



Barrow: Ross's Gull Migration

October 5-7, 2013

A Report by Aaron Lang, leader

Our 2013 trip to Barrow to search for Ross's Gulls experienced great weather, incredible light, three polar bears and, most importantly, fine looks at Ross's Gulls each day including several hundred on our last day! As is typical on this tour we bundled up and spent most of the trip on the beach scanning for birds. The Ross's Gulls came easy this year. At our first stop along the waterfront to admire a close Yellow-billed Loon we caught a glimpse at our first pink gull just as we were getting back in the van. Although not everyone saw this bird, we all enjoyed great looks at our next stop about a mile down the road and throughout the rest of the three days.

We broke up our time at the beach by exploring the road system looking for Snowy Owls and other land birds, which are very few and far between at this season. While there were relatively few owls around compared with our past trips, we did find several very accommodating birds close to town. Locating a bird feeder in town allowed us fantastic studies of both Common and Hoary Redpoll. An added bonus was that the feeder was right on the waterfront, so turning our back on redpolls we could admire Ross's Gulls, Yellow-billed Loons, and King Eiders.

On the 6th we hired a local driver and four-wheel drive vehicle for a trip out to Point Barrow. A proper vehicle and local knowledge is required to get out to the northernmost point of land in the United States. We split into two groups to do this and both groups enjoyed excellent views of dozens of Ross's Gulls, a couple of Sabine's Gulls, and large flocks of Common and King Eiders. Members of the first group photographed a very late Arctic Tern on this foray. During both of our trips to the point, the group that stayed behind enjoyed long and leisurely views of a mother and twin Polar Bear cubs! This was our first time finding bears on our fall tour!

Our trip benefited greatly by great weather. Daytime temperatures were in the mid 20s to low 30s and winds were generally light. Clear or mostly clear conditions also made for great visibility and fantastic evening light conditions for photography. It was difficult to leave Barrow on the last day; I could have easily enjoyed another three days of doing nothing more than bundling up and watching the gulls and world go by.

ANNOTATED BIRD LIST:

1. **GREATER SCAUP:** On 6 October we found one Greater Scaup bobbing off-shore.
2. **KING EIDER:** We tallied King Eider each day of the trip. Our highest daily estimate was 800 on 7 October. The birds were seen in large flocks flying at a distance and occasionally crossing over the base of the point. We also found singles and small groups on the water along the entire length of the beach.
3. **COMMON EIDER:** Less numerous than King Eider, but seen daily with a high count of 100 on 7

October. Most of the large flocks of eiders that we saw flying at a distance were not identifiable to species and probably contained mixed flocks of eiders.

4. LONG-TAILED DUCK: About 100 seen daily.

5. PACIFIC LOON: We observed four Pacific Loons on 6 October and one on 7 October.

6. YELLOW-BILLED LOON: We excellent views of Yellow-billed Loons on all three days of the trip, including a number of close birds on the water. The high tally was 15 birds on 6 October. All of the birds we studied were in basic plumage.

7. RED-NECKED GREBE: On 6 October we had good views of two Red-necked Grebes off shore of Barrow.

8. NORTHERN FULMAR: One light-morph Northern Fulmar flew by our sea watch on 7 October.

9. SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATER: A Short-tailed Shearwater cut across the base of Point Barrow right in front of our van on 5 October. Two days later we tallied three more.

10. ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK: A light-morph Rough-legged Hawk was hanging around the Shooting Station on the base of Point Barrow during our stay. We finally caught up with it on 6 October.

11. RED PHALAROPE: We tallied 60 Red Phalaropes on 5 October, most of these from our trips to the point. Away from Point Barrow we saw very few and on 6 October only counted 5 Red Phalaropes.

12. BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE: Two adults flew by our seawatch on 5 October and we tallied a juvenile on 7 October.

13. SABINE'S GULL: Trips to the point on 5 October tallied 2-3 juvenile Sabine's Gulls.

14. ROSS'S GULL: The prime target of this trip, we got excellent views of this bubble gum pink gull on each day of the trip. Our high count was 120 on 7 October, a day that we actually spent very little time at the seawatch! Our trips out to the point yielded fantastic views of Ross's Gulls at close range, in perfect warm evening light as these tern-like gulls migrated past the point.

15. THAYER'S GULL: We found two adult Thayer's Gulls along the beach on 7 October.

16. GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL: An adult was feeding on whale blubber with a flock of Glaucous Gulls on 5 October.

17. GLAUCOUS GULL: Common and ubiquitous in Barrow and found all along the beach, even occurring inland.

18. ARCTIC TERN: An Arctic Tern was photographed on one of our trips to the end of the Point on 5 October. This is an incredibly late record of Arctic Tern for Barrow, falling short of the previous record by only two days!

19. BLACK GUILLEMOT: On 6 October we enjoyed nice views of four Black Guillemots at various spots along the beach.

20. SNOWY OWL: Snowy Owls were in short order in Barrow this fall due to a crash in the lemming population. Despite this, we enjoyed excellent views and photographic opportunities of four different Snowy Owls, including one only a few blocks from our hotel, on 6 October.

21. COMMON RAVEN: We saw two Ravens on 7 October.

22 and 23. COMMON and HOARY REDPOLL: A flock of 19 Redpolls was seen at and near a feeder during our stay. Many of the birds were juveniles and some in our group enjoyed studying the flock. While we found several clear cut examples of both species, we left a number of the birds unidentified. Those in our party not interested in this exercise turned their backs on the feeder and happily scanned for eiders, Yellow-billed Loons, and Ross's Gulls.

MAMMALS OBSERVED:

1. polar bear
2. seal sp.