

GRAND ALASKA

GAMBELL/NOME: JUNE 2 – 10, 2017

GRAND ALASKA PART I: NOME & THE PRIBILOFS JUNE 9 – 19, 2017

GRAND ALASKA PART II: ANCHORAGE, DENALI HIGHWAY

& KENAI PENINSULA JUNE 19 – 27, 2017

BARROW EXTENSION: JUNE 27 – 29, 2017

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Our Grand Alaska tour offers participants the option of taking any combination of four individual sections. Those taking the entire package will have a 28-day tour that is truly comprehensive in scope. Those desiring a shorter trip may select one or two of the tours and still enjoy excellent birding in a more relaxed visit to some of the most beautiful areas in North America.

When spring suddenly arrives on the adjacent shores of Alaska and Siberia, and thousands of birds rush northwards to claim their nesting territories, some of these small navigators make big mistakes. Because of this, every year a number of Asian migrants wind up on North American soil, and a few have even colonized Alaska as breeding birds. Birders have learned that they can intercept some of these strays by positioning themselves at strategic points in western Alaska. The Gambell/Nome tour is designed to do exactly that, and at the same time it will familiarize us with the multitude of Bering Sea and northern mainland (sub-Arctic) breeding specialties.

Both the Gambell/Nome tour and Grand Alaska Part I: Nome & The Pribilofs, will allow participants the opportunity to explore the varied habitats to be found in the Nome region. Nome, the old gold-rush capital of Alaska, still retains much of the frontier character that typifies the Alaskan bush. Here, amidst wonderful examples of alpine and coastal tundra, we will search for some of the most special of Alaska's breeding birds including Rock and Willow ptarmigan, Gyrfalcon, Bristle-thighed Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit, Aleutian Tern, Bluethroat, Northern Wheatear, Eastern Yellow Wagtail and others. We can also expect a nice cross-section of large mammals with Musk Ox, Moose, Grizzly (Brown Bear) and Reindeer among the possibilities.

The Bering Sea is considered to be the center of the adaptive radiation of the Alcid family. Nowhere is that diversity on better display than in the Pribilof Islands, where visitors can expect to see at least seven nesting species of puffins, auklets and murre. The sight-and-sound spectacle of the bird cliffs, with thousands of alcids, fulmars, kittiwakes and cormorants, many of them at close range, has to be experienced to be appreciated. Participants can expect all of the special breeding birds (including Red-legged Kittiwake and Red-faced Cormorant), abundant photographic opportunities, and a good chance of picking up one or more Asiatic vagrants.

With a slightly more relaxed pace and comfortable accommodations throughout, the Grand Alaska Part II: Denali Highway & Kenai Peninsula tour will enjoy the varied birdlife, large mammals, and incomparable scenery of interior and south coastal Alaska.

A visit to Barrow will take us to the northernmost town on the North American continent. In a setting of 24-hour sunlight, the birdlife is unmistakably High Arctic. All four eiders use the lakes here, and displaying sandpipers are everywhere. Every pond is alive with gorgeous Red Phalaropes, and we should be treated to the sight of Snowy Owls cruising over the tundra.

Those interested in taking only the Barrow Extension will need to be in Anchorage before June 27 in order to assure meeting the group for the flight to Barrow.

GRAND ALASKA GAMBELL/NOME PRE-TRIP JUNE 2 – 10, 2017

June 2, Day 1: Anchorage. Participants will arrive in Anchorage today and take the complementary shuttle to our hotel, where a room will be reserved in each person's name. We'll meet in the hotel lobby at 6:30 p.m. for a get-acquainted dinner and to discuss plans for tomorrow.

NIGHT: The Coast International Inn, Anchorage

June 3, Day 2: Anchorage to Gambell. This morning we'll fly from Anchorage to Nome and transfer to a smaller plane for our flight to the Yupik village of Gambell, at the northwestern tip of St. Lawrence Island. Regardless of the scheduled flight time, please note that we may experience weather delays in getting out to Gambell. Accordingly, this is a day when we need to remain particularly flexible in our plans. If the weather cooperates, we should be on the ground at Gambell by mid-late afternoon, ready to take on a whole new set of birds and birding experiences!

NIGHT: Sivuqaq Inn, Gambell

June 4-6, Days 3-5: Gambell. A visit to Gambell can rightly be considered an adventure. The friendly villagers are subsistence hunters and wonderful workers of ivory. The opportunity to stay amongst these Bering Sea people provides a unique glimpse into an ancient culture that few outsiders ever experience. Our accommodations are in a community-owned facility with simple double-occupancy rooms. The building is heated and has plumbing (unlike pre-1996 tours) with five shared bathrooms complete with flush toilets and hot showers. Self-service laundry facilities are available (at no charge) within our building. Our birding here is done on foot (average hikes of about three miles roundtrip), often over slush and loose gravel, but always over flat terrain. **A recently added network of hard-packed gravel roads through the village eliminated much of the need for slogging through loose gravel, allowing us to reach most of the closer birding sites within 20-30 minutes of easy walking. For more distant locales (e.g. North Beach or the south end of Troutman Lake and beyond), or for rare bird chases (where speed may be of the essence), your leaders will arrange and pay for group "taxi" rides in carts towed by ATVs. These rides are provided by villagers who are accustomed to driving the ATVs, and who are responsible for maintaining their own vehicles.** Participants, at their own discretion, may also opt to utilize this "taxi" service, in lieu of hiking, at any time for one-way or roundtrip rides to and from closer birding sites (the Point, the boatyards, airstrip, near and far boneyards, marsh at the northeast corner of Troutman Lake). A typical one-way ride to most birding locations is \$7-12, and is solely at the discretion of the individual participant, who will be responsible for paying directly for these services. Your leaders will be happy to facilitate contacts with the taxi drivers, most of whom post their telephone numbers on the lodge bulletin board, and some of whom we've known for many years. Rides can usually be arranged on very short notice, and the drivers

routinely arrange to drop people off at a birding site and return at a specified time to pick them up. We also carry radios in the field, further facilitating rides on demand. We have found this system to work very well, and it allows participants the option of hiking or riding depending on conditions at the moment. At the same time, it is much less expensive than charging each participant for full-day ATV rental (going rate of \$85/day, or more than double what you would expect to pay for three roundtrip taxi rides), and avoids the inevitable frustration and inconvenience of having to swap out or repair rented ATVs that develop mechanical problems or break down (a regular occurrence).

