



Alaska has been called North America's final frontier and pelagic birding is certainly the final frontier of birding in Alaska. Some of the 49th state's most prized birding targets inhabit the offshore regions of the Gulf of Alaska, the northern extent of the Pacific Ocean. For many reasons accessing these waters as a birder is difficult, and until now no organized and regularly operating pelagic birding trips have existed in these rich waters, making finding the birds that inhabit them extremely difficult. The distance of the continental shelf from shore, rough waters, and lack of suitable charter boats capable of carrying birders far enough offshore are a few of the obstacles to pelagic birding trips in Alaska. However, for years a few curious and pioneering birders have occasionally taken the trip across the Gulf of Alaska on board the M/V Kennicott, a 382' ferry operated by the Alaska Marine Highway. Although no one trip has recorded everything possible some remarkable observations have been documented over the years. Since 2012, we've offered a trip to explore this route as a viable pelagic trip and all trips were rewarded with a healthy trip list, several notable rarities, and a comfortable trip in an entirely underbirded region!

Birding from the ferry has a number of advantages: it's a large and stable platform; it offers comfortable sleeping quarters and a cafeteria and bar on board; the ship is spacious enough to comfortably accommodate many birders with good observation areas on deck and inside; and it has a reliable schedule. Of course, since the mission of the ship is to provide safe transit for passengers, and not to find birds, there are obvious disadvantages to birding from a ferry as well, such as not being able to stop in productive areas or turn around to chase a bird. However, the list of birds that has been encountered along this route over the years is long and, with spotters poised at key points on board and a 42 hour crossing, we make the most of what is currently the only available option for birding the deeper offshore waters of the northern Gulf of Alaska.

**Day 1:** Arrival in Juneau throughout the day. There are several flights daily from both Anchorage and Seattle. We'll meet for a welcome dinner near our hotel. Overnight at Juneau hotel.

**Day 2:** This day of birding around Juneau will include some time looking for migrant shorebirds, and resident and migrant passerines. Many visiting birders overlook Juneau when planning their Alaskan travels. Even many Alaskans rarely get the opportunity to bird our isolated capital. But the birding here can be excellent and for those keen on building their Alaska list Juneau holds the chance for species like: Hooded Merganser, Sora, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Cedar Waxwing, American Redstart, MacGillivray's Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Warbling Vireo, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Vaux's Swift, and Red Crossbill. Fall migration will be just beginning during our trip and if there are any rarities around we will make efforts to find them. Night in Juneau at hotel.

**Day 3:** We board the ferry around 10 AM (exact time TBA) for a noon departure and begin our 42 hour sailing to Whittier. We will sleep in staterooms on the ferry, which includes two nights on board. There is a cafeteria with hot food and a selection of to go options. We also carry a hefty selection of snacks to allow us to spend as much daylight as possible on deck birding.

The trip from Juneau to Whittier includes time in both inshore and offshore waters. During our first afternoon on board the we'll ply the northern portion of the famous Inside Passage, before transiting Cross Sound and setting off into the open pelagic waters of the Gulf of Alaska at Cape Spencer. We'll have several hours in offshore waters before the sunsets. Night on board the ferry.

**Day 4:** Early in the morning on day three, the ship makes a stop at the port of Yakutat, a small and isolated coastal fishing community. Here you'll have an opportunity to stretch your legs and get a quick look at this rarely visited port. After leaving Yakutat our route takes us through what are likely to be the most productive offshore waters of the trip. Our early departure from Yakutat (approximately 8 AM) allows us to spend almost all of this second day on board in off-shore waters. The sun will set on us in the Gulf of Alaska at around 9 PM. Night on board the ferry.

**Day 5:** We arrive in Whittier at about 6 AM and then travel by van to Anchorage (about an hour drive), with breakfast and birding along the way. Our trip ends in Anchorage around noon.

The list of possibilities for this trip is long, but with luck we hope to encounter some of the true Alaskan rarities like Mottled Petrel, Buller's, Pink-footed, Manx, or Flesh-footed Shearwater, Short-tailed Albatross or South Polar Skua.



All three species of north Pacific Albatross are found year-round in the Gulf of Alaska. Of these, the Black-footed Albatross is the most common. Aaron Lang

*The cost of the trip includes: all ground transportation in Juneau, and from Whittier to Anchorage at the end of the trip; ferry passage, including a shared stateroom; lodging in Juneau on Day 1 and 2; welcome dinner in Juneau on Day 1; breakfast in Juneau on Day 2 and Day 3; all group gear (e.g., first aid kit, etc.); snacks; and WBA guides. It does not include any pre- or post-trip Juneau or Anchorage costs (e.g., lodging, ground transportation, meals, etc.), meals (except the welcome dinner and breakfasts on Day 1 and Day 2.), or personal gear (e.g., binoculars, rain gear, etc.). Additional costs incurred due to factors beyond the control of WBA will be the participants' responsibility (e.g., weather delays, sickness, strikes, evacuations, political crises, etc.).*

*Note: Price is based on double occupancy in Juneau and a shared ferry stateroom (with 1-3 other participants). Staterooms have bunk beds and you may be in an upper bunk. Staterooms may or may not have bathrooms en suite but do have sinks. If you choose to forgo the staterooms and prefer to bring your sleeping bag and sleep in the solarium, your trip price will be adjusted accordingly.*