



Prince William Sound and the Copper River Delta: A Naturalist's Journey

April 25 to May 7, 2015
Price: \$6,400

On this trip we'll ply the protected waters of Prince William Sound on board the M/V Discovery, a classically fitted 65-foot historic yacht. While expertly blending comfort and adventure, this small vessel sails into quiet coves and navigates ice-bound channels that larger boats must avoid, letting us get an up close and personal view of glaciers, birds, and wildlife. With the leisure of eight days aboard the Discovery, plenty of time exists for us to explore via zodiac, kayak, and on foot the secluded beauty of Prince William Sound, including calving glaciers, whales and other marine mammals, impressive bird concentrations, and stunning scenery.

During the final five days of our trip we'll get to know the small fishing town of Cordova and the rich wonders of the Copper River Delta, the largest wetland on the Pacific Coast of North America and the site of one of the world's most famous shorebird concentrations, where dense flocks of Western Sandpipers, sometimes 100,000 or more at a time, congregate to feed and rest before pushing on to their breeding grounds farther north.

There is no better time in the year to visit Prince William Sound and the Copper River Delta than late April and early May and our itinerary targets special areas for key bird observations, as well as the wildlife that congregates due the surge of the marine food web in Prince William Sound. We've timed this trip to attempt to catch the peak of the herring spawn in Prince William Sound, where impressive numbers of Surfbirds, Black Turnstones, and other species congregate to feast. The end of our itinerary is anchored around the shorebird migration at Hartney Bay and the Copper River Delta, where staggering numbers of birds stage and pass through during a few short weeks each spring.

The birding, wildlife viewing, and photographic opportunities on this tour will be world class and you'll be led by three of the most knowledgeable naturalists in Alaska. For those interested in photography, you'll have the opportunity to work with professional photographer, Hugh Rose, throughout the journey to hone your photography skills.

TOUR ITINERARY

Day 1 (April 25)

Fly in to Anchorage, accommodations included in Anchorage. Check-in usually after 3pm.

Day 2 (April 26)

Private van transfer of approximately 1 hour from Anchorage to the port of Whittier. Depart Whittier mid day, with lunch on our way to College Fjord and Barry Arm. Enter some of the world's most spectacular scenery—corridors of breathtaking beauty, sprawling glaciers and a panoramic skyline of

mountain grandeur. Harbor Seals hauled out on the flotillas of icebergs watch closely as the Discovery navigates the icy blue waters of Barry Arm. The enveloping mountains of this inlet stretch skyward to nearly 10,000 feet, with glacier after glacier descending the terraced mountain valleys. Alaska's lush rainforest vegetation drapes the hillsides in green as streaming waterfalls spill from rocky cliffs. Our night may be spent anchored in the shadow of 10,000 foot Mt. Gilbert at the head of Harriman Fjord, named for the historic Harriman expedition of 1899.

Day 3-4 (April 27-28)

Mornings aboard the Discovery are relaxed and casual. An open breakfast is served from 7-9am. Often a guided off boat activity for closer to shore exploration is scheduled after breakfast via our large inflatable skiffs into the various protected back bays and estuaries only accessible by skiff or kayak. The ship navigates through delicate Ester Passage en route to Cascade Falls, a 300 ft. high waterfall that thunders fresh water into Eaglek Bay. After a visit to the falls, travel south along the bay's remote shores to visit the Oyster Farm. The oyster lover will enjoy a taste of one of the Sound's most delicious sea products, fresh "Pristine" oysters. As we continue onward, note that Prince William Sound is at the peak of the herring spawn! Needless to say this is a feast of great proportions for the wildlife. Get ready for this list of action, observed in previous seasons during the herring roe gorging session: Flocks of 40,000 Glaucous-winged Gulls, mixed groups of more than 30,000 Surfbirds and Black Turnstones, several thousand Common Murres, Oldsquaws, Pelagic and Red-faced Cormorants, Horned and Red-necked Grebes, Pigeon Guillemots, Marbled and Kittlitz's Murrelets, Common and Red-breasted Mergansers, Pacific, Red-throated and Yellow-billed Loons, Horned and Tufted Puffins, groups of Mew, Bonaparte's, and Herring Gulls, Black-legged Kittiwakes, Harlequin Ducks, Surf and White-winged Scoters, Arctic and Aleutian Terns, hundreds of Bald Eagles—the bird list goes on... plus several hundred Steller Sea Lions, pods of Orcas and breaching Humpback Whales!