The weather conditions are often harsh—temperatures are just above freezing, with frequent fog, drizzle, or even occasional snow. In spite of this, the birding can be fabulous! Remarkable strays that have occurred here include White-tailed Eagle, Black-tailed Gull, Oriental Pratincole, Green Sandpiper, Great Knot, Eurasian Dotterel, Jack Snipe, Taiga Flycatcher, Dusky Warbler, Stonechat, Dusky Thrush, Pechora Pipit, Eurasian Bullfinch, Common Rosefinch, and many others. The 1989 VENT group discovered a Little Curlew here—the first for Alaska and only the third ever found on the North American continent! The 1995 VENT group discovered a Tree Pipit—only the second ever found in North America. Our 2011 group found a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, which represented not only a first island record, but a first record for the entire Bering Sea region of that North American breeder. Our 2012 group turned up a Common (“Siberian”) Chiffchaff, which represented the first confirmed (photographically documented) record of that species for North America! Our 2013 tour enjoyed a number of vagrants, topped by a Little Curlew (only the second Alaskan record) that we found on our last morning on the island. Common Ringed Plover, Red-necked Stint, Bluethroat, Red-throated Pipit and McKay’s Bunting (exceedingly rare in recent years) occur with varying degrees of regularity. Of course, the ultra-rarities are never to be expected, and one cannot count on seeing Siberian vagrants on any single visit. Nonetheless, our daily checks of the marshy ponds south of the village, the boneyards, and the lower slopes of Sivuqaq Mountain will be tinged with excitement and anticipation—practically anything is possible.

Even on days when no vagrants turn up, the birding is exciting. Tens of thousands of alcids nest on the cliffs just east of the village, and flocks are constantly passing very close to shore at the Northwest Point. Alcid diversity reaches its zenith in the Bering Sea, and we can expect to see as many as 10 species. Eight of these (Crested, Least and Parakeet auklets; Horned and Tufted puffins; Common and Thick-billed murre; and Pigeon Guillemot) should be present in numbers, whereas some searching may be required to find the Black Guillemot and Dovekie. Each year, small numbers of Dovekies are found (and are presumed to nest) on the mountain slopes above the village. Regular migrants often seen at Gambell include Yellow-billed and Arctic loon, Emperor Goose, all four species of eiders, Red Phalarope, Slaty-backed Gull, Sabine’s Gull, and all three species of jaegers. There are typically a few scattered nesting pairs of Rock Sandpipers and White Wagtails in the area as well. Snow Bunting and Lapland Longspur are the two common breeding passerines at Gambell! In years when the concentrations of pack ice offshore are especially heavy (sadly, an increasingly rare occurrence over the past 15 years), occasional Ross’s Gulls and Ivory Gulls may be present near the village.

NIGHTS: Sivuqaq Inn, Gambell

June 7, Day 6: Gambell to Nome. Sometime this morning, we’ll fly back to the relative comfort and civilization of Nome, on the Seward Peninsula in western Alaska. During the afternoon we should have time to check the mouth of the Nome River (where Slaty-backed Gull is often present and where other strays have been seen on occasion) and explore the Council Road at least to Safety Lagoon, the two most dynamic spots for waterfowl, shorebirds, gulls, terns, and jaegers, and the best locales in the Nome area for potential vagrants.

NIGHT: Aurora Inn, Nome

June 8-9, Days 7-8: Nome. We will have two full days to explore the area around Nome, the ivory capital of Alaska and once its gold capital as well. Increased coverage over the past two decades has yielded a number of discoveries from this region, including the presence of breeding Bristle-thighed Curlews and Bluethroats, as well as such vagrants as Eurasian Wigeon, Lesser Sand-Plover, Great Knot, Gray-tailed Tattler, and Black-headed Gull. Red-necked Stint, Emperor Goose, and Slaty-backed Gull are seen with some regularity, and it’s a rare stay

here that doesn't produce something unexpected. In the absence of “staked-out” rarities, we will search such standard hot-spots as Safety Lagoon and the Nome River mouth, or devote more time to the exploration of the outer reaches of the area's three roads. Road conditions permitting, we'll spend one of our full days working the Kougarok Road. Although our biggest “quest” bird out here is the Bristle-thighed Curlew (which typically requires a roundtrip hike of at least a few hours over some difficult terrain, with no guarantee of success), there is much more to this day. The Kougarok Road is arguably one of the best birding roads in North America! Harlequin Duck, Red-breasted Merganser, Rock and Willow ptarmigan, Gyrfalcon, Rough-legged Hawk, Golden Eagle, Wandering Tattler, Eastern Yellow Wagtail, Bluethroat, Northern Wheatear, Golden-crowned Sparrow, and Hoary Redpoll are just a few of the many birds that we regularly see on this road. Additionally, mammal-viewing opportunities abound (Moose, Grizzly, Reindeer, and Musk Ox are all regularly seen), and the scenery is exceptional. Regardless of our exact course of action over the two days, we're certain to see a number of typical breeding birds of the region, usually including Pacific and Red-throated loons, Brant, Common Eider, Bar-tailed Godwit, Long-tailed and Parasitic jaegers, Aleutian Tern, Willow and Rock ptarmigan, Gyrfalcon, Eastern Yellow Wagtail, Bluethroat, Northern Wheatear, Gray-cheeked Thrush, American Tree Sparrow, Golden-crowned Sparrow, and Hoary Redpoll. Some years, White Wagtails or early arriving Arctic Warblers may be present.

NIGHTS: Aurora Inn, Nome

June 10, Day 9: Departure for Home or Begin Grand Alaska Tour. Depending on actual flight schedules, we may have time for an abbreviated morning birding excursion. Participants not continuing on the Grand Alaska Part I section will depart for Anchorage at roughly mid-day (subject to change). Some participants may find it necessary to overnight in Anchorage and depart the following day. A hotel room for the night of June 10 is not included in the Gambell/Nome tour fee. However, upon request, VENT will be happy to arrange pre-paid reservations at The Coast International Inn in Anchorage.

GRAND ALASKA PART I: NOME & THE PRIBILOFS JUNE 9 – 19, 2017

June 9, Day 1: Arrival in Anchorage. Participants should plan to arrive in Anchorage sometime today. One or both tour leaders will be in Nome, finishing up with the Gambell/Nome tour. Therefore, participants will be responsible for getting themselves to the hotel and then back to the airport for the flight to Nome the next morning. The hotel provides a courtesy shuttle, as well as storage facilities for any items not needed during the four-night stay in Nome. Our hotel is immediately adjacent to Lake Spenard, and short walks to the lake have often produced such treats as Pacific Loon and Barrow's Goldeneye amidst the more common waterfowl.

NIGHT: The Coast International Inn, Anchorage

June 10, Day 2: Anchorage to Nome. Participants will depart Anchorage for Nome in the morning (subject to change) and be transferred to the Aurora Inn, where a room will be reserved in each person's name.

After meeting for lunch, we'll begin birding along the Council Road, which hugs the coastline south and east of town. Nome is the ivory capital of Alaska and was its gold capital in years gone by. Today the town is a major center for the native people of the region. Once a part of the Bering land bridge, the Seward Peninsula has been colonized by several Old World species. Our first afternoon in this rich area will provide an introduction to some of these Siberian colonizers, as well as to some familiar birds in decidedly unfamiliar settings.

Here, pairs of colorful Eastern Yellow Wagtails and Lapland Longspurs enliven the brown tundra, while Fox Sparrows and Gray-cheeked Thrushes sing from the willow thickets. Long-tailed Jaegers cruise tirelessly over the tundra, their approach noisily protested by pairs of Whimbrels or Pacific Golden-Plovers. The edges of the vast Safety Lagoon complex are a gathering spot for hordes of shorebirds, sometimes including numbers of bickering

Bar-tailed Godwits. Farther out, at Safety Sound, are masses of resting gulls (mostly Glaucous, Mew, and Black-legged Kittiwakes), which we will check carefully for the occasional Slaty-backed, Sabine's, or Black-headed gull. Flocks of Brant and Common Eiders are scattered liberally across the Sound, and jaegers of all three species can be seen harassing the Arctic and Aleutian terns. Red-throated and Pacific loons are frequent sights, as are groups of Tundra Swans and Sandhill Cranes. There is more than enough to keep us busy this first day, and we will undoubtedly return to this area on another of our days in the Nome region.

