

Alaska: Birds and Mammals of the Great North

May 24rd – 31st, 2024 (8 Days)



Spruce Grouse by Luis Gonzalez

Alaska is considered by many as the final frontier, whether this is an American bias, the fact that anyone wishing to reach the state needs to spend a lot of time traveling or simply that this is one of the great wilderness regions left on earth, it's up to each person to decide. Personally, I saw it as the complete opposite of where I've lived most of my life (Florida), but didn't see it as big a priority in my travels since it was "within the US borders". In hindsight, this was a dumb mindset, as it took me longer to reach Alaska, than it took to reach Kenya last year and much more packing was involved, but I wouldn't trade my experience for anything in the world.

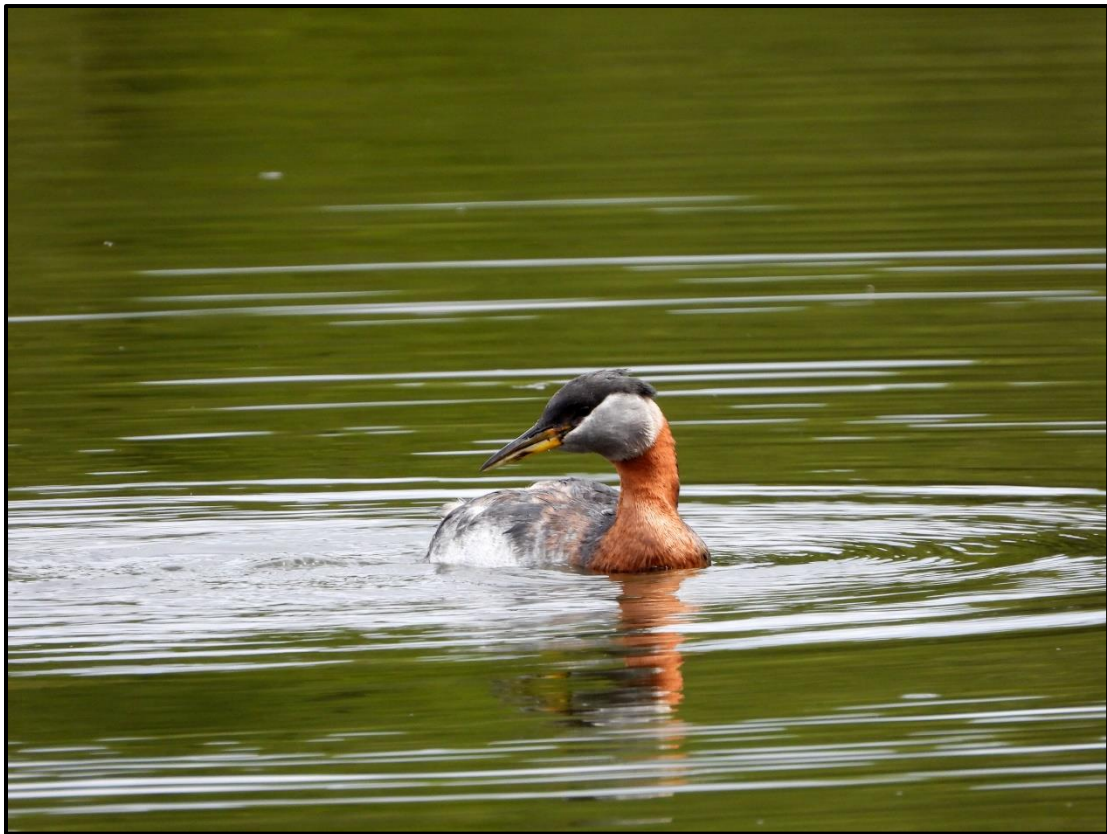
This trip was also made as a family trip as way of thanking my mother for all of her efforts in raising me and my brother, so I did my best to bring to her the place she dreamed of seeing ever since we moved to the US. However, anyone who's met me knows that family trips just means I bird while sacrificing a few hours or activities to my family, combined with the fact that we all wanted to see the beautiful landscapes of Denali and Seward and some of the amazing wildlife that calls this state home. I can proudly say that my trip ended with 110 bird species and 14 mammal species, of which 16 birds and 9 mammals were lifers.

Detailed Itinerary:

- May 23-24 (Flight to Anchorage and first afternoon)

Due to time constraints, flights to Anchorage tend to be early morning, this meant that we had to spend the night in Seattle unless we wished to be tired travelers in an airport at 1AM for a 6AM flight. The flights from Miami to Seattle via Los Angeles were peaceful, and even a 30 minute birding break around the hotel gave me a chance to get used to some Western species including **Bushtit**, **Dark-eyed (Oregon) Junco**, and the default song for the upcoming week, **White-crowned Sparrow**.