We'll remain flexible and opportunistic in order to capitalize on local marine activity or special wildlife sightings. If time permits, we'll sail to Montague Island and visit the field camps of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Copper River Delta Institute, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Enjoy evenings at anchor in the protected bays or coves.

Day 5-6 (April 29-30)

We continue through the Sound's southern most barrier islands, observing the birds and wildlife along the way. This region displays an intricate and phenomenal "web of life," as numerous birds and animals play their role in the Sound's theater of natural wonder. As observers, we respectfully interact with the environment during this exiting season of the year. We will enjoy a great deal of flexibility in the following four days as the factors of weather, guest's interests, and regional wildlife activity influence each day's itinerary.

The nutrient rich waters of the Gulf of Alaska pour into the Sound through Hinchinbrook Entrance, a narrow passage way between Hinchinbrook and Montague islands. As we near the Entrance, catch a view looking out of the protected Sound to the expansive Gulf of Alaska and Pacific Ocean. The ocean currents bring much of the region's food (in the form of plankton and small fishes) through this waterway creating a popular feeding ground for birds, fish and marine mammals including both Humpback Whales and Orcas. To observe the sights and sounds of these powerful, but gentle giants of the sea, is truly a remarkable experience. Depending on the activity at sea, enjoy a casual hike along the intertidal shores, walk through the world's northernmost temperate rain forest, rich with ferns,

mosses, and towering spruce, hemlock and cedar trees. Relax in the evening to a delicious meal and enjoy a pleasant evening anchorage along the area's quiet shores.

Day 7-8 (May 1-2)

Sail east through Orca Inlet and into Orca Bay watching for Bald Eagles, Sea Otters, Steller Sea Lions and a host of resident and migratory bird life. View large groups of Common Murres, Long-tailed Ducks, gulls, murrelets, mergansers, scoters and cormorants to name a few of the species that overwinter in the Sound's protected waters. Abundant concentrations of small fish and crustaceans serve as a critical fuel source for the migrants, the Arctic Terns, as well as phalaropes, jaegers and loons commonly viewed along this route. Flocks of acrobatic shorebirds fly rhythmically and in unison, sweeping and turning along the convoluted shores. It's a wonder how these tiny and delicate creatures travel such great distances. Some species travel 1,900 miles in 48 hours!

On to Sheep Bay and Sahlin Falls for a gourmet dinner. After dinner, we'll launch the inflatable boats and explore an adjacent saltwater lagoon at the head of Sheep Bay. The shallow waters and intertidal shores of the lagoon offer a bounty of food for birds, waterfowl and land animals. Harlequin Ducks, Black Oystercatchers, and other foragers enjoy the blue mussels, limpets and clams of the intertidal zone. During this time of year, juvenile salmon (fry) migrate out from the nearby freshwater streams into the lagoon and serve as an important food source for diving birds such as murres, mergansers, guillemots, murrelets, loons, scoters etc. Both Black and Brown Bears may be occasionally observed foraging along the shores. As opportunistic feeders, the bears scavenge for animal carcasses, graze on the new growth grasses, overturn rocks in the intertidal zone in search for small crabs and fish, and feed on Pacific Herring egg masses, recently spawned and drifted on shore. Anchor for the evening in the serene waters of Sheep Bay.

Day 9 (May 3)

Arrive in Cordova. We begin with a tour of the picturesque coastal community of Cordova, nestled along the mountainous shores of Eastern Prince William Sound. In spring life pulses in this town of only 2,000 residents, as commercial fishermen bustle about the harbor. The region's resource rich "gifts of the sea" are vital to the survival of this seafaring community. The rest of the day will be spent exploring the coastal habitat of Prince William Sound around Cordova. The historic Orca Adventure Lodge, with roots into the 1800's, will serve as home base during our stay in Cordova providing all meals and lodging.

