to take lunches in the field to maximize our time. Dinner will usually be around 7 pm (dinners on St. Paul Island will be earlier) and we will have the option of continued birding after dinner on most nights. In places like Nome or Utqiagvik, that can mean potentially staying out until after 10 pm.

There will be the opportunity to opt out of certain hikes or excursions by staying back at the hotel or by the van when we are birding on non-travel days. You may also opt-out of our all-day boat trip to the Kenai Fjords.

Price

The price of the main tour is **\$6895*** per person and the single room supplement is **\$1915**. The price for the St. Paul pre-trip **\$3795*** and the single room supplement is **\$730**. These prices **include** all meals (excluding alcoholic beverages) from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 14 (Dinner on Day 1 to Dinner on Day 5 for St. Paul pre-trip); all transportation and accommodation during that period (except airport transfers); an expert Red Hill Birding guide with a scope and audio equipment; an additional local guide on St. Paul for the pre-trip; all park entrance and usage fees; and a bound checklist to keep track of sightings during the trip. It **does not include** alcoholic beverages, travel insurance, private airport transfers, optional activities, snacks, laundry, tips (apart from meals), or other items of a personal nature.

The trip will also include the cost of internal flights, but they are currently **NOT included in this price. **We will send a separate invoice for the cost of internal flights once we get closer to the date and are able to price the flight costs accurately.** The costs for these flights will be available no later than 6 months in advance of the trip.*

A deposit of **\$1200** per person (**\$750** per person for St. Paul pre-trip) and the submission of the [booking form](#) will secure your place on this tour. Upon receiving your booking form, we will send you deposit details. **Final payment is due by December 29, 2023.** We accept payment by Zelle, check, and bank transfer. We also accept payment by credit card with an additional 3.1% processing fee.

Hotels

Accommodations are comfortable throughout the main tour. Accommodations are somewhat basic on St. Paul Island with shared bathrooms, but still very comfortable. Generally, there will be free wireless internet. We favor hotels that are convenient to our birding sites whenever possible.

Photography

The **photographic opportunities** are **excellent**. The open nature of arctic habitat lends itself well to bird photography, although it is more difficult in the forests in coastal Alaska. Many birds in the Arctic allow for close approach and the window of time for good lighting is greatly prolonged due to the length of day. Although this is primarily a birding tour and we will not be making special accommodations for photographers, this is an excellent part of the country for bird photography and any photographers in the group will go home with many excellent images.

Weather

The weather will be quite varied on this tour. Temperatures in the mid 30s to 40s is the norm for St. Paul, as is the potential for rain and gusty winds. Highs on the mainland can range from lows in the 30s and high temperatures in the low 70s. Rain is possible throughout the trip and even a chance of snow in more northern regions. In Utqiagvik lows can reach the low 30s but be even colder (20s) with windchill.

Packing considerations

Preparation for wet and potentially cold weather is key. High quality rain jacket and rain pants will be crucial for comfort. Waterproof hiking boots, and rubber boots (or NEOS overshoes) will be essential for enjoyment on this tour, as we will at times be walking through wet areas to search for birds. We will let you know when rubber boots should be brought for the day. Layers are important to keeping warm in Alaska. Good, warm base layers, mid-layers and a warm (preferably windproof) jacket, gloves, and a winter hat will be important. Comfortable but sturdy pants that can dry quickly are helpful and easier to maneuver in when getting in and out of rain pants.

In terms of gear, apart from the usual binoculars, hat, field guide, etc., it is important to bring a flashlight or (preferably) a head lamp. Trekking poles can be helpful for our walks, especially on uneven trails. Sunscreen is necessary and bug repellent is good to bring, even though biting insects are rarely a problem as most have not emerged this early in the season. A refillable water bottle is a good item to have, and for coffee/tea drinkers, a travel mug is always nice on colder mornings.

eBird

Your Red Hill Birding guide and/or local guides will be eBirding the entire tour. If you have an eBird account, they will collect your username/email address in order to share those lists and will share them when it is convenient. You are welcome to edit your lists to add/remove species, edit text, or change numbers as much as you would like, since any edits you make to your lists do not change others' lists. And we love it when participants add photos and sound recordings to the checklists!

The leader will also provide an eBird Trip Report after the tour and will add participants who have an eBird account to the report; this way, you can see your own personal trip details and those of the whole group. These trip reports are accessible to anyone who has the link, so participants who do not have eBird accounts can still view the report to see the trip list, photos, and any added text.

Tipping

We aim to provide **exceptional service**, using guides that are knowledgeable, interesting, personable, and experienced. While tipping is never expected, if you feel that your guides went above and beyond, you are welcome to leave them a gratuity. Tips at restaurants are included in the cost of the tour.

Travel insurance

We do not require travel insurance for domestic trips. However, we recommend purchasing it to help protect you against the unexpected. For your convenience, we offer travel protection through Travelex Insurance Services. For more information on the available plans or to enroll, go to www.travelexinsurance.com or contact Travelex Insurance Services at 800-228-9792 and reference location number 13-0441.

Travelex Insurance Services, Inc CA Agency License #0D10209. Travel Insurance is underwritten by, Berkshire Hathaway Specialty Insurance Company, NAIC #22276. 55Y

Note that to be eligible for some benefits, travel insurance must be purchased within 1-2 weeks of paying the trip deposit.



Tufted Puffin photo by Nathan Goldberg