A 10:00AM flight had us in Anchorage by midday, following a quick rental car pickup, a delicious lunch at Spenard Roadhouse, and a failed attempt to do an early checkup at the hotel. We decided to spend over an hour in Westchester Lagoon to get used to some of the birds and sights that call the Anchorage area home. In the waters of the lagoon, a colony of **Short-billed Gull** and **Arctic Tern** shared the area with **Red-necked Grebe**, **Trumpeter Swan** and **Greater Scaup**. The more reedy areas had a breeding pair of **Sandhill Crane** along with some shyer duck species (by comparison) **Gadwall** and **American Wigeon**.



Red-necked Grebe by Luis Gonzalez

From there, we managed to check-in to the hotel, and decided to indulge me in a failed attempt to find a Northern Saw-whet Owl that had been reported the day before. The peaceful park did provide good background noise for the most common songsters I would hear throughout the

trip, including **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**, **Red-breasted Nuthatch**, **Dark-eyed (Slate-colored) Junco**, **Yellow-rumped** and **Wilson's Warbler**. Final stop of the day took us up the Arctic Valley Ski Area, which has reports of some big target species, but maybe due to the time of day, not much was seen outside of the usual suspects, along with a family of **Canada Jay** and my first lifer in the form of **Common Redpoll**. The true highlight however, came in the shape of our first *Moose*, one of our big targets and thankfully one that we ticked off by having great views before another vehicle scared it off. Dinner was repeated in Spenard Roadhouse (our go-to restaurant in Anchorage) and went to sleep sometime around 10:30PM, though the sun showed no signs of going down.

- May 25 (Morning in Anchorage and transfer to Denali)

Early mornings are a must whenever traveling is involved, whether it's due to jetlag, the bed not being your own or excitement from being in a new place, it doesn't change the fact that every day I woke up around 4AM and was out and about by 4:30AM. Birding this morning began with a slow drive around Lake Hood and Lake Spenard near the airport, these lakes hold a variety of waterfowl in the spring and summer, and this morning, the birds in attendance included the first of many **Barrow's Goldeneye** for the trip, along with a pair of **Ring-necked Duck**, **Northern Shoveler** and **American Wigeon**. Second stop took me to Connor's Bog, a site that had a Pacific Loon staying the past few days, but due to the access to the lake being hidden, I simply settled for a walk around the trail, which did provide some new species, including a displaying **Lesser Yellowlegs** and lifer **Boreal Chickadee**. Final stop of the morning before heading back for checkout was at the Smokejumper Trailhead, that while it failed to give me my soon to be main target of the trip, American Three-toed Woodpecker, it did provide better views at **Boreal Chickadee**, **Lincoln's Sparrow** and lifer views of **White-winged Crossbill**.

After a difficult attempt to find breakfast around Anchorage, we ate in a place that made it clear that all of their ingredients were Costco bought with a long wait time and extra cost that left us a bit disgruntled, but we had a long drive north to the Denali area, so we weren't going to waste more time. The drive was scenic and beautiful, as we moved from the Anchorage area through open bog-filled prairies enclosed by mountain ranges, to small towns and boreal forests. We also noted the railroad that goes from Anchorage to Denali, but after making the drive, I can't in good conscience say the scenery is not as beautiful by car. Our first proper stop was at the Willow area near the Sockeye burn site of 2015, this area is historically great to find some of the toughest woodpeckers that call Alaska home, but due to the habitat bouncing back, the woodpeckers were few and far between, but we did note the squeaky calls of a **Downy Woodpecker** and a **Black-backed Woodpecker** briefly flew across the road in front of the car, showing off its namesake black back and yellow cap. The only other bird of note in the area was a pair of **Common Redpoll** in a nest that showed off much better views than the previous day.



Denali State Park: South Viewpoint & North American Porcupine by Luis Gonzalez

A stop at the Denali Viewpoint South, provided us a rare chance to see most of the imposing Denali, North America's tallest peak. The mountain is usually covered in clouds due to its unique climate, so while we didn't get to see most of the peak among the clouds, we count ourselves lucky to have seen 2/3 of this iconic piece of landscape. The area was also dotted with *American Red Squirrel*, and the song of a **Northern Waterthrush**, gave away my only encounter with this species during the trip.



Willow Ptarmigan by Luis Gonzalez

We reached our cabins for the upcoming 3 nights around 5PM and while we enjoyed a wonderful lunch in the cabin's restaurant (which was also the best eatery in the area), we decided that a late preview of Denali National Park was needed. Driving the road into the park until the Savage River (final self-driven point of the park), we encountered beautiful landscapes, but the wildlife encounters were brief, **White-crowned Sparrow** were the default song in this region, but sometimes, you could hear a **Varied Thrush** in the forested areas or **American Tree Sparrow** in the meadows. A stop around the Savage River Bridge helped us connect with the first pair of **Harlequin Duck**, a cute *Arctic Ground Squirrel*, and after much battle with the cold wind, our first **Willow Ptarmigan** of the trip, which we affectionally decided to call "Paco" due to its call, but after tomorrow, their charm would be slightly lost as they turned out to be the most common bird we would see in Denali National Park, due to their preference for the hanging around the main park road. The drive back to the cabins made sure we stopped to see the tamest *North American Porcupine* we would encounter throughout the trip (so tame that a pair of Asian travelers decided to take selfies with it, much to the worry of everyone watching on).

