

Dalton Birder™

**Along the Dalton Highway
June 2 – 9, 2006
Fairbanks to Prudhoe Bay**

The birding tour with more birds, wildlife and wilderness, habitat and adventure, time and freedom than any one-week tour, anywhere with anyone in Alaska.

And a guide with 39 years in Alaska. More than anyone.



Spectacled Eider at Prudhoe Bay

“Along the Dalton Highway” –Alaska’s best northern birding

Birds – a reflection of habitat diversity

The search for birds for 500 miles along the Dalton Highway reveals the enormous diversity of habitat - physiography, ecology, biogeography and climate - in the wilderness of arctic Alaska. There is enough diversity to attract the **29 families and 148 species seen between 1981 and 2005, an average of 100 species per trip.** For 500-miles, over one full week, this north-south route crosses three biogeographic regions and six major northern ecosystems.

- Yukon River Basin
Boreal forest and northern-most treeline
- Brooks Range
Arctic alpine and tundra foothills of the north slope
- Arctic Coastal Plain
Beaufort Sea coast and coastal tundra

I know where to look

The ecological concept of “patchy habitats,” finds examples in 14 avian habitats within these major northern ecosystems. Spectacled Eiders do not rest on every tundra thaw pond. Bluethroats do not perch on every willow bush. Smith’s Longspurs do not nest in every grassy meadow, nor do Northern Hawk Owls hunt from every spruce branch. But in the 500 miles between Fairbanks and Prudhoe Bay there are, indeed, a lot of spruce trees, willows thickets, thaw ponds and tundra meadows. After 30 years birding the Dalton Highway, I know where to look.

Schedule – weather & water, breeding & nesting

Birds arrive in the boreal forests of the Yukon River Basin in late April, spreading northward through May. Birds begin nesting on the Arctic Coastal Plain (ACP) at Prudhoe Bay, the first week in June. June 2 - 9 is an optimum time in a narrow window when birds are in their most active breeding behavior and plumage.

Inclement weather in early June on the ACP can have a significant influence on timing of nesting and distribution. Birds are busy establishing and defending territories, concurrent with snowmelt, with courtship and nesting soon after. Slight changes in early weather conditions can accelerate or impede snowmelt, affect feeding and nesting. With highly variable weather causing climate change, “normal” timing of events can shift a week either way.

Single road, a changing landscape

Between Fairbanks and Prudhoe Bay, the Dalton Highway reaches across the Yukon-Tanana Uplands, Yukon River, Arctic Circle, northern-most treeline, Brooks Range, Arctic Continental Divide and Atigun Pass, Alaska’s highest road summit at 4,736-feet. Pliocene Ice Age glaciers smothered 250 miles from the Arctic Circle in the south to Sagwon Bluffs in the north, leaving behind spectacular landforms. As the landscape changes, so do the birds and mammals.

More to birding than just birds

Birding along the Dalton is as much about northern Alaska - wilderness landscapes, wildlife, geology, people and history - as it is about birds. These northern regions have influenced the popular image of Alaska more than any other. The cultural history in the Arctic begins with Paleo Indians 11,000 years ago, onto the gold rush of 1898, oilfield geologists in 1969 and adventurous birdwatchers in 2006.

Come North with NatureAlaska Tours in 2006 and find the birds in the unique and fascinating wilderness habitats along the Dalton Highway.

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