NIGHT: Aurora Inn, Nome

June 11-13, Days 3-5: Nome Area. One of these days will be devoted to exploration of the Kougarok Road, which runs north into the interior of the peninsula. In contrast to the low coastal tundra and beaches that border the first 30 miles of the Council Road, the landscape here is mountainous, with high, rocky domes overlooking the river valleys below. The dense willow thickets along the river are home to another Siberian colonizer, the late-arriving Arctic Warbler, whose hammering trills reverberate through the countryside. Here too are Gray-cheeked Thrush; Wilson's, Orange-crowned, and Yellow warblers; Northern Waterthrush; Fox, Golden-crowned, and American Tree sparrows; and Common and Hoary redpolls. Rapidly flowing rivers and ambient gravel bars are the preferred habitat of Harlequin Ducks, Red-breasted Mergansers, Wandering Tattlers, and Ruddy Turnstones. In good years, both Willow and Rock ptarmigan are frequently seen in willow thickets or rocks along the road. Large mammals are also frequently encountered. In addition to herds of semi-domesticated Reindeer (rare in recent years), our groups have been treated to regular sightings of Moose, Grizzly (Brown Bear), and even Musk Ox!

A special quest bird is the Bluethroat, a beautiful little Eurasian Muscicapid (Old World flycatcher) with a wonderful skylarking song. In years past this was considered one of the most difficult-to-find of all North American breeding birds, with known sites being reached only by special chartered bush flights. In 1987, during a VENT tour, Kevin Zimmer discovered a pair of Bluethroats constructing a nest along the Kougarok Road, farther from Nome than most birders had previously ventured. These gorgeous birds have been found on every VENT Alaska tour since then, and seem to have become a fixture as well as a true highlight of our annual trips. Conditions permitting, we will offer an optional hike to search for the Bristle-thighed Curlew. This rare bird breeds in small numbers in the Nome area. In a typical year, there are one or two pairs breeding on a large dome about 73 miles out of Nome. At the time of our annual visits, the curlews are often incubating eggs and remaining inconspicuous. The pairs have ranges that cover large sections of the mountain (we have seen these birds pick up and fly two miles to an opposite ridge without stopping), and hence, are not easy to find. To make matters more difficult, Whimbrels, which are quite similar to the Bristle-thighed in appearance (although not in voice), also breed on the mountain, and are routinely mistaken for the Bristle-thighed by inexperienced or overly enthusiastic birders. Despite this, we have had pretty fair success in showing this rare bird to groups, recording it on approximately 70% of our attempts. The hike for the curlew typically involves a minimum of two hours (often twice that) of walking, much of it uphill (moderate slope) and over tussock grass formations that range from merely annoying to mildly treacherous in spots. **Whether or not you opt to hike for the curlew, a day's birding on the Kougarok Road is not to be missed.** Participants routinely rave about this day, and many have rated it as among their lifetime birding highlights.

Note: Our day on the Kougarok Road is likely to be a long one. After breakfast in Nome, we will be gone for the remainder of the day with lunch in the field. Depending on birding conditions, our return could be delayed until late evening with a very late dinner to follow. On rare occasions, birding conditions have even warranted a picnic dinner in the field.

The rest of our time in the Nome region will be left somewhat open, with our precise plans no doubt dictated by current road, weather and birding conditions. Most likely, we will devote one full day to further exploration of the Council Road, which, in addition to having the most dynamic spot for migrants (Safety Lagoon complex), can also boast of easily accessible alpine tundra on either side of Skookum Pass, and of the Nome region's only accessible spruce forest near Council itself. The Teller Road will likely occupy us for a day as well. This road is particularly good for alpine-breeding shorebirds, raptors, and Rock Ptarmigan, and has been the most regular road

for seeing White Wagtail in recent years. There are always surprises in the Nome region, and it pays to be flexible with our schedule. Past groups have discovered such unexpected treats as territorial Red-throated Pipits, pairs of Red-necked Stints, Gray-tailed Tattler, Great Knot, and Arctic Loons. In addition to unexpected vagrants, there are also a few resident birds such as Gyrfalcon, Northern Shrike, and Northern Wheatear that frequently require special efforts to find. Regardless of our exact course of action, there will always be plenty of excitement in birding this beautiful and remote outpost.

NIGHTS: Aurora Inn, Nome

June 14, Day 6: Nome to Anchorage. Depending on our actual flight departure time, this morning we'll check vantage points along the Nome coastline before returning to Anchorage. Migrants like Brant, sea ducks, and jaegers may still be moving offshore, and there's always a chance for a rare migrant like Emperor Goose, King Eider, or Sabine's Gull. At some point in the day we will fly back to the bustling big city of Anchorage and prepare for the next stage of our tour.

NIGHT: The Coast International Inn, Anchorage

June 15, Day 7: Flex Day in Anchorage. This "flex" day offers the chance for some very different birds and habitats from those encountered elsewhere on Part I, while providing a buffer between flight days and a hedge against any weather-related problems getting out of Nome. The day will likely be devoted to birding the boreal forest, lakes and coastal mudflats in and around Anchorage, and will represent a dramatic shift in habitats and avifauna from the sub-Arctic tundras of Nome and the island of St. Paul. **Our exact schedule will be dictated by current birding conditions and tidal schedules**, but will most likely include visits to Westchester Lagoon and Potter Marsh, where waterbirds abound. Westchester Lagoon is typically dotted with nesting pairs of Red-necked Grebes, and the adjacent tidal mudflats offer foraging sites for Hudsonian Godwits, Short-billed Dowitchers, Surfbirds and a variety of other shorebirds, some of which regularly roost on islands in the lagoon during high tides. Potter Marsh boasts a lovely boardwalk that offers intimate viewing of nesting grebes, waterfowl, Mew Gulls, Arctic Terns and, sometimes, even Sandhill Cranes. Ambient swampy birch forest is excellent for seeing Alder Flycatcher and Lincoln's Sparrow, and nearby spots often host nesting Horned Grebes and Rusty Blackbirds. Various parks in and around Anchorage provide access to boreal forest, with such birds as Spruce Grouse, Merlin, American Three-toed Woodpecker, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Western Wood-Pewee, Alder Flycatcher, Boreal Chickadee, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Swainson's and Varied thrush, Townsend's and Orange-crowned warblers, Pine Grosbeak and White-winged Crossbill among the many possibilities. The many small lakes scattered through the Anchorage basin are also home to Common and Pacific loons, Barrow's and Common goldeneyes, and Bonaparte's Gulls. **Alternatively**, on past tours, we have used these flex days to make day trips out of Anchorage to see actively nesting Great Gray Owls, Northern Hawk-Owls, or to take advantage of some ephemeral condition such as a recent burn that is attracting Black-backed and/or American Three-toed woodpeckers. Whatever our exact schedule is on this day, we are certain to see a surprising variety of birds, with the lovely Chugach Mountains providing the scenic backdrop.