We enjoyed dinner in the cabin's restaurant before they closed, bought some food for breakfast tomorrow, and an early sleep in preparation for tomorrow when we would explore Denali National Park.

- May 26 (Denali National Park and Preserve)

Currently the third largest protected area within the US National Park system, Denali National Park and Preserve is also considered an UNESCO biosphere reserve and it's probably the closest you can get within the US to the variety and quantity of megafauna that you'd expect to see in other parts of the world, like the savannas of Africa or the forests of Asia. The park was originally founded for the protection of the endemic subspecies of the Thinhorn Sheep, best known as the Dall Sheep, combining that to the namesake mountain and millions of acres of land, and you have a place whose natural history is as diverse as the wildlife that calls the place home.



Caribou by Luis Gonzalez

With that said, I should make clear that whether it was due to the overcast weather, the nature of having to move around the park exclusively within a bus or simply that being shown around safari park isn't our style, the park felt a bit disappointing at times. While the mammals did come in a decent variety throughout the day, including bachelor herds of *Caribou*, family units of *Dall Sheep*, and even a cow *Moose* with two young, the overall experience felt a bit diminished as it was sharing the same bus with 50 other people who weren't as interested in the natural wonders of the area. To make matters more interesting, outside of the many **Willow Ptarmigan** that call the park home, few birds were noted, with the few exceptions being a Northern Harrier

flying over the plains, a **Belted Kingfisher** Teklanika Rest Stop, and a nesting pair of **Common Raven**, and a flyover **Short-eared Owl** at the Polychrome Pass. At the current time, Polychrome Pass is the westernmost point you can visit into the park courtesy of climate change, and the park expects to have the complete road open by the 2027 season, so consider making your visit after that date if you want to explore the full park.

We returned to the bus depot by midday, and still wanting to make the best of the park experiences, we made way to the Sled Dog Kennels to see the Alaskan Huskies that help rangers, biologists and artists explore the park in the winter, alongside a presentation of how they do this. The rest of the afternoon was spent exploring the main park road that could be driven, in hopes of finding our own wildlife encounters, but sadly, the overcast weather was turning into snow and rain at times, due to this, we called it quits and I left confused on how I was able to find a **Bald Eagle** for Denali, but not a single Golden Eagle, which is the more prominent raptor within the park.



Denali National Park by Luis Gonzalez

- May 27 (Denali Highway)

Early morning meant that I had some time before the restaurant opened and in hoping to make the best of my time, I decided to explore Denali National Park on my own in the morning hours. This turned to be the best decision I made for the trip, the park is full of visitors once the buses begin running around 6:30AM, but for the first two hours prior to that, the visitor center and even the main park road is mostly left to you and the early morning encounters flourish because

of it. Starting by walking around the trails of the visitor center, I was greeted by the morning chorus of mostly **Swainson's Thrush**, but **Boreal Chickadee** and *American Red Squirrel* also provided some distraction. Since the weather was much better than yesterday, I wondered how that would affect activity in the park road, and let's just say that few words describe the pleasant experience of having a *Moose* foraging next to your car or seeing a *North American Porcupine* cross the road.



Moose by Luis Gonzalez

Just before the habitat changed from spruce forest to prairie, I noticed a weird shape on the side of the road, by this point I was used to *Snowshoe Hare*, **Willow Ptarmigan** and **American Robin** being roadside outlines, but this one looked different. Sure enough, I slowed down and I started making out the colors of a plump, chicken-like bird with a black throat and speckled white chest, a **Spruce Grouse**! I managed to stumble on a male grouse on the side of the road and after a bit of back and forth, I managed to get great views of this sought-after target from the north. Once I had my fill of the bird, I decided to test my luck and continue driving to the vantage point that sometimes gives you clear views of Denali, but even with clear blue skies, the peak remained hidden by the clouds, but the Double and Sable mountain made a good compensation prize. The prairie was also alive in the early morning with the songs of various sparrow species, including **American Tree**, **Savannah** and the omnipresent **White-crowned Sparrow**, the latter was so common that I encountered over 50 singing individuals in a 5 mile stretch! At this point I began driving out of the park, the **Spruce Grouse** was encountered again, this time displaying on the road, and checking the roadside pools gave views of **Northern**

Shoveler and **Green-winged Teal**, a final *Moose* encounter for the morning made it clear that I did right thing to explore this beautiful park on my own before the buses began their run.

After a delicious breakfast in the cafe of the McKinley Creekside Cabins, I made my way to the Denali Highway with a passenger that seemingly forgot that 3 hours for a birder in a birdy area is not the same as 3 hours for a driver. Warnings aside, the breakfast was good enough to last through the day until dinner, and it allowed me to focus on the many birds that call pond and potholes close to the road home.

