Alaska has been called North America’s final frontier and pelagic birding is certainly the final frontier of birding in Alaska. Indeed, some of the 49th state’s most prized birding targets inhabit the offshore regions of the Gulf of Alaska. Accessing these waters as a birder is difficult, and prior to our tour, no organized and regularly operating pelagic birding trips had existed in these rich waters, making finding the birds that inhabit them extremely challenging. 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 pelagic trip on this route and all of our trips have been rewarded with a healthy trip list, several notable rarities, and a comfortable trip in an entirely under-birded region! Add to that a few days birding in Juneau, where few visiting birders go, and you’ve got an excellent tour!

Birding from the ferry has a number of advantages. It’s a large and stable platform offering comfortable sleeping quarters and a cafeteria 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, 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 have 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 Anchorage throughout the day. Your leader will pick you up at the Anchorage airport or hotel. We’ll meet for dinner in Anchorage before taking a one-hour drive to the port of Whittier. We’ll board the ferry in the late evening and get checked in to our quarters. Night on board the ferry.

**Day 2:** We’ll travel through Prince William Sound during the night and by daylight should be in the productive waters of the northern Gulf of Alaska. Birding hours will begin around 5 AM and continue until about 6 PM when we reach the town of Yakutat for a 3 hour stop. All of this birding will be offshore in the Gulf of Alaska and it is this stretch that has the best potential for tubenoses and pelagic rarities. As we approach Yakutat the views of the Wrangell-St. Elias mountains, which rise to over 18,000 feet, are stunning! We’ll be able to stretch our legs in Yakutat for an hour or so and may pick up a few new birds. On past trips, Yakutat has produced such Alaska rarities as Caspian Tern, Anna’s Hummingbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, and Eurasian Collared-Dove. The ferry departs Yakutat at 9 PM.
Day 3: With an early sunrise we should enjoy the rich waters of the Cape Spencer/Cross Sound area at first light. This is often a great area for tubenoses. On our inaugural 2012 trip, it was here that we had a Manx Shearwater. The final four hours of the crossing are through the beautiful and protected waters of the Inside Passage. We’ll arrive at the dock in Juneau at 1 PM. We’ll get our rental van, check into our hotel, and have the rest of the day to bird Juneau for southeast Alaskan specialties.

Day 4: We’ll bird Juneau all day today. Your leader will take you to the airport for your afternoon or evening departing flight. If you’re staying in Juneau to explore further on your own we can take you to your hotel. The tour ends at the Juneau airport.

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.

The cost of the trip includes: all ground transportation in Juneau, Anchorage, and from Anchorage to Whittier at the beginning of the trip; ferry passage, including a shared stateroom; lodging in Juneau on Day 3; breakfast in Juneau on Day 4; all group gear (e.g., first aid kit, etc.); snacks; and WBA guides. It does not include any pre- or post-trip Anchorage or Juneau costs (e.g., lodging, ground transportation, meals, etc.), meals (except breakfast in Juneau on Day 4), 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.