NIGHT: The Coast International Inn, Anchorage

June 16, Day 8: Anchorage to St. Paul. After breakfast today we will fly southwest along the Alaska Peninsula toward St. Paul in the Pribilof Islands. As seen from the air, the peninsula is one of Western Alaska's most scenic areas, with remnant volcanic peaks rising 6,000 feet from the coastline. We may stop briefly at Dillingham before continuing northwestward over the Bering Sea. There should be time for birding this afternoon and an after-dinner excursion as well. Please note that in most years, only one VENT leader (typically the first leader) will be accompanying the group to the Pribilofs. There are excellent resident guides on the Pribilofs who will assist the VENT leader with driving and guiding. We feel it is important to keep one guide in Anchorage as a hedge against the possibility of the group being weather-bound on St. Paul for one or more days (this has happened a few times in past years), which would leave incoming participants for Part II in Anchorage without a leader.

NIGHT: King Eider Hotel, St. Paul

June 17, Day 9: St. Paul. Largest of the Pribilof Islands, St. Paul offers an incomparable seabird experience. At various vantage points along its cliffs, thousands of birds are constantly visible, some practically within touching distance: Least, Crested, and Parakeet auklets; Common and Thick-billed murres; Northern Fulmars; Horned and Tufted puffins; and more. The colorful Red-faced Cormorants and Red-legged Kittiwakes are easily observed here, and the latter species is a true specialty that is difficult to find elsewhere in Alaska. Flocks of non-breeding Harlequin Ducks along the shorelines and in the harbor are sometimes accompanied by small numbers of King or Steller's eiders. Among the few landbirds, Gray-crowned Rosy Finch and Snow Bunting are conspicuous, while more searching is often required to find the Pacific Wren. Rock Sandpipers are common on the grassy interior of the island. In addition, our mid-June visits have often turned up one or two odd strays from Asia. Examples of such bonus birds from past trips include Bean Goose, Tufted Duck, Gray-tailed Tattler, Lesser Sand-Plover, Little Stint, Long-toed Stint, Wood Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Ross's Gull, Black-headed Gull, Common and Oriental cuckoo, Eurasian Skylark, Siberian Rubythroat, "Black-backed" Wagtail, Hawfinch, Brambling, and Rustic Bunting. Between stretches of sea cliffs, huge herds of Northern fur seals come ashore each summer to raise their pups on the beaches. The neat and brightly-painted Aleut village of St. Paul makes a picturesque base for exploring these islands.

NIGHT: King Eider Hotel, St. Paul

June 18, Day 10: St. Paul to Anchorage. After a final morning on St. Paul, we'll return to Anchorage. Depending on flight times, upon arrival in Anchorage we may be able to bird Lake Spennard, which is perhaps the float-plane capital of the world as well as being very popular with birds such as Pacific Loon, Greater Scaup, Common Goldeneye, and Red-necked Phalarope.

NIGHT: The Coast International Inn, Anchorage

June 19, Day 11: Anchorage. Participants not continuing on Part II can depart Anchorage anytime today.

This will serve as a transition day of optional birding between tours for Part I participants continuing on Part II. The day will likely be one of relaxed birding of the boreal forest, lakes and coastal mudflats and lagoons in and around Anchorage, but, as always when we are in Anchorage, we will have our ears tuned to the local birding grapevine, and will be prepared to make last-minute adjustments to take full advantage of any unusual birding opportunity that might present itself. In 2016 we used this day to visit the Sockeye Burn area north of Willow, which had only recently been colonized by unusual numbers of Black-backed and American Three-toed woodpeckers following the big fire of 2015. Part II will officially commence with an introductory dinner on this night.

GRAND ALASKA PART II: ANCHORAGE, DENALI HIGHWAY & KENAI PENINSULA JUNE 19 – 27, 2017

June 19, Day 1: Anchorage. Participants not continuing from Grand Alaska Part I should plan to arrive in Anchorage today and take the complementary shuttle to our hotel, where a room will be reserved in each person's name. We'll meet in the hotel lobby at 6:30 p.m. for a get-acquainted dinner and to discuss plans for tomorrow.

NIGHT: The Coast International Inn, Anchorage

June 20, Day 2: Anchorage to Tangle Lakes. After breakfast, we'll head up the Glenn and Richardson Highways toward Paxson, birding en route. These two highways traverse some truly grand country and a great variety of habitats that typify the interior of central Alaska. In the early going we'll be bordering the Matanuska River Valley and afforded wonderful views of the spectacular Matanuska Glacier. The highway ascends to subalpine zones before dropping into a vast taiga belt of spruce forest dotted with small lakes and barrens of wet muskeg. These

habitats are particularly good for such special birds as Merlin, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Bohemian Waxwing, Northern Shrike, Blackpoll Warbler, White-winged Crossbill, and, in some years, Northern Hawk-Owl. The many lakes provide breeding habitat and feeding areas for a variety of waterfowl species including Trumpeter Swan, Barrow's Goldeneye, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Greater and Lesser scaup, Surf and White-winged scoters and many others. Horned Grebe, Solitary Sandpiper, Lesser Yellowlegs and dainty Bonaparte's Gulls are just a few of the other species regularly found around these taiga lakes. Stops in areas of bigger timber may yield such prizes as American Three-toed Woodpecker, Gray Jay, Boreal Chickadee, Pine Grosbeak and others. On a few occasions, we have even seen Great Gray Owls. Eventually, we will reach the tiny settlement of Paxson, at the east end of the famed Denali Highway. This 135.5-mile road, most of which is gravel, runs basically east-west, and connects the Richardson Highway with the George Parks Highway. Completed in 1957, the Denali Highway provided the first access for motorists wishing to visit Mount McKinley (now Denali) National Park. The George Parks Highway, running between Anchorage and Fairbanks, was completed in 1972, and offered a paved alternative route to Denali that has since become the standard. The Denali Highway reverted to being a backcountry road for hunters, fishermen and other wilderness travelers that were willing to deal with the gravel road, lack of facilities and general isolation. To this day it offers some of the most accessible, quintessentially Alaskan birding, wildlife viewing and sightseeing opportunities in all of interior Alaska.

The eastern end of the highway is paved for the first 21 miles. Starting at Paxson, where tall spruce forest and adjacent alder thickets are home to Merlin, Spruce Grouse, Alder Flycatcher, Gray Jay, Bohemian Waxwing, Northern Shrike, Varied Thrush, Blackpoll Warbler and Pine Grosbeak, the road quickly ascends into alpine habitats patrolled by Golden Eagles, Northern Harriers, Long-tailed Jaegers and even Gyrfalcons (rare). Willow and Rock ptarmigan replace the Spruce Grouse, and American Golden-Plovers and Whimbrels are to be seen in open expanses of tundra. Rushing streams are home to Harlequin Ducks, Wandering Tattlers and American Dippers, whereas shrubby thickets of willow, alder and dwarf birch are the abode of Gray-cheeked Thrush, Wilson's Warbler, American Tree Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow and Golden-crowned Sparrow. By mid-June, many of the taller thickets reverberate with the hammering trills of Arctic Warbler, the latest of the breeding species to arrive each spring.