The full Denali Highway is a 130 mile unpaved road that was the original access road to Denali National Park and it is only open during the summer season as many areas of the highway are snowed in during winter. My goal today was Thirteen Mile Hill, a spot nearly on the other side of the highway from where we were staying that is good to find Lapland Longspur at this time of year. However, the unseasonably cold weather made it so the songbirds were still hunkering further south. This however, didn't make the birdlife in the highway any less spectacular, all 3 American Scoter species were seen in glorious breeding plumage (**Surf**, **Black** and **White-winged Scoter**), in the faster moving streams another pair of **Harlequin Duck** was seen, while in the smaller pools **Trumpeter Swan**, **Horned Grebe** and **Red-necked Phalarope** were observed preparing for the nesting season. Once we began climbing in elevation, **Fox (Red) Sparrow** was heard singing, while **Wilson's Warbler** and **Common Redpoll** were foraging in the bushes while a **Merlin** flew over.



Harlequin Duck by Luis Gonzalez

As we reached the midpoint of the Susitna River Bridge, I noticed the active beaver dams, but no beavers in the forested parts, but stopping at the middle of the bridge gave one of the best surprises of the day with a single **Tundra (Whistling) Swan**, casually foraging in the far bank. Views left a bit to be desired, but thankfully the camera managed to get an ID shot that shows the yellow spot near the eye and base of the bill to distinguish it from the more common Trumpeter Swan. The Waterfowl Lakes were mostly frozen over, which gave a stark reminder that it was a weirdly cold season with a late spring, but in the clearings, the waterfowl congregated in great variety, **American Wigeon**, **Mallard**, **Ring-necked Duck**, **Bufflehead** and Red-breasted Merganser were all seen, along with a surprise flyover Least Sandpiper, and a lifer pair of **Long-tailed Duck**. On the mammal front, a North American River Otter was noted swimming in the frigid waters, but we soon moved on as the wind was not helping our cause to remain in the area.



White-winged Scoter by Luis Gonzalez

Upon reaching the Maclaren Summit, there was not much activity as the weather was turning, becoming more overcast and colder, so all we could do is enjoy the beautiful winter scenery in the middle of May. As we reached Thirteen Mile Hill, we noticed small settlements, along with some bold Caribou foraging in the middle of areas that allow sustenance hunting. The hill itself was cold, windy and without much to be heard or seen outside of the display calls of **(Hudsonian) Whimbrel**, I called the bird a dip and began the long drive back to our cabin. Along the way, we noticed the *Arctic Ground Squirrels* doing sentry on the road that reminded us of someone praying, and made plans to change our schedule for the next day and repeat this road,

so the two that missed out on the winter scene of the summit could enjoy it, even if it meant adding an extra 4 hours to the drive south towards Seward. Overall, it was a wonderful day and my personal best in Alaska, great views, good food, interesting lifers and the outdoors all to myself, what more could I ask for?

- May 28 (Long drive to Seward)

Today we had a 10 hour drive to Seward, normally this drive is about 6 hours long, still a long trip, but it was made longer from the request of the family to go back to Denali Highway and spend some time in the winter scenery of Maclaren Summit. The drive there had us pumping gas and getting some gas station coffee by 6AM in hopes of making most of the drive without much difficulty. Little to no stops were made on our way east through the highway until we reached the Waterfowl Lakes, the variety was different from yesterday, less species of duck were seen, but in its place, we had a resting **Common Loon** in the open water and a displaying **Wilson's Snipe** on the road. Little past 9, we arrived at the Maclaren Summit, indulged ourselves in playing in the snow for the first time in our lives, but I made sure to note the constant calls of the **Gray-cheeked Thrush** and had close-up views of a spiffy **Golden-crowned Sparrow** that didn't seem to care about being so close to humans.



Denali Highway (Maclaren Summit) by Luis Gonzalez

I made a second attempt at Thirteen Mile Hill for the Longspurs, as the weather was much nicer than yesterday, but all I got to show for it was a flyover **Sandhill Crane** and a breeding pair of **Long-tailed Jaeger**. Well out of Denali Highway, we noted a few raptors on our way south

through Richardson Highway, including a perched **Bald Eagle** and a flyover **Osprey**, the latter would be the only one we'd see on the trip. Past midday, we had reached west of the census town of Glennallen and into prime Northern Hawk-Owl habitat, sadly no owl was seen during the drive towards Anchorage, but a much rarer animal gave us a brief appearance as it crossed the Glenn Highway in front of us. To paint a picture, by this point, we were well familiar with the various domestic dogs that people keep as pets in Alaska, and how they tend to be larger breeds, we were also well familiar with Coyote from various trips around the Lower 48 states, so when I say that we saw a large gray and brown canid crossing the road, we couldn't accept it as anything else besides a *Yukon Wolf*, the prominent subspecies of Gray Wolf found throughout most of Alaska. We drove slowly up to the area that we saw the animal cross the road, but it was already hidden deep in the thickets, and after asking around local naturalists, they made it clear that Coyote would have been too small an animal to match what we saw, so it seems like we lucked out and saw a wolf!



