



Nome, Alaska

A Bird Photographer's Goldmine

Tour Leader: Brian Zwiebel

June 8-14, 2023

The multitude of breeding shorebirds is one of the main reasons you will want to book your trip to Nome. Also, our visit to Nome is timed to take advantage of the beautiful tundra wildflower bloom which we will strive to incorporate into some of our bird compositions as well. Some of the species we encounter will be tending to a nest or newly hatched young. We will give them the space they need but use their sometimes-bold behavior to our advantage. In addition to the shorebirds we will attempt to photograph several species of waterfowl, Red-throated Loons, and Arctic and Aleutian Terns. We will keep our eyes peeled for Willow and Rock Ptarmigan as well as the often cooperative Long-tailed Jaegers. Lapland Longspur and American Pipit can sometimes be photographed among stunning flowers and a long list of other songbirds including Arctic Warbler and Bluethroat will be on our radar. All of these wonderful birds can be found along the extensive roadways surrounding Nome while daily flights with Alaska Airlines from Anchorage make getting to Nome a snap.

General Overview

Once we arrive in Nome, you can relax knowing that you will have no additional out of pocket expenses on this all-inclusive tour. We will find exceptional modern accommodations at our lodging, a limited range of restaurants, and a full grocery for snacks for the road. Having all of your meals and lodging taken care of will leave you to enjoy your bird photography vacation with the least amount of hassle possible.

We are intimately familiar with the birds and challenges of photographing on the tundra. We will work extremely hard to get you into the right position to make the best images possible, but you will learn much more than simply how to get close to your subject. You'll also learn how to use the light and wind angles to full advantage to successfully capture images of action and behavior. We will give exposure tips, point out opportunities to improve compositions, and warn of any pitfalls that could reduce the success of your images. The small group size and low student to instructor ratio will insure the best possible opportunities for each participant. Along the way we will share natural history anecdotes and first-hand experiences of many of the species you encounter.

Join us in Nome and learn to take your photography to the next level!

Equipment

Bring your longest telephoto lens and matching teleconverters. A 500mm or 600mm lens is preferred but a 400mm lenses with a teleconverter and/or one of the small sensor cameras (1.5 or 1.6x crop) will provide ample magnification for a great number of opportunities. If your longest lens is 400mm then you likely are used to having your subject a little smaller in the frame. We will discuss how to make pleasing compositions when the subject is not frame filling. A wider lens will come in handy for fully documenting your trip and taking the required tourist snap shots around town. Chest waders and a bag blind are highly recommended for this tour. We will be happy to provide suggestions as to which style might be best for you. Muck boots can be a nice substitute or addition to the chest waders if you are sure you will not want to get into the water. But photographing ducks and loons from eye level in their environment is a very special experience.

Environment

Participants should be prepared for a wide range of weather at Nome from low temperatures in the upper 30s to highs near 80 degrees. Layers should definitely be part of your clothing plan. A heavy waterproof camo jacket is a great option but also pack a light-weight wind breaker/rain jacket for warmer days. Mosquitoes will likely be a nuisance at least some of the time so plan on a head net and gloves at least. I also pack a net shirt but have never needed to use it. Bug repellent with Picardin as the active ingredients is suggested. Deet works fine but can be terribly hard on the plastic parts of your camera and tripod. Picardin is just as effective without doing damage to your gear.

Physical Activity

Walking in waders over uneven tundra while carrying heavy camera gear is not your typical walk in the park but we will not be using them often or walking very far when we do need them. Brief periods of strenuous activity should be expected but slow and steady wins the race. A number of previous clients have arrived on tours with some nervousness about their physical abilities. Each left proud of their efforts and with new found confidence in their abilities. A number of shorebirds, songbirds and ducks will be photographed quite close to or even from the road. This workshop may not be for you if you have knee or back problems or otherwise have difficulty with off trail walking while carrying your camera gear.

Daily Schedule

The sun is below the horizon for less than three hours a day during our mid June visit to Nome. In short order we will adapt our shooting schedule in order to take advantage of the best light daily. Our day will be split into a sometimes short night's sleep with a longer mid-day break in order to take full advantage of the best light. While not easy, the results will be spectacular and there will be time to catch up on sleep when the weather deteriorates. In addition to dictating our schedule the weather will also have a say in where we photograph from day to day. The best laid plans to photograph near the Bering Sea in the morning may have to be changed if a marine fog hits shore. On other days heavy clouds in the mountains may force us to lower elevation to find good light. We will plan to travel the length of the Teller, Kougorok and Council Roads during the tour. On these long days we will buy sandwiches the previous day to pack for lunch on the road. While the schedule can be tiring the results will be spectacular. No participant should feel pressured to join every outing. This is your trip and you may choose to spend one or more sessions at your room catching up on sleep or doing some image editing.

Likely Species on this tour (species in BOLD are most frequently photographed on the trip):



Green-winged Teal

Northern Pintail

Common Eider

Long-tailed Duck

Willow Ptarmigan

Rock Ptarmigan

Red-throated Loon

Pacific Loon

Red-necked Grebe

Golden Eagle

Gyr Falcon

Black-bellied Plover

American Golden-Plover

Pacific Golden-Plover

Semipalmated Plover

Whimbrel

Bristle-thighed Curlew

Bar-tailed Godwit

Red-necked Stint

Semipalmated Sandpiper

Western Sandpiper

Ruddy Turnstone

Dunlin

Red Knot

Red-necked Phalarope

Parasitic Jaeger

Long-tailed Jaeger

Mew Gull

Glaucous Gull

Arctic Tern

Aleutian Tern

Short-eared Owl

Arctic Warbler

Bluethroat

Northern Wheatear

Gray-cheeked Thrush

Eastern Yellow Wagtail

American Pipit

Orange-crowned Warbler

Yellow Warbler

Blackpoll Warbler

Northern Waterthrush

Wilson's Warbler

American Tree Sparrow

Savannah Sparrow

Fox Sparrow

White-crowned Sparrow

Golden-crowned Sparrow

Lapland Longspur

Snow Bunting

Trip Details:

Cost:

Price per person (double occupancy), from Nome, Alaska: \$4,999

Single Supplement: \$1000

Minimum Participants: 3

Maximum Participants: 4

Price Includes:

Expert Guides

Ground Transportation in Alaska

All Lodging

All Meals

Park Entrance Fees

Price Does Not Include:

Airfare to and from Nome, Alaska

Airport Taxes

Passport and Visa Fees (if applicable)

Alcoholic Beverages

Personal Items

Travel Insurance

Tips

Deposit:

A deposit of \$500 per person is required to hold your spot on this tour. The remaining balance is due no later than 3 months prior to the scheduled start date of the tour (March 8, 2023).

If you have any questions about this tour or would like to sign up for it, please contact Rob at info@sabrewingnaturetours.com, by phone at 317-324-8505, or register through our website at sabrewingnaturetours.com.

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