



HILLSTAR
NATURE

Alaska

Utqiagvik:

The Northernmost Point in the US

15th -19th June, 2024

With George Armistead & Alvaro Jaramillo



A pair of Steller's Eiders look on alertly from a pond in Utqiagvik. This species is the only one in the genus Polysticta and is the closest living relative of the Labrador Duck.

Arguably Alaska's most remote and coveted birding hotspot, Utqiagvik is also as far north as you can get in the State. Eiders and shorebirds abound!

All the way up at 71 degrees north, just inside the Arctic Circle lies a northward projecting point and an adjoining town. Formerly known as Barrow, the native Inupiat people have long known it as Utqiagvik, which is often translated as "the place where Snowy Owls are hunted." Famous as a place where all four eider species can be seen in a single day, it is also a great location for vagrant birds from eastern Russia, and a fabulous spot for breeding shorebirds. Lucky observers at times get to see Polar Bear here. We will spend three nights and parts of four days exploring this unique town and its outskirts, smack in the middle of the arctic wilderness.

Join us for a thrilling excursion to Alaska's north slope!

Itinerary

Day 1, June 15th: Arrival into Anchorage

Welcome to Alaska. Please schedule your flight to arrive before dinner. We will plan to meet for the first time in the lobby of the hotel at 615pm and then head to dinner. Upon arrival into Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport (ANC), after collecting any checked luggage, please call the front desk at the Coast Inn at Lake Hood (907-243-2233), and let them know you are ready to be picked up. They have a free shuttle to/from the airport. Night in Anchorage.

Day 2, June 16th: Flight to Utqiagvik

Today we aim north for Utqiagvik, catching a flight aboard a 737 and arriving to a place that has almost 24 hours of daylight at this season. As soon as we are checked into our hotel and are fed, we'll head out for our first birding excursion.



American Golden-Plover is one among a host of attractive shorebird species that breed in the area.

Day 3 & 4, June 17th & 18th: Exploring Utqiagvik

A town of just 21 square miles, with a population of about 5000 residents, that is only accessible by plane and at certain times by boat, we have just a few roads from which to search for birds, and yet our time here will be jam-packed. With endless tundra and daylight we'll keep to the roadsides, examining the array of ponds, sloughs, the coastline and the tundra searching for shorebirds, waterfowl, Snowy Owls, and vagrants.



Songbirds are few and far between here, but those present are nice ones to see, including Hoary Redpoll.

Snowy Owls can be absent or abundant depending on the year. Certain years you might see 30 or more in a day, while others we might struggle to find one.

We'll spend a good amount of time watching the coast too. With luck Yellow-billed Loon is possible here, as are all four eider species, and we'll need to be watchful of the gulls too. Rarely small arctic gull species are seen here, with Sabine's quite regular, and in its breeding finery.

Out on the tundra all three jaeger species could be encountered, and a host of waterfowl species are in evidence, including breeding Greater White-fronted Geese, and again the much sought-after eiders, along with a remarkable array of shorebirds. The constellation of shorebird species

varies annually somewhat, but often includes nesting Red Phalarope, and Pectoral, Baird's and Buff-breasted Sandpipers, as well as rarities that could include Red-necked Stint, Lesser (Siberian) Sand-Plover, Ruff, Gray-tailed Tattler or others. If you think you know what a Pectoral Sandpiper is, trust us... until you've seen one on the breeding grounds, you don't. They transform into an entirely different beast here when in courtship and establishing territories.

Nights at The Top of the World Hotel.

Day 5, June 19th: Flight back to Anchorage.

We'll see what time our flight to Anchorage is, but we'll squeeze every last minute of birding out of Utqiagvik, and try to mop up any last birds we might like to see, before heading back to Anchorage. The tour concludes upon arrival into the Anchorage Airport.

Smooth Sailing! Thank you for joining us for this wildlife experience.



Only luck visitors see a Polar Bear like this at Utqiagvik, but it does happen at times. Fingers crossed and eyes peeled!

Tour Price/person*: \$2500

Deposit: \$1000

Single supplement: \$620

Final Payment Due: 1 February 2024, or at registration if after.