Wandering Tattler by Luis Gonzalez

The rest of the drive to Seward was long and uneventful, outside of trying to find something to eat at the world's worst Dairy Queen (everything on their menu was missing at least one ingredient needed to make the food), the only thing of note was the beautiful scenery around Glacier View and the Turnagain Arm complemented by seemingly every single road construction project in the state deciding to start up after the Memorial Day Weekend.

By 6:30PM, we had finally made it to our lodging the Steller Inn, just outside of Seward, which I can only advise as the place to stay for the visiting birder due to how productive the grounds of

the inn are. During our two night stay some of the best birds seen right on the property included **Golden-crowned Kinglet**, **Brown Creeper**, **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** and **Varied Thrush**, the latter two were sometimes seen coming to the seeds dispersed on the ground by the owner.

We had dinner in a seafood restaurant overlooking the Harbor, and while service was slow, the food was tasty, and we were happily distracted by a pair of **Wandering Tattler**, alongside a lone *Sea Otter* and a female *Steller's Sea Lion*, the latter two were giving us a preview of what was coming tomorrow. Tired from the long day, we tried sleeping early that night and prepared ourselves for our glacier and wildlife pelagic trip tomorrow.

- May 28 (Kenai Fjords National Park and Seward)

Pelagics are the dream experiences for many birders, it gives us a chance of seeing birds that while shown in our country's field guides, rarely do we connect with them unless we go out to sea. The Seward area is not a traditional pelagic spot in the US, like Westport, Washington, Monterey Bay, California or Hatteras, North Carolina, however, seabirds do congregate in these waters and the off-shore seabird colonies makes the region sought-after for many birders, add to that beautiful glaciers and fjords, and one of the best concentrations of marine life in the North Pacific, and you'd be hard pressed to not find something great on a day out at sea in this region.

The trip was done through Kenai Fjord Tours and while I can heavily recommend their service to see the glaciers and marine mammals, along with great overall hospitality, keep in mind that this is not a traditional pelagic with focus on birds or even a spotter onboard to identify the birds for you. Add to that, the amazing experience of the trip was partially dimmed for me when I realized that the captain was going to prioritize giving the audience more glacier views over visiting the seabird colonies in the Chiswell Islands, due to this, species like Parakeet Auklet, Thick-billed Murre and Red-faced Cormorant, plus any potential storm-petrels or shearwaters were also out of the picture. Please note that this was just my experience, and tours before and after mine have visited the colonies, so it all depends on the captains reading of the weather and time.

Taking the caviats out of the picture, the boat was large, great view of the sea without any worries for seasickness, not surprisingly, the staff soon figured out that I was the only birder onboard since everyone else was warming up inside and drinking hot chocolate while I enjoyed the wind and waves to find my lifers. Some of the first wildlife sightings of note came soon within the harbor with *Harbor Seal* and **Pelagic Cormorant** resting on the rocky berm. Quickly passing through Resurrection Bay helped me connect with **Pigeon Guillemot**, **Common Murre** and my first **Marbled Murrelet** of the trip. A stop around the Porcupine Cove region helped us see a *Humpback Whale* with her young, while looking out to sea, a flock of over 50 **Brant** were seen flying north, while a **Pomarine Jaeger** moved south avoiding the cliffs. While passing the Cheval Narrows, I noticed the first Horned Puffin of the trip, while giving some attention to a *Steller Sea Lion* colony made it easy to scan through for flocks of **Surf** and **White-winged Scoter**, alongside a lonesome **Pacific Loon**.



Steller Sea Lion & Aialik Glacier by Luis Gonzalez

Past 9:30AM, we had made our way through the Aialik Bay of the Kenai Fjords National Park, this made the bird variety drop, but the quality increase as I had good views of **Ancient Murrelet** passing the boat. Once at the Holgate Glacier, I enjoyed comparing between **Tufted** and **Horned Puffin** while experiencing the bitter cold brought about by the glacier. A lunch break was taken on a different side of Aialik Bay, where our company was many beautiful waterfalls and a playful pair of *Sea Otter*. Our final stop of the morning (and the trip) was at the Aialik Glacier, probably one of the most spectacular sceneries we enjoyed on the trip and one that made the cold we felt in the Holgate Glacier seem tame. Add to that experience seeing the glacier do a ice calving big enough to rock the boat, finally connecting with glacier dependent **Kittlitz's Murrelet** and a loud trio of **Black Oystercatcher**, and you can say it was a very memorable experience! Sadly from there, the captain would not make any other stops until we reached the cliffs of Resurrection Bay, where we saw small family groups of *Mountain Goat* and we disembarked by 2PM in Seward.



