Nome, Alaska
Photography
Tour Leaders: Brian Zwiebel and Tyler Ficker
June 14 - 21, 2018
The group met up at the Anchorage Airport and took the short flight over to Nome together. After going to unpack at the bed and breakfast, we bired locally to familiarize the group with the species in the area and see town. Within a few miles of where we stayed, we were encountering Red-throated Loon pairs, large numbers of Black-legged Kittiwakes, migrating Pelagic Cormorants, Willow Ptarmigan and Long-tailed Jaeger. We went sleep eager to get up for our first full day for photography.

Our first day started off with displaying Wilson’s Snipes singing from the alders and flying all around us. Shortly after, a cooperative Arctic Warbler allowed for some awesome photos while Fox and Golden-crowned Sparrows sang around us. No more than an hour later, we were amazed with a very friendly pair of Rock Ptarmigans who cooperated for a photoshoot. Once we headed back towards town, we spent some time between periods of good lighting to scope out some shorebird locations. We found Bar-tailed Godwit, Semipalmated and Pacific Golden Plovers, and Whimbrels. Once the lighting became more favorable, we spent a few hours with a group of Aleutian Terns and Mew Gulls before heading to bed for the day.
The next morning, we focused on some of the songbirds of the area. We had very nice opportunities with White-crowned and American Tree Sparrows, Blackpoll Warblers, Bohemian Waxwings, and both Common and Hoary Redpolls. We had our first encounters with both Moose and Musk Ox as well! Two of the male Musk Ox were competing against one another in the middle of the road at one point. We found a nice place to stop and take some landscape photos of the beautiful mountain range north of the city. At this spot, we couldn’t pass up the chance to photograph American Golden-Plovers and Long-tailed Jaegers in the tundra wildflowers. The evening was spent along the coast exploring more locations for the next few days. We were able to photograph some of the Thick-billed Murres that were around and relocate the Lesser Sand Plover that had been around, a very rare bird for North America!
The following morning allowed us to bring out the waders and get in the water to photograph a pair of Red-throated Loons! We spent several hours enjoying this pair and the Green-winged Teal that joined them. Nearby Golden-crowned Sparrows, Wilson's Warblers, and Common Redpolls added several great photo opportunities to the morning. Continuing down the road, we watched a pair of Moose and their calf enjoying some time in the river. Not too much further, we spent quite a bit of time with a White Wagtail nesting under one of the bridges. The highlight of the day, however, would have to be the pair of Northern Wheatears we were able to photograph while nest building. This experience was incredible and yielded some great photos. A pair of Black-bellied Plovers present made it even better! On the way back to the house, we made a quick stop at one of the mountains to photograph Western Sandpipers and found more Musk Ox.

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Early the next morning, we drove along the coast towards the town of Council. Along this road, we were able to photograph species such as male Harlequin Ducks, Thick-billed Murres, Lapland Longspurs, Golden Eagle, Arctic Warbler, and Whimbrel. Out near council lighting wasn’t favorable but we enjoyed using that time for lunch and birding the spruce forest. Many of the locations in Nome don’t have large trees, meaning that we were able to add quite a few species here that we hadn’t come across yet such as Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Varied Thrush. On the drive home we saw THREE Gyrfalcons!

Our final day was spent along the mouth of the Nome River photographing Long-tailed Jaegers, Black-legged Kittiwakes, Arctic Terns, and Sabine’s Gulls. A nearby spot allowed for opportunities with Yellow, Orange-crowned, Wilson’s and Blackpoll Warblers, and Bluethroat, a great species to end the trip with! Our final night was full of excitement from everything that we had photographed and the great time we had as a group!
Join us in Nome for the opportunity to photograph birds in one of the best spots Alaska has to offer!

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