Just before the pavement ends, we'll reach our lodge, situated amidst a picturesque mosaic of tundra lakes whose still waters reflect the images of snow-capped mountains. The Tangle River Inn offers a true Alaskan experience, surrounded by the natural beauty that typifies the Denali region, but without the congestion of cruise line tour buses and rampant commercialization that is coming to dominate the National Park itself. It will also allow us more birding time and greater flexibility than previous itineraries that visited the park. This will serve as our base for the next two days.

NIGHT: Tangle River Inn, MP 20 Denali Highway

June 21-22, Days 3-4: Denali Highway Wilderness. Emerging from our cabins in the morning, we'll be greeted by the dreamy songs of American Tree Sparrows and White-crowned Sparrows, while the staccato chipping of Wilson's Warblers emanates from nearby thickets. To the north, the magnificent Alaska Range spans the horizon, with many of the visible peaks topping 12,000' in elevation. Arctic Terns wheel and hover above the many small lakes and ponds, each seemingly decorated with a Barrow's Goldeneye, Long-tailed Duck or pair of Red-necked Phalarope. These will be days of great adventure, as our exploration of the Denali Highway wilderness begins in earnest. On Day 3, we will concentrate on the eastern end of the highway, which provides some of the best examples of glacial geomorphologic features in Alaska. The Gulkana Glacier is visible from the road several miles to the east of our lodge. Turnouts along the higher portions of the highway provide magnificent vistas of broad, U-shaped valleys carved by glaciers and dotted with kettle ponds and lakes formed by melting chunks of ice left behind during glacial retreat. The skyline of the imposing Wrangell Mountains to the southeast is dominated by Mount Sanford (16,237'), and by Mount Wrangell (14,163'), the northernmost active volcano on the Pacific Rim. The area immediately to the east of the lodge has been designated as the Tangle Lakes Archaeological District, which has some of the densest concentrations of archaeological sites (more than 500) in the North American subarctic, some dating back more than 10,000 years.

Tundra-covered ridges along this end of the highway are home to a small breeding population of Smith's Longspurs. In Alaska, these attractive and enigmatic birds breed primarily in the eastern Brooks Range, from Anaktuvak Pass east into Canada. A disjunct population breeds in south-central Alaska, centered along the Denali Highway. This population is fragmented, and somewhat ephemeral, with many breeding pairs present in some years, and seemingly none in others. Several patches of good longspur habitat are to be found within a few miles of our lodge, and we will make a point of checking these, although visiting birders have had limited success in finding the longspurs in recent years. We did find Smith's Longspurs nesting at a new site near our lodge in 2016, and can only hope that this spot will continue to prove productive. Farther west, the road climbs to MacLaren (4,086'), the second highest highway summit in Alaska. The alpine tundra here is often alive with wildflowers of stunning beauty and variety. Abundant Arctic Ground-Squirrels provide prey for Golden Eagles, whereas Rock and Willow ptarmigan are hunted by the much rarer Gyrfalcon. This is also breeding habitat for American Golden-Plover, Long-tailed Jaeger, American Pipit and Golden-crowned Sparrow. Down below, the many lakes are excellent places to see Trumpeter and Tundra swans, Common and Red-throated loons, and an amazing diversity of ducks. Open flats are patrolled by Northern Harriers, Short-eared Owls and Northern Shrikes, and the thickets are alive with a variety of passerines, including Gray-cheeked Thrush and Arctic Warbler.

Wildlife viewing opportunities abound, particularly on our evening drives. Moose, Caribou, Grizzly (Brown Bear), Red Fox, Beaver, Porcupine, Collared Pika, Snowshoe Hare—all have been seen by us on previous visits to the Denali Highway. The Nelchina Caribou herd still migrates through the region at the east end of the highway, and it is not uncommon to see them right from the lodge.

On Day 4, we will spend the entire day birding our way west, the length of the Denali Highway, to its western terminus at Cantwell. We'll concentrate our time and attention on the middle section of the highway, as the habitat transitions from the higher alpine tundra of the east end, to the lower, wetter spruce and muskeg of the western end. Waterfowl are more abundant here, and our chances of finding such low-density species as Northern Hawk-Owl, Northern Shrike, Bohemian Waxwing and Rusty Blackbird increase as we penetrate deeper into taiga habitats. After exiting the Denali Highway at Cantwell, we'll drive a short distance up the George Parks Highway to our lodge, which is situated on the banks of the Nenana River, just seven miles south of Denali National Park.

NIGHTS: Tangle River Inn, MP 20 Denali Highway (June 21)
The Lodge at Denali Park Village, Denali National Park (June 22)

June 23, Day 5: Cantwell to Anchorage. Our lodge is well positioned to allow us a last morning of birding along the west end of the Denali Highway. The spruce forest is taller, denser and more extensive in scope here, offering better chances for boreal forest birds and mammals. Spruce Grouse, Northern Goshawk, Merlin, Northern Hawk-Owl, American Three-toed Woodpecker, Gray Jay, Bohemian Waxwing, Boreal Chickadee, Varied Thrush and White-winged Crossbill are all more common here than along the eastern and central portions of the Denali Highway, but some of them can be difficult to locate even here, and may require focused searches. Muskeg bogs at this end of the highway are sometimes home to small numbers of breeding Upland Sandpipers, and scattered lakes are excellent places for finding scoters and goldeneyes. After spending most of the morning birding the western end of the highway, we'll begin making our way back to Anchorage via the George Parks Highway, a route that, in clear weather, offers exceptional views of Mt. McKinley (20,320'), Mt. Foraker (17,402') and much of the rest of the Alaska Range. The scenic drive back to Anchorage will occupy the remainder of the afternoon, with dinner to follow check-in at our hotel.

NIGHT: The Coast International Inn, Anchorage

June 24, Day 6: Anchorage to Seward. Today we bird our way to Seward, enjoying fabulous scenery en route. With special permission from the Seward Ranger District, we'll have access to a variety of areas in the Chugach National Forest.

The Kenai Peninsula has much to offer—perhaps an American Dipper bobbing along a rushing, glacier-fed stream, a Barrow's Goldeneye in the reflection of a snow-capped peak on a glass-smooth lake, a Spruce Grouse nervously

leading her downy charges safely through the forest, or an American Three-toed Woodpecker quietly flaking bark from a dead spruce. Frequent stops are inevitable, perhaps to appreciate the majesty of a close Bald Eagle, to scope a distant slope for Mountain Goats, or simply to snap a picture of some dazzling alpine backdrop.

NIGHT: Harbor 360 Hotel, Seward

June 25, Day 7: Boat Trip to Kenai Fjords National Park. This will be a day of great adventure as we embark on an all-day boat trip through protected waters to Kenai Fjords National Park. The breathtaking scenery alone would validate the trip, as our boat navigates past massive headlands, fog-drenched spruce forest, icy fjords, and scores of snow-covered mountains. However, this area is teeming with birds and mammals as well. Low rocks are adorned with Harbor Seals, comical Sea Otters backstroke nearby, and our chances of seeing whales are excellent. We'll visit an island where more than 20,000 Horned and Tufted puffins nest, and these colorful alcids should be frequently encountered throughout the day. At the mid-point of our trip, we will experience a calving tidewater glacier—a sight and sound extravaganza never to be forgotten. We'll pay special attention to the ice-choked waters of the fjord leading to the glacier, where we hope to find the Kittlitz's Murrelet, a specialized little alcid whose global population appears to be in serious decline.

