Barrow, AK
Photography

Tour Leaders: Brian Zwiebel and Tyler Ficker
June 9 - 14, 2019

Pacific Loon
Shortly after arriving in Barrow, our group was ready to go! After a quick stop to drop things off at the hotel, we were in the field starting the trip off with a gorgeous pair of Sabine’s Gulls and a friendly Arctic Tern. While photographing these species, we were surrounded by the chorus of displaying shorebirds, ducks, and Lapland Longspurs. Visibility was low and lighting quickly shifted so it wasn’t in our favor, but we still managed to start the trip off successfully! We headed in early so we could get ready for the first full day in the field.

Our first full day was spent driving around town to see all that was around town, familiarize the group with the species and locations, and try to locate some cooperative birds to photograph. Not too long into our search, we were in the water with our first birds, a pair of Pacific Loons. Near the car on the way back, a very vocal Lapland Longspur put on quite a show and allowed for another great photo opportunity. Down the road a, we were able to find a male Snow Bunting on a mound of snow and a light sky, making for a very interesting and beautiful setting for photos. A nearby pond allowed us to have our first chance with Pectoral Sandpiper, Semipalmated Sandpiper, and a striking female Red-necked Phalarope.
The next day, weather was not quite cooperating for us, making conditions difficult to shoot in. We decided to use this day to visit the local heritage museum in town, a very cool center filled with information on the local culture and some wonderful local made art. We visited the other major tourist attractions in town such as a series of signs telling the distance to major cities across the world, giving you an idea of just how far north you are in Barrow. Next, we visited the whale bone arch, an arch made of the lower jaw bones of a Bowhead Whale. The weather cooperated for a bit and we were able to take advantage of this opportunity by driving out in search of a pair of Spectacled Eiders we had seen earlier. We got out of the car ready to get into position to photograph them when we noticed they were flying right at the car, a quick pass by allowed for a quick but fantastic opportunity to photograph them!
The following day brought some of the best photos and memories of the entire trip. We started the morning watching displaying shorebirds, specifically spending time with a Dunlin who kept raising his wings in the air as a territory defense and display. A pair of Parasitic Jaegers circled overhead vocalizing to each other, and a group of King Eiders were in the pond next to us. We found a spot on the opposite side of the pond from the eiders and got in position. Shortly after, the male King Eider swam right past us before taking off to lure the Jaegers away from an apparent nest. This encounter allowed for great photos of the eider. A Long-tailed Duck was also in the pond with the eider and became the new center of attention. The day ended with us finding a displaying male Buff-breasted Sandpiper who was friendly and almost stuck his head in our lens hoods!
The next few days were affected by unfavorable weather with enough time to get some shooting in each day. While trying to find a spot to photograph Snowy Owls, we came across photogenic Western Sandpipers, Pomarine Jaegers, and a Brown Lemming. Although we did find a Snowy Owl, the Jaegers had chased it off before we could get out of the car. We decided to try to photograph the Pacific Loons that we had found earlier and improve on what we had. We spent nearly an hour with this pair of incredibly friendly birds who often swam close enough for headshots.

Our final day was spent with yet another pair of Pacific Loons, a displaying Long-billed Dowitcher, as well as the Arctic Tern and Sabine’s Gulls that we had started the trip with, allowing us to improve on what we had from day one. These wonderful photo opportunities were the perfect ending to a very successful trip. Dinner that night was full of excitement as we looked back on everything we had been able to shoot and eagerness to process photos!
Join us in Barrow for the opportunity to photograph birds in one of the best spots Alaska has to offer!

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