Alaska: Utqiagvik
Top of the World Bird Photography

Tour Leaders: Brian Zwiebel and Jamie Cunningham
June 14 - 19, 2023
Utqiagvik is always an adventure. Our group was excited to experience the unique and wonderful bird photography experiences in the high Arctic! Our first night was a bit rainy but gave us our first opportunity to get out on the tundra and do some exploring. The group was rewarded with two of the biggest prizes of the trip, King and Spectacled Eiders right off the roadside!

Our first morning allowed for some unique high-key images of Pacific Loons. After a cooperative session, we ventured onto the tundra and worked with a Semipalmated Sandpiper and Snow Buntings in the tundra flowers. We moved to another spot that hosted lots of shorebirds! Dunlin, American Golden Plover, Pectoral Sandpiper, and Long-billed Dowitchers kept us busy for hours! We finished up the day with all 3 species of Jaegers including a gorgeous dark morph Parasitic Jaeger.
A good night’s rest was just what we needed to prepare us for what everyone dreams of in Utqiagvik, a full night of golden light! Nothing compares to that golden glow on the tundra. Our group took full advantage of the opportunity. Long-tailed Ducks too close to photograph, King Eiders lazily drifting mere feet away in tundra ponds, a pair of Pacific Loons, and an incredibly clean male Snowy Owl were just a few of the subjects we enjoyed. A happy tired crew headed off to bed after an evening of pure photography bliss!
We had one big target the next day, Steller’s Eider. We found a pair near the road that provided some incredible shots both on the water and in flight. Red and Red-necked Phalaropes are fun to photograph in nice light and we managed a number of great shots of them performing their signature spin. That evening, participants went out to look for Polar Bear and were rewarded with 4 adult bears! Seeing this incredible predator in the wild is an unforgettable experience!
Another sunny night was coming up, so after some daytime rest we headed out for more King Eider and another round of Spectacled Eider shots. We photographed displaying Pectoral Sandpipers and Glaucous Gulls were so close and photogenic, we couldn’t help but grab some shots of them too. That evening we found several pairs of Semipalmated Plovers and Lapland Longspurs on beautiful tundra patches. It was fun to see how each species tends to match their environment.

The group ventured out to look for Black Guillemots that Jamie had seen on her private trip before the main tour started and were rewarded with a relaxed pair that engaged in courtship behavior, making for some interesting shots. Both White-rumped and Baird’s Sandpipers were located and photographed nearby.
Our final day was spent photographing a breeding pair of Red-necked Stints and enjoying some of the cultural experiences in Utqiagvik like the Heritage Museum and Whale Bone Arch. Utqiagvik is always a favorite among participants and it’s easy to see why with so many interesting and cooperative subjects. We look forward to returning to one of our favorite spots 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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