Group size: 6 to 14 guests

*Based on double occupancy at lodgings, with a group size of 6 to 14 registrants. Maximum groups size is 14 registrants, plus guide(s) and driver(s). If there are fewer than 6 registrants, this tour may be cancelled or re-negotiated. Note that if you want a roommate we can try to find you one, but we cannot guarantee all guests a roommate. If none is available, you will be charged the single supplement. Deposit is made via WeTravel. Final tour payment is by check or ACH transfer. Final tour price is subject to change should flights within Alaska, fuel, or other required goods/services increase in cost significantly between now and departure.

The tour price (fee) includes services from upon arrival on Day 1 into Anchorage (ANC) until our return to ANC on Day 5, including:

- All meals from dinner on Day 1 through lunch on Day 5.
- All accommodations from Day 2 until Day 5.
- All transport from dinner on Day 1 through our return flight to ANC on Day 5.
- All guiding services, access permits and entrance fees to birding areas.
- Flights to/from Utqiagvik.

Excluded from your tour fee are:

- Arrival flight to and departure flights from Anchorage to your home destination.
- Arrival night (15 June) hotel in Anchorage. This Utqiagvik tour is arranged as extension option from Alaska Outposts tour, but it is available for purchase to anyone. The price for the night of June 15th is included in the Outposts tour fee. If you register for this Utqiagvik tour, but are not participating in the Outposts tour, the 15th is an additional charge (estimated at ~\$250/room).
- Alcoholic beverages, laundry services, charges to your hotel room, or other items of a personal nature.
- Visa fees, airport taxes, airline baggage fees, etc.

Documents

All non-U.S. citizens should have a current passport, valid for six months beyond the start date of this tour, with at least 1 blank page for stamps.

ALL GUESTS/REGISTRANTS MUST:

- Review Travel Documents. For international travel, guests must have a current passport valid for six months beyond the end date of this tour, with at least 1 blank page for stamps.
- Review COVID-19 and other health requirements required to travel into or around the destination.
- Review Hillstar Nature's Code of Conduct.
- Consider obtaining travel and medical insurance to cover incidents over the duration of this tour.
- Sign the Hillstar Nature Terms & Conditions, which includes the assumption of risk/liability waiver.

Cancellation Policy

If a guest/participant cancels registration:

- 120 days or more prior to the start of the tour, a refund is issued minus a \$500/person processing fee.
- Between 119 and 90 days prior to the start of the tour, half of the tour fee will be returned to the registrant.
- 89 days or less prior to departure, no refund of payments or deposits are issued.

Pace, Rigor, Climate & Pests

- Moderate pace but with early mornings and possibly evening outings after dinner.
- Comfortable accommodations near to most of the birding sites.
- No rigorous hiking required, but some prolonged periods of time on foot in potentially very cold conditions.
- Expect cold or very cold weather, with a good chance of high winds.

Fairly long days in search of birds and other wildlife. All meals likely to be at restaurants. It's possible that weather may dictate a break or that success with our birds may allow for a break, but typically we'll plan to be out from after breakfast and again after lunch, with perhaps an additional shorter outing after dinner.

All birding is along or near roadsides, and walking is at a slow pace so as not to startle wildlife and see as much as possible. Weather is cold and possibly windy. Usually there is little if any precipitation here.

We strongly urge guests to consult a doctor about vaccinations and medications prior to travel. All participants are recommended to receive COVID-19 vaccinations. If any guest becomes sick and appears contagious during the tour, the guest may be no longer permitted to continue with the group. This is at the judgement of the guide(s).

Photography is welcome on this tour, but note that this is not in essence, a "photography tour". We will always try and allow some time for obtaining images of desirable subjects, but time is a factor in achieving each of the day's goals, and it will be up to the tour leader when we move on from birds and other photography subjects.

Packing

Please limit yourself to one mid-size suitcase/duffel and another smaller bag for daily use on outings. Group travel dictates we consider our fellow traveler's comfort, and this includes not over-packing. Warm waterproof footwear is recommended. Weather proof pants and a good winter coat, and a hat and gloves, and long underwear are recommended to protect from the cold.

As mentioned, a daypack (small backpack or the like) for your belongings for daily field outings is useful, and some folks find that having a walking stick for balance is nice or having a foldable stool/chair is nice for times when we sit and wait in an area for a bird(s) to show.

Your leaders will have spotting scopes for group use. If you plan to bring your own, and/or intend to bring a tripod keep in mind there is some space in the vehicles, but also that this space is limited. Generally we recommend sharing group scopes or being prepared to keep your scope or tripod on your person as we travel.