Chestnut-backed Chickadee by Luis Gonzalez

With the afternoon open to us, we decided to change clothes in the inn, before visiting the famous Ava's Place, a residential home that the owner has made it accessible for birders to enjoy her feeders from the road. My main target here was a Pine Grosbeak reported the previous day, but I had to settle with a flock of around 60 **Red Crossbill** and over 50 **Pine Siskin**; other birds of note in the feeders included **Hairy Woodpecker** and **Rufous Hummingbird**. Time was plenty, so we made a visit to Exit Glacier and hiked the 2 mile loop to see this retreating wall of ice, while the view left a bit to be desired, we were kindly reminded how many Moose

use the area as there parts of the trail that were completely covered by their dung. On the bird front, activity was slow, but **Orange-crowned** and **Yellow-rumped Warbler** were plenty active and I counted over a dozen singing males of both species while hiking. The highlight of the hike came as I finally managed to connect with our first bear! A mama *Brown (Grizzly) Bear* and her cub were being seen by a group of people on the opposite cliff and we managed to get on it just before they disappeared into the bush. Since nothing was going to beat a bear, we decided to head back down the mountain, enjoy an early(ish) dinner and sleep to help our tired bodies recover after a long day.

- May 30 (Seward to Anchorage)

Final full day in Alaska had us going back to Anchorage on a steady pace without many hurries, but since I got up early as usual, I made a visit to the Lowell Point in Seward, in hopes of getting better views of **Marbled Murrelet**, this was easily achieved, along with fly-by views of **Harlequin Duck**, and driving back to Seward, a pair of **Common Merganser** were noted close to the road, while the sea was covered in a large flock of **Black-legged Kittiwake**.

Stops were made in the Bear Creek Weir for American Dipper, but sadly the bird was a no-show for my second attempt this trip, but a **Belted Kingfisher** gave some variety, alongside some Sockeye Salmon swimming in the creek. A second stop at Ava's Place gave the same bird variety of the previous day, but a roadside stop at the creek that flowed behind the inn proved to be successful as a pair of **American Dipper** are nesting under the bridge, and one came out in an open branch to preen and collect nesting material as soon as I parked.

After a late breakfast and pumping gas, we began the drive north for one last time, along the way a stop produced great views of a singing Townsend's Warbler before leaving the Seward Highway, but other stops in Tenderfoot Creek Campground and Beluga Point produced little outside of a singing **Golden-crowned Sparrow**. Past midday, we stopped in Potter Marsh and despite the windy conditions, I was able to connect with some **Cackling Goose**, but it was difficult tell them apart, until I was able to see the image on the computer of what I thought were "small Canada Goose". Turns out that the smallest subspecies of **Canada Goose** breeds in the area and telling them apart takes a lot of practice and patience.

Following a late lunch, the groups split, some went to the Alaska Zoo to see some of the native and cold-weather animals they have on display, while I went on a failed hunt between 3 locations for American Three-toed Woodpecker, outside of some good hiking and seeing different parks around Anchorage not much was achieved until they were picked up by the time the zoo closed.

Final stop of the day had two of us doing a 4 mile roundtrip hike in the Chugach State Park in hopes of finding a Northern Hawk-Owl a fellow birder shared the pin for from earlier in the week. Sadly, no owl was seen while hiking, but it was beautiful hike through great scenery and sunny weather from 7-9PM. From there, we picked up a pizza and celebrated our last day in Alaska before the afternoon flights tomorrow.



Golden-crowned Sparrow & American Dipper by Luis Gonzalez

- May 31 (Morning in Anchorage and departure)

Only time during this trip that the alarm ringed before I woke up, but the early rise was worth it if I got my targets, American Three-toed Woodpecker and (what I thought I still needed at the time) Cackling Goose. First stop was Kincaid Park, a large protected area south of the airport that acts as the main family park in Anchorage, while also being a good biodiverse spot. The park gates were still closed when I arrived, so I parked outside of the gates and slowly walked through the main road until I reached the Myze Loop, which is the trail that mainly goes through the spruce forest that the woodpecker prefers. On the walk there, there was a cow *Moose* with her young on the forest's edge and thankfully she did not notice me, as there were signs later in the trail warning about her aggressive tenacities.



Canada Jay by Luis Gonzalez

At the start of the trail, there was a **Canada Jay** foraging for scraps left by RV campers and the tapping of a woodpecker was heard on the other side of the trail, but the bird could not be located. As time kept passing, the bird continued to elude me, but the warming temperature made the other birds of the forest begin their song, first with a flyover flock of **Pine Siskin** and **White-winged Crossbill**, followed by **White-crowned Sparrow** and **Orange-crowned Warbler** in the open areas, while Lincoln's Sparrow and **Swainson's Thrush** called from the forested parts. A single **Lesser Yellowlegs** was relaxing by a puddle in the middle of the trail, while looking up at a passing **Merlin** helped me notice a foraging family of **Boreal Chickadee**. At this point, I was beginning to cut my loses due to time, but thankfully the undulating flights of a woodpecker, combined with the distinctive "pweek" call helped me get very brief but countable views of an

American Three-toed Woodpecker as it moved through the gaps in the trees. The walk back to the car had another Moose on the side of the road, this time an uninterested bull, while the sweet calls of **Yellow Warbler** were stand out due to how few were encountered this week.

