On the first day of the trip, me met up with the group in the Anchorage Airport and traveled as a group up to Barrow by way of Prudhoe Bay. Since the travel day to Barrow is quite exhausting, that first evening was spent driving around the area to familiarize ourselves with what species were around, giving everyone a chance to think of what their major photo targets were. On the first road we drove down, we were met with an arctic welcoming committee, a male Spectacled Eider, dozens of Red and Red-necked Phalaropes, and Lapland Longspurs. The group went back to the hotel early to rest up for our first day of shooting.

Our first morning started out with a group of cooperative Snow Buntings, a stunning female Red Phalarope, and laying on the tundra watching a dark-morph Parasitic Jaeger that had just finished eating a lemming. Further down the road, Brian spotted a quick wing-up display from a shorebird out on the tundra. This display that most shorebirds do is very fun to watch and almost never seen outside of breeding grounds. We were thrilled when we realized that the displaying shorebird was a lekking group of Buff-breasted Sandpipers! A quick walk through the snow-covered tundra put us right in position to photograph this incredible behavior up close. From this spot, we were surrounded not only by the Buff-breasted Sandpiper group, but also displaying Semipalmated Sandpipers, Pectoral Sandpipers, and Dunlin. The rest of our day was spent looking for species to photograph the next morning and exploring the Barrow Heritage Museum in town.
Within the first hour in the field the next morning, we were laying in the grass on the edge of a pond with six Steller’s Eiders and a group of Long-tailed Ducks. We spent several hours not only enjoying these awesome ducks up close but watching distant King and Spectacled Eiders. After spending a few hours at this pond, we were all thrilled and ready to see what else we could find. Right by the car, an American Golden-Plover was displaying right when it started snowing, creating an opportunity and setting we just couldn’t pass up, resulting in some beautiful photos. The day continued to get better with our first friendly King Eider pair. The cloud cover lifted, allowing for some beautiful golden light. We went back over to the Buff-breasted Sandpiper lek. Between the sandpiper group and the nearby Red Phalaropes, the setting was so night that we were out until 12:40am (thanks to the 24 hours of light this time of year).
The opportunity for displaying shorebirds, eiders, and other waterfowl on the gorgeous tundra setting is enough to make you lose track of time, fully immersed in what’s around you. We continued to visit the Buff-breasted lek, the Steller’s Eider ponds, as well as the Snow Buntings and Lapland Longspurs near town. However, on the final night, we had three very memorable encounters that just added to an already successful trip! The first was while photographing a pair of Long-tailed Ducks, we noticed movement on the other side of a mound that turned out to be a pair of King Eiders. The group got into a position where everyone had a close clear angle and we enjoyed the pair swimming right past us, allowing for great photos! Shortly after a very vocal and bold Long-billed Dowitcher approached us and his calls attracted several others. Just like that, we had five very curious Long-billed Dowitchers right in front of us. Any opportunity to photography vocalizing shorebirds is great!
The last bird we photographed before heading back to get ready to leave was something we’d not seen the whole trip. Brian noticed movement not too far off the road running away from us. We pulled over and began searching and spotted a male Willow Ptarmigan on the side of one of the side roads. This bird was just as interested in us as we were it. The next two hours were spent with this bird that at times was walking up to us within minimal focal distance and kept gracing us with their hilariously cool calls. This was the perfect ending to the trip. Dinner that night was full of excitement and eagerness to look through the photos from the trip.
Join us in Barrow for the opportunity to photograph birds in one of the best spots Alaska has to offer!

www.SabrewingNatureTours.com