Day 10-12 (May 4-6)

Travel the Copper River Delta, visiting Alaganik Slough Boardwalk trail and a picnic site for lunch and superb scenery. In order to optimize the best shorebird access, trips are timed to coincide with the daily high tide, as it will concentrate the thousands of shorebirds along the vast mudflats. The expansive Delta region is accessible by van on a gravel road. The road weaves through the tidal flats providing ample opportunities to view the variety of birds. Another fantastic trip will be to Hartney Bay to see concentrations of up to 100,000 shorebirds flying in huge flocks and feeding on the mudflats. This is a truly unforgettable sight for the birder and a remarkable opportunity for the photographer! Weather permitting there will be an opportunity to do a scenic flight over the Chugach Mountain range and glaciers, along the inland side of the Delta and with optional landing on Kayak Island or Barrier Sandbar Islands on the Gulf Coast of Alaska (fee). Kayak Island is the site of the only landfall of the Vitus Bering/George Steller expedition to North America in the mid 1700's, when Russia "discovered" Alaska.

Day 13 (May 7)

Homeward Bound. Departures will be at your convenience. Shuttle service through Orca Adventure Lodge is included to the Cordova airport. Alaska Airlines has daily jet service to/from Anchorage and points south.

TOUR DETAILS

LEADERS:

Hugh Rose: Outstanding resident naturalist and great personality, Hugh Rose, has led Alaska trips since 1991 with unending praise for his amazing attention to every detail and everyone's needs. He has an extensive knowledge of all aspects of Alaskan natural history from bird behavior to geology. He is also a professional photographer.

Nan Eagleson: Nan is a true wonder of the guiding world. Her innate curiosity and enthusiasm for all things wild and free have given her a remarkable breadth of knowledge and what seems like several lifetimes of experience. For over 30 years she has called Alaska and the northern Canada home and has led Wilderness Birding Adventures trips since 2002.

Dean Rand: Captain Dean Rand is captain of the wonderful "Discovery" and knows Prince William Sound and all the special places in the Sound probably better than anyone else after more than 30 years of full time experience on Alaska's waters. Dean is also a naturalist and photographer.

GROUP SIZE: 10 participants, 3 leaders and crew of the Discovery

TOUR COST: \$6,400. Single supplement: \$3,840. The 10% returning guest discount is not applicable on this tour.

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT: If you are a single traveler willing to share a cabin and we are unable to match you with a roommate you will not be charged a single supplement. If you want to guarantee a private cabin, single supplement charges will apply.

INCLUDED IN THE TRIP COST: Accommodations in Anchorage on Day 1; personal van transfer between Anchorage and Whittier on Day 2; overnight accommodations on the Discovery; all meals from breakfast on Day 2 through breakfast on Day 13, beverages (complimentary beer, wine, etc) on the Discovery; WBA and Discovery guides; crew and guide services including kayaks; rubber boots and raingear.)

NOT INCLUDED IN THE TRIP COST: Your travel from your home city to Anchorage or from Cordova to your home city; optional flight seeing trip from Cordova; a gratuity to guides, the Discovery crew, or anyone else of exemplary service. While complimentary beverages and drinks (wine, beer, sodas, water, juice, etc) are included onboard the Discovery they are not always included at our land-based accommodations. Guide will provide orientation upon arrival with details.

PAYMENT SCHEDULE: A deposit of \$500 is required to hold reserve your spot. By January 1st, 50% of the total ticket price is required. Reservations made after January 1st require a 50% deposit within

two weeks of the booking date. Final payment is due 90 days prior to departure. Reservations made less than 90 days prior to departure must be accompanied by full payment within one week of booking. Payment may be made by credit card or check.

CANCELLATION POLICY: The initial deposit is non-refundable. Cancellations received after January 1st will be subject to a cancellation fee of 50% of the total ticket price. Cancellations received ninety days to the day of departure are not refundable and will be charged 100% of ticket price. We recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance with CSA Travel Protection or call 800.348.9505.

WHAT TO BRING: Upon registering for the tour we'll send you a detailed packing list. If you're interested in photography we can also provide a recommended list of photographic equipment for this tour.