A second run of Lake Hood and Lake Spenard by the airport did not provide views of the reported Red-throated Loon, but it did give a nice close-up to a pair of **Steller's Jay**, alongside some **Red-necked Grebe** and **Bonaparte's Gull** in the water. Final stop of the morning was at Westchester Lagoon, the first site of the trip, which gave amazing views of Cackling Goose, alongside **Greater** and **Lesser Scaup**, **Sandhill Crane** and the final bird of the trip, a **Semipalmated Plover**.

From there it was a quick checkout, a hefty brunch in the Spenard Roadhouse and we went to the airport for an afternoon departure from Anchorage. The flights home were thankfully uneventful and we arrived a bit ahead of time for once, making this the best ending to an already amazing trip to Alaska. A quick mention needs to be given to my family and their request, as Alaska is a place that should be high on everyone's bucket list, but due to my priority for lifers, I was putting it on the backburner, this place is one of those dream destinations and one that everyone with the chance to experience it should definitely take the opportunity and explore this final frontier of North America.



Steller's Jay by Luis Gonzalez

Bird List:

	Common Name	Scientific Name	Location
1	Brant	<i>Branta bernicla</i>	Kenai Fjords National Park
2	Cackling Goose	<i>Branta hutchinsii</i>	Multiple Locations
3	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	Multiple Locations
4	Trumpeter Swan	<i>Cygnus buccinator</i>	Multiple Locations
5	Tundra (Whistling) Swan	<i>Cygnus columbianus</i>	Denali Highway
6	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	Multiple Locations
7	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	Westchester Lagoon
8	American Wigeon	<i>Mareca americana</i>	Multiple Locations
9	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Multiple Locations
10	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	Multiple Locations
11	Green-winged Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	Multiple Locations
12	Ring-necked Duck	<i>Aythya collaris</i>	Multiple Locations
13	Greater Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>	Multiple Locations
14	Lesser Scaup	<i>Aythya affinis</i>	Multiple Locations
15	Harlequin Duck	<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>	Multiple Locations
16	Surf Scoter	<i>Melanitta perspicillata</i>	Multiple Locations
17	White-winged Scoter	<i>Melanitta deglandi</i>	Multiple Locations
18	Black Scoter	<i>Melanitta americana</i>	Denali Highway
19	Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	Denali Highway
20	Bufflehead	<i>Bucephala albeola</i>	Denali Highway
21	Barrow's Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala islandica</i>	Multiple Locations
22	Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	Multiple Locations
23	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	Denali Highway
24	Willow Ptarmigan	<i>Lagopus lagopus</i>	Multiple Locations
25	Spruce Grouse	<i>Canachites canadensis</i>	Denali National Park
26	Horned Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	Denali Highway
27	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>	Multiple Locations
28	Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon)	<i>Columba livia</i>	Multiple Locations
29	Rufous Hummingbird	<i>Selasphorus rufus</i>	Seward—Ava's Place
30	Sandhill Crane	<i>Antigone canadensis</i>	Multiple Locations
31	Black Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus bachmani</i>	Kenai Fjords National Park
32	Semipalmated Plover	<i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>	Westchester Lagoon
33	(Hudsonian) Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	Denali Highway
34	Wilson's Snipe	<i>Gallinago delicata</i>	Multiple Locations
35	Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>	Denali Highway
36	Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>	Multiple Locations
37	Wandering Tattler	<i>Tringa incana</i>	Seward—Small Boat Harbor
38	Lesser Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>	Multiple Locations
39	Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>	Denali Highway

