

Birding Adak
with NatureAlaska Tours and VENT
in the Aleutians, Alaska's Outermost Islands
MAY 17 – 25, 2006

With great pleasure and anticipation, NatureAlaska Tours announces joining with Victor Emanuel of VENT for birding Adak in the Aleutian Islands in 2006. Following my 2003 pioneer explorations and birding at Adak, this new partnership brings the strengths of Alaska's two premier birding companies to birders from across the globe.

My 39 years of Alaskan logistics, operations and pioneering nature tours in Alaska, with VENT's decades of Alaskan birding and extraordinary leaders, Kevin Zimmer and Marshall Iliff, are a combination impossible to match in Alaska birding tours.

Adak is a large island in the Andreanof group of the central Aleutian chain, with a resident human population of less than 300. Over the years, it has accumulated a long list of Asiatic vagrants, in spite of the fact that it has received relatively little coverage from birders. Prior to 2004, access to the island was highly restricted, due to the presence of an active U.S. Naval base.

Birders could only look at Adak on the map and dream about what could have been. But, in April of 2003, the government shut down the Adak base, and relinquished control of the island and its facilities to the Aleut Enterprise Corporation. With that move, Adak became open for tourism. Adak offers the rare opportunity to search for Asiatic vagrants and Bering Sea specialties in relative ease and comfort.

May 17, Day 1: Arrival in Anchorage. Participants should plan to arrive in Anchorage anytime today and take a cab to the Hawthorn Hotel, where a room will be reserved in your name. We will meet in the hotel lobby at 6:30 p.m. for a briefing before going to dinner.

NIGHT: Hawthorne Suites, Anchorage, Anchorage

May 18, Day 2: Anchorage to Adak Island. We will have breakfast at the hotel before transferring to the airport for the 9:53 a.m. departure of Alaska Airlines Flight 138 to Adak Island which is scheduled to arrive at 1:26 p.m. (subject to change).

Upon arrival, we will transfer to our accommodations in two-bedroom, two-bathroom houses (up to three participants quartered in each house) that were formerly occupied by U.S. Navy personnel. Access to birding locations is via an extensive system of roads and we will have vans for transportation. This means that birding excursions will minimize the need for arduous long treks on foot and will also allow us to bird from the vehicles when the Aleutian weather takes a turn for the worse. The extensive road system also means that we can cover much more ground and many more habitats than is possible in most outpost locations. We will have the remainder of the day plus all of the next six days to bird Adak.

NIGHT: Adak Island

May 19-24, Days 3-8: Adak Island. In addition to resident populations of such prizes as Harlequin Duck, Rock Ptarmigan, Bald Eagle, Rock Sandpiper, Aleutian Tern, Horned and Tufted puffins, Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch and Lapland Longspur, Adak offers a tremendous opportunity for seeing a variety of alcids and other seabirds, often right from shore. Ancient, Marbled and Kittlitz's murrelets can all be common in the nearshore waters, and tubenoses such as Northern Fulmar, Short-tailed Shearwater, Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel and occasionally even Laysan Albatross pass by offshore. A major attraction is the regular presence of Whiskered Auklets, which feed in tidal rips off of Adak. We are likely to see at least a few of these localized alcids from shore, but should see hundreds more if plans for an optional one-day offshore boat trip materialize. Much of our time will be spent searching for migrants, particularly vagrants from Eurasia. The list of vagrants that have occurred here is long, and includes such prizes as Whooper Swan, Bean Goose, Spot-billed Duck, Tufted Duck, Eurasian Wigeon, Common Pochard, Smew, Mongolian Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit, Black-tailed Godwit, Gray-tailed Tattler, Wood Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Spotted Redshank, Common Sandpiper, Terek Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint, Temminck's Stint, Long-toed Stint, Common Cuckoo, Eye-browed Thrush, and Brambling.

Of course, as is always the case, the presence of vagrants is largely weather dependent, and the number of vagrants seen in any single trip is likely to be small. However, the vagrant potential of Adak is great, and largely untapped, and with a full week to cover the island, we should be well positioned to find whatever is there. Birding in these northern latitudes is always ephemeral and transient by nature, and these qualities only add to the unpredictability and excitement of birding Alaskan outposts. Rare birds arrive without warning and leave without notice; conditions are optimal one moment and inhospitable the next. One has to admire the feathered wanderers that return again and again from more hospitable climes to fulfill their reproductive destinies in lands that can be so capriciously unpredictable and unforgiving. Seemingly fragile, always restless, they strike out each spring for shores on both sides of the Bering Sea. And each spring, we wait, anticipating their arrivals, and reveling in our unexpected discoveries. It is a drama we look forward to repeating, year-after-year, with undiminished anticipation.

NIGHTS: Adak Island

May 25, Day 9: Final Morning in Adak: Return to Anchorage. After a final morning of birding, we'll be transferred to the Adak Airport in time for the 2:15 p.m. departure of Alaska Airlines Flight 139 which is scheduled to arrive in Anchorage at 6:53 p.m. (subject to change) in time to connect with overnight flights to the lower 48. Depending upon flight schedules and to avoid the risk of misconnecting, some participants may find it necessary to overnight in Anchorage and depart the following day. A hotel room for this evening is not covered by the tour fee. However, upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with any lodging arrangements.

Birding Adak includes round trip airfare from Anchorage to Adak and return, all meals and lodging from night of May 17 until return to Anchorage May 25. \$4,295. Due Feb 15, 2006.

Tour will be limited to 15 participants. Leaders Kevin Zimmer, Marshall Iliff & Dan Wetzel.