

in fall 2004, is being planned) and visitation will not only build the Pribilof checklist (and maybe even North America's): it will also provide valuable insight into the phenomena of migration and vagrancy.

Several bird-tour operators offer August excursions to St. Paul (WINGS has offered a late August trip for years). However, at present no tour groups visit the Pribilofs after the end of August. But birders can book spring, summer, or fall trips directly through St. Paul Island Tours. Fall tours (late August through as late as October) will be offered beginning in 2005, featuring the guides and facilities of the spring and summer tour season. See St. Paul Island Tour's website at <www.alaskabirding.com> or call (877) 424-5637.

The author thanks Mike Froelich, Ron Philemonoff, and Jolene Lekanof of TDX for making the fall survey possible. Thanks to Peter Ginsburg and Brad Murphy for their hard work and dedication while working on the survey. Peter, Paul Lehman, Jeanette Morss, Matt Pelikan, and Sean Smith provided helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

A birder since he was 11 or younger, Derek Lovitch has worked in eight states as a biologist, naturalist, and tour guide since his graduation from Rutgers University in 1999. He was the lead tour guide for St. Paul Island Tours in 2003, his third season guiding on St. Paul, when he developed and led the island's first fall survey. He and his fiancée will be opening a Wild Bird Center franchise store in Yarmouth, Maine, this summer.

Adak: the Aleutians Made Easy

Easy access, robust infrastructure—and a ton of birds

BY TIMOTHY LENZ

Okay, so you want to see Palearctic vagrants, thousands or even millions of alcids, and albatrosses—all from *terra firma*? And you want to do so near indoor plumbing, working telephones, and a nice restaurant? Not to mention great roads and smoothly operating rental cars? Well, a trip to Adak isn't exactly cheap. But it will do the job.

For most of the past half-century, the U.S. Navy station on Adak forbade access to anyone except spouses and families of naval officers. But in April 2003, the government shut down the base and turned over control of the island and its facilities to the Aleut Enterprise Corporation. Since the island's population plummeted to fewer than 300 residents with the closure of the naval station, Adak is now marketing itself to the rest of the world as a destination for everything from business to birding. And why not? The infrastructure is there, and so are the birds.

Ted Floyd, Chris Wood, and I birded Adak's beautiful, roughly 280 square miles during the last week of August 2003, when many of the summer residents were leaving and fall migrants were just beginning to arrive. Like all migrants to Adak, we were treated to a landscape composed of grassy rolling hills and waterfalls towered over by a 4,000-foot volcano. Adak's location in the Andreanof chain of the Aleutian Islands makes it virtually the southernmost (and one of the westernmost) points in Alaska.

Adak's location, its superior shorebird habitat, and the ease of access to its good birding areas all scream "mega-rarity" to the first-time visitor. For example, North America's first Spot-billed Duck spent an entire year in the sheltered waters of Adak's famous Clam Lagoon. The lagoon's expansive mud flats and tundra marshes are worth birding at least twice a day. Virtually anything can show up during in spring

and fall migration. Even though our visit was too early in the season for large numbers of migrants, our Clam Lagoon list included goodies such as Pacific Golden-Plover, Red-necked Stint, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, and American and Red-throated Pipits. Each spring, large flocks of Bar-tailed Godwits stage at Clam Lagoon. During the summer, the lagoon provides important nesting habitat for Aleutian and Arctic Terns.

Seabirding can also be exciting on Adak: expect albatrosses, shearwaters, storm-petrels, eiders, murres, auklets, and puffins. While you are likely to see especially large numbers from a boat, watching from land is productive, as well. On one memorable morning at the now-defunct LORAN station, we were treated to the spectacle of eight Black-footed Albatrosses, more than ten Laysan Albatrosses, hundreds of Northern Fulmars, thousands of Short-tailed Shearwaters, and a few Fork-tailed Storm-Petrels—without even a twinge of the seasickness seeing these birds often entails. For good measure, we witnessed a spectacular display by breaching orcas. At all times, we were within view of alcids—usually many individuals of many species. One of the real specialties of Adak is the distinctive Whiskered Auklet. We were fortunate to see a few from shore and another from a small boat just offshore. To see large numbers (well up into the five-digit range), you may have to go a little farther offshore. Al Giddings, Adak's harbor-master, is the person to approach about arranging longer boat trips.

