Alaska: Utqiagvik
Top of the World Bird Photography

Tour Leaders: Brian Zwiebel and Jamie Cunningham
June 11 - 17, 2022
Once we all arrived in town, we were happy to have a number of evenings with beautiful light. Our first trek out netted courting Long-tailed Ducks, a fan favorite, with their crazy calls and constant bickering among the males. It made for some great action photography and left us excited for more. A cooperative Semipalmated Plover showed off for the group before we moved on from that spot. The group tracked down some Red and Red-necked Phalaropes, and Semipalmated Sandpipers for some great images before calling it a night.

Early the next morning we started by wading into one of the few thawed ponds with a high concentration of birds. We were able to slowly approach two pairs of sleepy King Eiders that allowed us within 20 feet of them. As if that wasn’t enough, a pair of Pacific Loons and a gorgeous plumaged Spectacled Eider swam right by us. Our group decided it was time to move on and were gifted with an unexpected pair of male Hudsonian Godwits to wrap up the morning. That evening we all enjoyed photographing a cooperative Pectoral Sandpiper and Dunlin while they performed their amazing breeding displays.
We caught up on sleep as the cloud rolled in overnight but had an early start the next morning. What a start it was. Arctic Fox, Snowy Owl, and the surprise find, a POLAR BEAR, right at the very edge of town! It was on the road when we first arrived, and we got some pretty amazing looks and photographs as it made its way out onto the ice shelf. What an exciting find! The evening added even more fun with Snow Buntings, Semipalmated Sandpiper flight displays, American Golden Plover, and a very cooperative Pomarine Jaeger, allowing us to slowly approach within about 30 ft!
The next day was an eider-filled day. With a calm wind, we focused on photographing Spectacled and Steller’s Eider. They can be rather shy and after a slow careful approach, we were able to grab some great images of both species! The Hudsonian Godwits made another appearance, and we took advantage of the opportunity to grab some more images of them calling and showing off that great breeding plumage!
White-rumped Sandpiper

Hudsonian Godwit
With the still water continuing the next day as well, we couldn’t give up a chance at photographing Red and Red-necked Phalaropes doing their spinning. While we were on our way to the spot, we refound the Varied Thrush that had previously been spotted in the area! We finished up the day with some great images of King Eider flying right toward us!

The next day had us seeking out some birds we hadn’t photographed yet and we were able to get awesome images of the hard-to-find White-rumped Sandpiper, Tundra Swans, and a courting group of Long-billed Dowitchers. It’s always fun to watch them spar with each other. The beautiful light really showed off their breeding plumage! We ended the day with a breeding plumage Sanderling, what a stunner!
On our final morning, we spent time with a pair of White-rumped Sandpipers. It was incredible. The male was actively doing its wing-up display for the female, giving us incredible photo ops in stunning light. We finished up the morning with a stunning pair of King Eiders, which swam right up to the group. What a way to finish the trip!

Utqiagvik is always an amazing place, full of incredible birds and opportunities you cannot get anywhere else. I can’t wait to be back on the tundra next year!
Join us in Utqiagvik for the opportunity to photograph birds in one of the best spots Alaska has to offer!

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