Next we encounter the Chiswell Islands, a naturalists' paradise. Craggy sea-stacks are draped in white by thousands of nesting Black-legged Kittiwakes. The rocky shores below are covered by the huge brown forms of scores of endangered Steller's Sea Lions, and the waters about the boat are liberally sprinkled with rafts of Horned and Tufted puffins; Common and Thick-billed murres (rare); lesser numbers of Rhinoceros Auklets, and, hopefully, at least a few Parakeet Auklets and Ancient Murrelets. Even some of the truly pelagic species (Short-tailed and Sooty shearwaters, Northern Fulmar, and Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel) are occasionally seen. Birders and non-birders alike have raved about this trip, and many Alaskan residents have labeled it the finest trip of its kind in the state.

NIGHT: Harbor 360 Hotel, Seward

June 26, Day 8: Seward Area and Return to Anchorage. The moist Sitka spruce forest that hugs the coast near Seward shelters birds like Spruce Grouse, American Three-toed Woodpecker, Rufous Hummingbird, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Steller's Jay, Chestnut-backed and Boreal chickadees, Pacific Wren, Varied and Hermit thrushes, Townsend's Warbler, Pine Grosbeak, White-winged Crossbill (in some years), and "Sooty" Fox Sparrow. We will bird much of the morning and early afternoon before returning through the scenic coastal mountains to Anchorage, with plans to arrive in the late afternoon.

NIGHT: The Coast International Inn, Anchorage

June 27, Day 9: Departure for Home or Begin the Barrow Extension. Participants not continuing on the Barrow Extension may depart Anchorage any time on June 27 or, depending on flight schedules, may take overnight flights departing after our farewell dinner on June 26.

BARROW EXTENSION

JUNE 27 – 29, 2017

June 27-28, Days 1-2: Barrow Area. After a morning of rest and lunch, an afternoon flight (subject to change) will take us from Anchorage up to Barrow. Lying well above the Arctic Circle, with sunlight 24 hours a day in summer, Barrow is High Arctic—quite different from other areas we will have visited in Alaska. The remarkably flat coastal tundra here is pockmarked with shallow surface lakes and puddles (the melt water cannot penetrate the underlying permafrost) and supports a different set of breeding shorebirds. Baird's Sandpipers are regular, Red Phalaropes are common, and Pectoral Sandpipers are everywhere, performing their odd hooting flight displays. In some years, one or more Buff-breasted Sandpipers, White-rumped Sandpipers, or Red-necked Stints have also been present and occasional rare vagrants like Gray-tailed Tattler have sometimes been found. Barrow

is **the** place to see eiders in full breeding plumage. We should see flocks of Kings migrating along the coast, and pairs of spectacular Kings, elegant Steller's (declining remarkably in the past few decades) and bizarre Spectacleds (also declining and considered threatened) on the inland lakes. Although the numbers of predators here vary (in concert with the local population cycles of Lemmings), we are almost certain to see at least a few Snowy Owls, and perhaps some Short-eared Owls. In good Lemming years, Snowy Owls are common, and Pomarine Jaegers can be downright abundant! Our stay at Barrow will allow us ample time to explore all the roads out of town as well as the base of the Point itself, a long gravel peninsula extending north into the ice-choked Arctic Ocean.

Other regular species around Barrow include the likes of Pacific Loon, Tundra Swan, Brant (the western subspecies *nigricans*), Greater White-fronted Goose, Long-tailed Duck, American Golden-Plover, Dunlin, Red-necked Phalarope, Glaucous Gull, Snow Bunting, Lapland Longspur, and both redpolls. We might encounter migrant Sabine's Gulls on the tundra ponds or fly-by or resting Yellow-billed Loons along the coast. With real luck, we could even see a Polar Bear!

NIGHTS: Top of the World Hotel, Barrow

June 29, Day 3: Final Day in Barrow; Evening Flight to Anchorage. After a second full day in Barrow, our flight will depart for Anchorage in the early evening (subject to change). Depending upon actual flight schedules, many participants will find it necessary to overnight in Anchorage and depart the following day. A hotel room for this evening is not covered by the Barrow Extension tour fee. However, upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with lodging in Anchorage.

TOUR SIZES: Gambell/Nome, Grand Alaska Part I, Grand Alaska Part II and the Barrow Extension will each be limited to 14 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Gambell/Nome and Grand Alaska Part I will be led by Kevin Zimmer (an additional leader will be added if group size warrants). Grand Alaska Part II will be led by Kevin Zimmer and Rafael Galvez. The Barrow Extension will be led by Kevin Zimmer and Barry Zimmer.

Kevin Zimmer has authored three books and numerous papers dealing with field identification and bird-finding in North America. His book, *Birding in the American West: A Handbook*, deals with finding and identifying birds in the western United States. Living in Alaska contributed to his affection for the Far North, where he has anchored VENT's tour program since 1986. For the past 20+ years he has concentrated his attention on the Neotropics, particularly on Brazil, Costa Rica, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela. He has directed VENT's Brazil program since 1991. Kevin has a PhD in biology (research emphasis in Avian Evolutionary Ecology) from New Mexico State University, and is currently a field associate of Cornell's Laboratory of Ornithology, a Research Associate of the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, an elective member of the American Ornithologists' Union, and a member of both the A.O.U. South American Classification Committee (SACC) and the American Birding Association (ABA) Check-list Committee. He has authored numerous technical papers on the taxonomy, distribution, and behavior of Neotropical birds, particularly those of the Amazon Basin. In 2003 he completed (with co-author Mort Isler) the major chapter on the *Thamnophilidae* (antbirds) for the prestigious *Handbook of Birds of the World* series. In 2006, he and Curtis Marantz coauthored a six-CD compilation of *Bird Voices of Alta Floresta and Southeastern Amazonian Brazil* (produced by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's Macaulay Library of Natural Sounds) that represents the most comprehensive set of commercially available bird recordings for any part of the Amazon Basin. He and Andrew Whittaker are currently at work on a comprehensive field guide to the birds of Brazil, to be published by Princeton University Press. Kevin lives in Atascadero, California with his wife Susan. Their daughter Marina completed her master's degree in psychology at Dominican University in May 2008. She and her husband Ryan are now living in Napa, California.