40	Least Sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>	Multiple Locations
41	Long-tailed Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius longicaudus</i>	Denali Highway
42	Pomarine Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>	Kenai Fjords National Park
43	Rhinoceros Auklet	<i>Cerorhinca monocerata</i>	Kenai Fjords National Park
44	Tufted Puffin	<i>Fratercula cirrhata</i>	Kenai Fjords National Park
45	Horned Puffin	<i>Fratercula corniculata</i>	Kenai Fjords National Park
46	Kittlitz's Murrelet	<i>Brachyramphus brevirostris</i>	Kenai Fjords National Park
47	Marbled Murrelet	<i>Brachyramphus marmoratus</i>	Kenai Fjords National Park
48	Pigeon Guillemot	<i>Cephus columba</i>	Kenai Fjords National Park
49	Common Murre	<i>Uria aalge</i>	Kenai Fjords National Park
50	Ancient Murrelet	<i>Synthliboramphus antiquus</i>	Kenai Fjords National Park
51	Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	Seward Area
52	Bonaparte's Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus philadelphia</i>	Multiple Locations
53	Short-billed Gull	<i>Larus brachyrhynchus</i>	Multiple Locations
54	Herring (American) Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Multiple Locations
55	Glaucous-winged Gull	<i>Larus glaucescens</i>	Multiple Locations
56	Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	Multiple Locations
57	Pacific Loon	<i>Gavia pacifica</i>	Kenai Fjords National Park
58	Common Loon	<i>Gavia immer</i>	Multiple Locations
59	Pelagic Cormorant	<i>Urile pelagicus</i>	Kenai Fjords National Park
60	Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Nannopterum auritum</i>	Kenai Fjords National Park
61	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	Richardson Highway
62	Northern Harrier	<i>Circus hudsonius</i>	Multiple Locations
63	Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	Multiple Locations
64	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	Denali National Park
65	Belted Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>	Multiple Locations
66	American Three-toed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides dorsalis</i>	Kincaid Park
67	Black-backed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides arcticus</i>	Willow—Sockeye Burn
68	Downy Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates pubescens</i>	Multiple Locations
69	Hairy Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates villosus</i>	Seward—Ava's Place
70	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	Multiple Locations
71	Canada Jay	<i>Perisoreus Canadensis</i>	Multiple Locations
72	Steller's (Coastal) Jay	<i>Cyanocitta stelleri</i>	Lake Hood & Lake Spenard
73	Black-billed Magpie	<i>Pica hudsonia</i>	Multiple Locations
74	American (Northwestern) Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	Multiple Locations
75	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Multiple Locations
76	Black-capped Chickadee	<i>Poecile atricapillus</i>	Multiple Locations
77	Chestnut-backed Chickadee	<i>Poecile rufescens</i>	Steller Inn
78	Boreal Chickadee	<i>Poecile hudsonicus</i>	Multiple Locations
79	Tree Swallow	<i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>	Multiple Locations
80	Violet-green Swallow	<i>Tachycineta thalassina</i>	Multiple Locations

81	Cliff Swallow	<i>Petrochelidon pyrrhonota</i>	Denali Highway
82	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	<i>Corthylio calendula</i>	Multiple Locations
83	Golden-crowned Kinglet	<i>Regulus satrapa</i>	Steller Inn
84	Red-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta canadensis</i>	Multiple Locations
85	Brown Creeper	<i>Certhia americana</i>	Steller Inn
86	American Dipper	<i>Cinclus mexicanus</i>	Steller Inn
87	European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Multiple Locations
88	Varied Thrush	<i>Ixoreus naevius</i>	Multiple Locations
89	Gray-cheeked Thrush	<i>Catharus minimus</i>	Denali Highway
90	Swainson's Thrush	<i>Catharus ustulatus</i>	Multiple Locations
91	Hermit Thrush	<i>Catharus guttatus</i>	Multiple Locations
92	American Robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>	Multiple Locations
93	Common Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>	Multiple Locations
94	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	Seward—Ava's Place
95	White-winged Crossbill	<i>Loxia leucoptera</i>	Multiple Locations
96	Pine Siskin	<i>Spinus pinus</i>	Multiple Locations
97	American Tree Sparrow	<i>Spizelloides arborea</i>	Multiple Locations
98	Fox Sparrow	<i>Passerella iliaca</i>	Denali Highway
99	Dark-eyed (Slate-colored) Junco	<i>Junco hyemalis</i>	Multiple Locations
100	White-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>	Multiple Locations
101	Golden-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia atricapilla</i>	Multiple Locations
102	Savannah Sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>	Multiple Locations
103	Song Sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>	Seward Area
104	Lincoln's Sparrow	<i>Melospiza lincolnii</i>	Multiple Locations
105	Northern Waterthrush	<i>Parkesia noveboracensis</i>	Denali State Park
106	Orange-crowned Warbler	<i>Leiothlypis celata</i>	Multiple Locations
107	Yellow Warbler	<i>Setophaga petechial</i>	Multiple Locations
108	Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler	<i>Setophaga coronate</i>	Multiple Locations
109	Townsend's Warbler	<i>Setophaga townsendi</i>	Multiple Locations
110	Wilson's Warbler	<i>Cardellina pusilla</i>	Multiple Locations

Mammal List:

	Common Name	Scientific Name	Location
1	Snowshoe Hare	<i>Lepus americanus</i>	Multiple Locations
2	North American Porcupine	<i>Erethizon dorsatum</i>	Denali Area
3	North American Red Squirrel	<i>Tamiasciurus hudsonicus</i>	Multiple Locations
4	Arctic Ground Squirrel	<i>Urocitellus parryii</i>	Denali Area
5	Steller Sea Lion	<i>Eumetopias jubatus</i>	Kenai Fjords National Park
6	North American River Otter	<i>Lontra canadensis</i>	Denali Highway
7	Sea Otter	<i>Enhydra lutris</i>	Kenai Fjords National Park
8	Brown (Grizzly) Bear	<i>Ursus arctos</i>	Kenai Fjords National Park
9	Gray (Yukon) Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>	Glenn Highway
10	Mountain Goat	<i>Oreamnos americanus</i>	Kenai Fjords National Park
11	Thinhorn (Dall) Sheep	<i>Ovis dalli</i>	Denali National Park
12	Moose	<i>Alces alces</i>	Multiple Locations
13	Caribou	<i>Rangifer tarandus</i>	Denali Area
14	Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>	Kenai Fjords National Park