Alcids and tubenoses are the prime attractions, but you should be able to see many other species from shore, too. Some of the more reliable species include Red-faced Cormorant, Harlequin Duck, Common Eider, Black Oystercatcher, Rock Sandpiper, and Glaucous-winged Gull (abundant). In fall and especially in spring, check the "Adak National Forest": a huddle of thirty-three spruces adjacent to



Away from the main roads and rocky coastlines, Adak presents the birder with surprisingly lush and dense vegetation. That's *Birding* editor Ted Floyd, lost in the weeds on the way home from a seawatch. Photo: Timothy Lenz, August 2003

a pet cemetery. This site has produced everything from passerine vagrants (expected, in season) to an oddball Great Egret perched on top of the tallest tree one spring.

Bald Eagles, Common Ravens, Winter Wrens, Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches, Song Sparrows, Lapland Longspurs, and Snow Buntings are the common resident birds in town. Local residents fondly refer to Lapland Longspurs as "red kittles" because of their beautiful breeding plumage and distinctive rattle call. Feeders and plantings around town should be checked for passerine vagrants, especially in spring. The longspurs depart during the winter months, but the five other passerine species are permanent residents. Along with the resident Bald Eagles (common), you should look for Short-eared Owls (uncommon in summer) in the fields around town.

Just outside town, the runway ponds (along the outskirts of, not surprisingly, the airport) harbor good numbers of Emperor Geese during the colder months. Waterfowl like Tufted Duck and Smew are always possible in migration or even in winter. At any time of year, expect to see large numbers of Green-winged Teal of the distinctive Eurasian subspecies. Away from town and away from the main bodies of water, bird diversity declines. Lapland Longspurs are ubiquitous during the warmer months, and Parasitic Jaegers are frequent. Throughout the year, you should be able to find Rock Ptarmigans in the drier uplands.

So how do you get to a place thousands of miles out in the Bering Sea? Alaska Airlines flies a comfortable Boeing 737 from Anchorage to Adak on Sundays and Thursdays. The round-trip ticket from Anchorage will cost about \$1,130. In-flight treats on this plane included one of the smallest apples I'd ever seen and a scrumptious, chocolate-caramel treat called a "bear claw". Don't be surprised to see a crowd waiting when you arrive at Adak's airport. The plane's biweekly

arrival is a major event, because flights to and from the mainland are an essential supply link for the community.

As nice as the airport is, you will probably want to get a vehicle and start birding right away. Fortunately, the Aleut Enterprise Corporation rents out automatic-transmission U.S. Navy jeeps for \$75 a day. These tough little vehicles can easily handle the numerous gravel roads on the northern half of the island. I'd recommend either bringing your own map or picking one up at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service building in town. Amazingly, we still somehow managed to take a couple of wrong turns, even with the coastlines and various landmarks to keep us oriented. The southern portion of the island is a designated wilderness area and largely inaccessible, because Adak's highly irregular terrain makes it difficult to walk long distances.

If you'd like a chance to see Adak's birds in reasonable comfort, then prepare for some of the worst weather imaginable. Pack a warm raincoat, rain pants, waterproof boots, gloves, hat, sweatshirts, and any other clothing you can think of to fend off the elements. As for birding gear, keep in mind that a good tripod is critical for high-wind sea-birding. I also recommend a Rite-in-the-Rain notebook, available through ABA Sales, to document your sightings.

Of course, aside from the birds, the most important thing to keep a birder going during the day is food. We found it useful to bring breakfast and snack foods into the field, saving trips back to town in the middle of the day. However, we quickly tired of beef jerky and tuna fish, and we always ate dinner at Violet's restaurant in town. Besides delicious entrees, you can also purchase souvenir T-shirts, candy bars, and other necessities. I bought an Adak Polar Bear Swim T-shirt here and didn't even have to swim for it.