Rafael Galvez has been birding and illustrating birds since childhood, a dual passion that developed when his family moved from Peru to South Florida. Always with a sketchpad in hand, he has traveled throughout the U.S., Latin America, and Eurasia in pursuit of birds. He served several years as a board member of the BirdLife International affiliate in the Republic of Georgia, developing educational and conservation programs. He gained

knowledge of the Caucasus region while directing a series of records and documentary shorts on the ancient chants of the Georgian nation. During that period he also produced retrospective books and catalogs on the works of Russian realist painters. He has combined his love of art, education, and birds while collaborating in several publications, including a field guide to *Raptors and Owls of Georgia (Caucasus)*, which he illustrated and coauthored. After working with raptor research along the Black Sea, he returned to South Florida to spearhead a new phase for the Florida Keys Hawkwatch migration monitoring project, where he has participated as director. As chair of citizen science and IBA monitoring at Tropical Audubon Society in Miami, he has reached out to underserved communities by providing opportunities for the greater appreciation of birds and Florida habitats. Currently, he lives in Homestead, spends much time in the Everglades, serves on the Florida Ornithological Society's Records Committee, and is on the Leica Sport Optics Pro Staff. He loves sharing his passion for birds with audiences of all ages, and has been a guide and teacher for over 15 years. You can find some of his latest sketches and articles about painting in the field at his blog, GalvezBirds.com.

Barry Zimmer has been birding since the age of eight. His main areas of expertise lie in North and Central America, but his travels have taken him throughout much of the world, including such exotic locales as Japan, Russia, Madagascar, Africa, and New Zealand. Barry is a longtime member of the New Mexico Bird Records Committee, and served on the Texas Bird Records Committee for 12 years. He has co-authored three books: *Birds of the Trans-Pecos*, *A Birder's Guide to the Rio Grande Valley*, and *Birds and Birdfinding in the El Paso Area*. Barry has a keen interest in nature photography, having captured over 1,000 species of birds on film. His other interests include sports (a diehard Red Sox fan), cooking, and movies. He received his degree in psychology at the University of Texas in El Paso. Barry resides in El Paso with his wife, Yvonne, and their daughter, Alexandra.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for **Gambell/Nome** is **\$4,995** per person in double occupancy from Anchorage, Alaska. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 9, all lodging as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation, the flights between Anchorage and Nome, the flights between Nome and Gambell, and guide services provided by your tour leaders. The tour fee does not include airfare from your home to Anchorage and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for **Gambell/Nome** is **\$615**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

Rooms are limited at the Sivuqaq Inn in Gambell and you may be asked to share. If so, you will be credited appropriately.

The fee for **Grand Alaska Part I** is **\$6,795** per person in double occupancy from Anchorage, Alaska. This includes all meals from lunch on Day 2 to dinner on Day 10, all lodging as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation, the flights between Anchorage and Nome, the flights between Anchorage and St. Paul Island (see below), and guide services provided by your leaders. The tour fee does not include airfare from your home to Anchorage and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The cost of the flights between Anchorage and St. Paul Island is subject to change. Should this happen, VENT reserves the right to adjust the tour fee accordingly.

The single supplement for **Grand Alaska Part I** is **\$1,150**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

Participants combining **Gambell/Nome** with **Grand Alaska Part I** in double occupancy will receive a discount of **\$500**.

Participants combining **Gambell/Nome** with **Grand Alaska Part I** in single occupancy will receive a discount of **\$750**.

The fee for **Grand Alaska Part II** is **\$3,895** per person in double occupancy from Anchorage, Alaska. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 8, all lodging as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation and guide services provided by your leaders. The tour fee does not include airfare from your home to Anchorage and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for **Grand Alaska Part II** is **\$925**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

The fee for the **Barrow Extension** is **\$2,495** per person in double occupancy from Anchorage, Alaska. This includes all meals from lunch on Day 1 to lunch on Day 3, all lodging as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation, flights between Anchorage and Barrow, and guide services provided by your tour leaders. This fee does not include airfare from your home to Anchorage and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for the **Barrow Extension** is **\$330**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

On all four tours, participants will be responsible for any extra expenses incurred during the tour (extra hotel nights, additional transportation, etc.) which directly result from events out of VENT's control (weather delays, flight cancellations, strikes, acts of God, etc.) For more information, please see the enclosed letter from Victor Emanuel and the RESPONSIBILITY section at the end of this itinerary.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The initial deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person per section. If you would like to pay your initial deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay the initial deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with American Express, MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at www.ventbird.com) should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: Initial tour deposits may be made by American Express, MasterCard, Visa, check, money order, or bank transfer. All other tour payments, including second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc., must be made by check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Cancellation penalties and refunds are based on the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$250** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions. *We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.*

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$250*
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person.

Upon cancellation of the transportation or travel services, where you, the customer, are not at fault and have not cancelled in violation of the terms and conditions of any of the contract for transportation or travel services, all sums paid to VENT for services not received by you will be promptly refunded by VENT to you unless you otherwise advise VENT in writing.

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE: We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. VENT recommends Travel Insured International as our preferred insurance provider. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. Contact Travel Insured International (800-243-3174 or www.travelinsured.com) prior to registration for details. Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than Travel Insured International, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

INTERNET ACCESS: Expect Wi-Fi to be available in all locations except the Sivuqaq Inn and Tangle River Inn.

BAGGAGE: In case your checked luggage is delayed, it’s recommended that you pack all documents, medications, a change of clothes, your binoculars, and toiletry items in a carry-on bag. All baggage will be weighed prior to our flights between Nome and Gambell. Participants will be charged excess baggage fees for each pound over the 50-pound limit (includes what you carry on the plane). As of 2016, Bering Air does not technically allow carry-on luggage, because there are no overhead baggage compartments, and the space beneath the seats is minimal. In 2016, passengers were allowed to carry binoculars and limited camera gear onto the plane, but no large gear bags were permitted. Traditional carry-on bags will need to be checked, along with other checked baggage, and will count toward your 50-pound limit. Gear not needed for Gambell or Nome can be stored at the hotel in Anchorage. Gear required for Nome but not for Gambell can be stored with Bering Air at the Nome airport. Please use a VENT luggage tag (which will be mailed to all participants about a month prior to departure) to aid leaders in recognizing your baggage during our airport and hotel transfers. An additional small duffel bag is recommended, either for storing items in Anchorage or Nome, or for use as your main piece of luggage during one of our jaunts away from Anchorage (allowing you to store your large bag). This would be especially recommended for participants on Grand Alaska Part I, where space on the flight to and from the Pribilofs is limited. Baggage limits for the flight to the Pribilofs is also 50 lbs/bag but you can take small carry-on bags on board, or, have them valet-checked. Please be advised however, that this airline has, at least in the past, routinely bumped checked bags in favor of freight, so limiting the size of your luggage is the best way to insure that it arrives on the same flight (day) to St. Paul as we do. Additionally, we would advise wearing cold weather appropriate clothing and footwear on the flight (or, at least having them in your carry-on), along with your binoculars, camera and any essential medications/toiletries, as a hedge against the possibility of having bags bumped to make room for freight. Flights from Anchorage to Nome and Barrow are on large jets, and normal airline regulations regarding checked bags and carry-on bags apply.

WEATHER: Normally it is 25 to 45 degrees at Gambell and Barrow, and anywhere from the 30s to 50s at Nome and the Pribilofs; however, each of these places are often windy with drizzle and fog. Elsewhere on the mainland, temperatures tend to be warmer and may reach the upper 60s or higher.