When the day is over, don't expect to stay in a Quonset hut or other small enclosure. Apartment houses are available



This juvenile Red-necked Stint represents one of several Palearctic shorebird species that the author and his companions found in Clam Lagoon, Adak's best spot for a good diversity and abundance of shorebirds. Photo: Christopher L. Wood, August 2003

for \$1,200 a month or \$1,300 for two months—excellent rates by Alaskan standards. Most apartment houses are fully equipped with a kitchen, laundry machines, beds, telephones, bathrooms, and living room. Our room even had an upright piano. Although painfully out of tune, it likely kept naval officers entertained in the dark, cold nights of winter. Another option for lodging is the hotel at Adak, which charges \$150 a night. Be sure to ask about special rates for birding groups. BirdTreks, High Lonesome Bird Tours, and NatureAlaska Tours are now offering guided birding tours of the island.

A trip to Adak is an unforgettable experience. Since transportation, lodging, and food are easy to find, all you've got to do is enjoy the scenery and track down some of the toughest, most mysterious, and most beautiful birds on the planet.

Timothy Lenz is working on his Master's degree in Computer Science at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. If he's not studying, he's birding.

Resources for Birding Adak

Useful articles:

"Birding the 'Other' Aleutians", by Charles S. Crabtree. *Birding*, September 1992.

"Finding Birds in Adak (Alaska)", by Tony White. *Birding*, October 1976.

"The Birds of Adak Island, Alaska", by Byrd, G.V., Gibson, D.D., and Johnson, D.L. *Condor* 1974 (Vol. 76, pp. 288-300).

Adak bird checklist:

www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/othrdata/chekbird/r7/adakisle.htm

Adak Island's home page:

www.adakisland.com

Updates and conditions:

www.adakupdate.com

ABA Updates

A loss, a gain, and an opportunity

Charlie Clark, 1912-2004

The ABA and the birding world generally suffered a great loss with the recent death at the age of 92 of Charlie Clark, in Wahoo, Nebraska, where he had recently moved to be closer to his son. Charlie was a part of the ABA since, quite literally, the beginning, being one of the organization's original members back in 1969; he served for a time as a "member at large", part of the group that was the precursor of today's Board of Directors, and he was once honored as the ABA's "Birder of the Year". Charlie was widely respected as an authority on bird identification and distribution, and widely loved as the kind of birder who exemplifies the birding community's ideal of sharing knowledge, time, and encouragement.

In recent decades, Charlie had lived and birded in the Rockport, Texas, area. Prior to that, he had been active in Illinois birding circles for many years. A respected member of the Illinois Ornithological Society, Charlie earned a reputation as a skillful observer with a keen sense of when and where to look, and as a patient teacher; many of today's leaders in the birding community owe their development in part to Charlie's help and encouragement. A birder of an ornithological bent, he was noted for honing his identification skills on museum study skins; he was once a collaborator of the famed ornithologist Margaret Morse Nice, and he published

articles on distribution and abundance in both Illinois and Texas journals.

Charlie Clark's "scholarly knowledge of birds and keen birding skills live on in countless birders in Illinois, Texas and, in fact, throughout this country", wrote ABA member Chuck Westcott on an Illinois birding listserve. Charlie will be greatly missed, but he leaves an admirable and influential legacy of birding skill and personal inspiration.

The Clark family has asked that memorials be made to the ABA or National Audubon in the name of Charlie Clark.

New ABA President Appointed

Steve R. Runnels assumed his duties as President and Chief Executive Officer of the American Birding Association on 1 April 2004. He was appointed to the post by the Board of Directors at the conclusion of its spring 2004 meeting, held in Colorado Springs in late March. The unanimous decision to appoint Runnels followed an extensive search conducted by a board search committee, chaired by board Vice Chair Bettie Harriman.

Runnels has a broad background in birding, ornithology, and the management of non-profit organizations. He comes to ABA from the National Audubon Society's Texas office, where he was Regional Director of Stewardship. He has served as Chief Executive Officer of the Dallas Museum of