CLOTHING: The weather in Alaska in May and June is notoriously unpredictable and can still be quite cold. The “layered” technique is your best defense against the variable weather. We suggest you combine a thermal undershirt, shirt, sweater, and coat or jacket. Medium-weight wool or synthetic equivalent for shirts, slacks, and sweaters is ideal. Cold-weather gear is essential and should include a warm coat or down jacket, warm hat, gloves, thermal underwear (both tops and bottoms), wool or synthetic equivalent socks, and warm shirts. A rain jacket or poncho is also essential for times when the weather turns misty. Since it can be surprisingly warm too, you should bring some lighter field clothing as well.

FOOTWEAR: Insulated waterproof boots, N.E.O.S. Overshoes or walking shoes are recommended for foot gear. **Waterproof footwear of some kind is essential for the Pribilofs and Barrow. Barrow Extension participants should bring rubber boots, waterproof boots, or N.E.O.S. Overshoes that extend to knee height for walking off-road on the wet tundra.**

ALCOHOL: Gambell is officially a “dry” village, meaning that not only is alcohol not available, but that it is a crime to bring alcohol to the village. Please respect local laws, and do not carry alcohol to Gambell. At the time of this writing, Barrow was also a dry community—the alcohol laws there have changed back and forth over the years.

OTHER ITEMS: We recommend you bring insect repellent, an alarm clock, sunglasses, seasickness medication (if necessary, for the Kenai Fjords boat trip) and sunscreen. The leaders will have a spotting scope and reference books, but you may wish to bring your own.

For Gambell, participants should bring a bar of soap and also may wish to bring ample cash (preferably in small, \$5, \$10, and \$20 denominations) to pay for ATV rides and/or native crafts, such as ivory carvings. Credit cards are not accepted for these activities/items. Individual ATV rides at Gambell typically cost \$15-20 roundtrip. Participants may find it helpful to carry two-way Walkabout radios to increase communication in the field as well as their own scopes for sea watching.

LAUNDRY: There is a self-serve laundry at Sivuqaq Inn in Gambell, the Aurora Inn in Nome, the King Eider Hotel in the Pribilofs and the Harbor 360 Hotel in Seward. The Coast International Inn in Anchorage has both self-service and send-out laundry service.

HEALTH: If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against hepatitis types A and B.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers’ Information Line (800) CDC-INFO (232-4636). You can check the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

SUGGESTED READING: Our website at www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from the store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You might also want to visit such other online stores as

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www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com, or www.buteobooks.com, which specializes in ornithology books. Also see the note about the Alaska Geographic Society at the end of the reading list.

Field Guides—Birds:

- Armstrong, Robert H. *Guide to the Birds of Alaska*. 4th edition. Bothwell, WA: Alaska Northwest Books, 1995.
- Brazil, Mark. *Birds of East Asia*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey. 2009. This is the best field guide for illustrating any of the possible Siberian vagrants that could turn up at Gambell, St. Paul or elsewhere.
- Dunn, Jon L. and Jonathan Alderfer. *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. Sixth edition. Washington, D. C.: National Geographic Society, 2012. The recommended field guide.
- Peterson, Roger Tory. *A Field Guide to Western Birds*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1998.
- Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. 2nd edition New York: Alfred a. Knopf, 2014. This classic field guide has been greatly expanded to cover many of the Eurasian vagrants that we could encounter at Gambell, St. Paul or elsewhere.

Reference—Birds:

- Gabrielson, I. N. & F. E. Lincoln. *The Birds of Alaska*. Harrisburg PA: Stackpole, 1959. Outdated now, but has a lot of information on the life histories of Alaskan birds. Try www.abebooks.com.
- Grant, Peter J. *Gulls: A Guide to Identification*. Academic Press, 1997.
- Harrison, Peter. *Seabirds: An Identification Guide*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1991 (reprint).
- Hayman, Peter, John Marchant & Tony Prater. *Shorebirds: An Identification Guide to the Waders of the World*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1991 (reprint).
- Kessel, Brina. *Birds of the Seward Peninsula, Alaska: Their Biogeography, Seasonality and Natural History*. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1996.
- Kessel, Brina & Daniel D. Gibson. *Status and Distribution of Alaska Birds*. Studies in Avian Biology No. 1, 1978. Try www.abebooks.com.
- Zimmer, K. J. *Birding in the American West: A Handbook*. Cornell University Press, 2000.

General Background Reading:

- Freuchen, Peter. *Book of the Eskimos*. Fawcett Books, 1981. An easy-to-read classic account of Eskimo life, written in 1931. Out of Print, but appears on www.amazon.com. Other Freuchen titles are available as well: *Arctic Adventure* (AMS Press, 1995) and *Ivalu, the Eskimo Wife* (AMS Press, 1935).
- Lopez, Barry. *Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape*. Vintage Books, 2001.
- McGinniss, Joe. *Going to Extremes*. Plume, 1989 (reissue edition). Raw non-fiction about the people and places of America's last frontier.
- McPhee, John. *Coming into the Country*. Noonday Press, 1991 (reissue). Published in 1976, this chronicles a remarkable journey by kayak into the last frontier.

Audubon (May 1988). The entire issue is devoted to Alaska. Especially worthwhile is “Exploring Literature of the Far North,” a great bibliography of interesting books on the region.

National Geographic (October 1982). “A New Day for Alaska’s Pribilofs.”

Alaska Guidebooks:

Rennick, Penny (ed.) *Mammals of Alaska*. Alaska Geographic Guides. Alaska Geographic Society, 1996.

A variety of books on Alaska are available through the Alaska Geographic Society: (907) 274-0521. Alaska Geographic Online is found at www.akgeo.com. Some of these resources include: Alaskan Native Peoples, Mammals of Alaska, and National Parks and Monuments of Alaska. On the tour a number of local guide books and pamphlets can be picked up at local gift shops, including: Louise Potter’s *Wild Flowers Along Mt. McKinley Park Road* (Camp Denali Publishers, n.d.). Although out of print, Potter’s book is possibly available in Denali National Park; it is also found on www.amazon.com.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

RESPONSIBILITY: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its Agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. When this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on August 31, 2016 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.

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Dear Alaska Tour Inquirers,

VENT has been operating Alaska tours for over 30 years. Occasionally, bad weather has forced us to spend extra nights at some locations due to all flights being cancelled. When and if this occurs, participants will be responsible for directly paying any additional expenses. This usually involves hotel rooms and should be charged to your credit card.

For example:

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The VENT group is in Nome and scheduled to fly to Anchorage. We have, of course, paid in advance for rooms for the group in Anchorage. If flight cancellations prevent us from arriving in Anchorage, we will not receive a refund for those rooms. Most hotels used on this tour have a 30-day cancellation policy for group bookings during high season. Your leaders will need to make other arrangements for rooms in Nome, but each participant will be responsible for the extra expense.

We can't control the weather and thus cannot be responsible for delays or changes in the itinerary due to weather related problems. As I noted previously, we have been very lucky in the past in this regard—but should it happen, I want you to know what to expect.

I hope you will decide to take one of our Alaska tours. Alaska is one of the most exciting birding areas in North America. The scenery is spectacular and the birding is great. All of our Alaska tour leaders are tremendously knowledgeable and do a terrific job.

Best wishes,
VICTOR EMANUEL