

Birding IN YUP'IK COUNTRY



Have you ever wanted to explore a land of mystery and discovery? Have you dreamt of entering the realm of the Bristle-thighed Curlew and Emperor Goose, the

Eastern Yellow Wagtail and the Spectacled Eider, the Sabine's Gull

and the Long-tailed Jaeger? If so,

Yup'ik Country is the destination you've been searching for.

The Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta is the heart of northern Yup'ik Country. For generations, Native people have forged a subsistence life here. Salmon, seals, and berries are harvested every year. Each spring, however, it is the arriving birds that warm the hearts of those who have endured the cold, dark winter. The cries of swans, geese, and cranes bring smiles to the faces of elders and youngsters alike.

Beginning in the 19th century, visitors to this vast, remote land also began to appreciate the region's diverse and abundant birdlife. Early explorers reported great flocks of waterfowl and shorebirds along the Bering Sea coast. In the 1950s, the great artist and bird expert, Roger Tory Peterson, referred to the Delta as the "supertundra" because it was so full of birds.

Now, a new generation of bird enthusiasts can enjoy the marvels and wonders of the Delta's birdlife. Whether you want to add Arctic species to your life list, photograph birds in the golden light of long summer evenings, or simply observe the intimate behaviors of birds courting mates and raising their young, Yup'ik Country has much to offer.



Part of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta's attraction is its sheer size. The Delta lowlands and surrounding mountains cover nearly 30 million

acres. The Yukon River is the third-longest river in North America and

the Kuskokwim is Alaska's second-

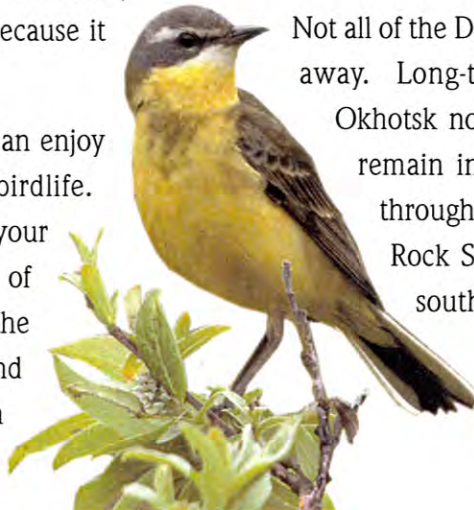
largest river. The combined delta

of the two great rivers is a watery mosaic of habitats—lakes, ponds, oxbows, marshes, bogs, and sloughs. Along the Bering Sea coast, the Delta's rivers have created the largest expanse of intertidal wetlands along the west coast of North America.

With such rich habitats, it is no wonder that the Delta is a magnet for birds from around the world. Waterfowl from all four North American flyways converge on the Delta each spring. Many birds come from even farther away. Neotropical migrants like Blackpoll Warblers and Northern Waterthrushes arrive from the forests of South America, Pacific Golden-Plovers fly north from Hawaii, Bar-tailed Godwits return from New Zealand and Australia, and Northern Wheatears depart from the plains of Africa.

Not all of the Delta's birds spend their winters so far away. Long-tailed Ducks winter in the Sea of Okhotsk north of Japan, four species of eiders remain in the icy waters of the Bering Sea through the coldest months of the year, and Rock Sandpipers may travel only as far as southeast Alaska. In fact, over 20 species

stay on the Delta all winter, including Gyrfalcons, Willow Ptarmigan, Pine Grosbeaks, and redpolls.



Checklist OF BIRDS

The Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge checklist includes 241 species reported within the outer boundaries of the refuge (including observations on both private and public lands) in March 2008.

While biologists have conducted many decades of research in the region, and have gained additional knowledge through incidental observations and discoveries of birds that were not the target



of their research, this region is almost untouched with respect to recreational birding and the wealth of knowledge birders can add.

Birders and local residents are encouraged to share their field reports, checklists with dates and locations, and photos or videos documenting any unusual or previously unconfirmed birds or bird behaviors with Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge biologists.

GEESE, SWANS

- s Greater White-fronted Goose*
- s Emperor Goose*
- m Snow Goose* [3]
- s Brant*
- s Cackling Goose*
- s Trumpeter Swan*
- s Tundra Swan*

DUCKS

- c Gadwall*
- c Eurasian Wigeon
- s American Wigeon*
- s Mallard* [4]
- a Blue-winged Teal
- s Northern Shoveler*
- s Northern Pintail*
- s Green-winged Teal*
- s Canvasback*
- c Redhead*
- a Ring-necked Duck
- s Greater Scaup*
- s Lesser Scaup
- s Steller's Eider [1]
- s Spectacled Eider*
- m King Eider* [1]
- s Common Eider*
- s Harlequin Duck*
- s Surf Scoter
- s White-winged Scoter

DUCKS (CONTINUED)

- s Black Scoter*
- s Long-tailed Duck*
- s Bufflehead*
- s Common Goldeneye*
- a Barrow's Goldeneye
- s Common Merganser*
- s Red-breasted Merganser*

GROUSE, PTARMIGAN

- p Ruffed Grouse [2]
- p Spruce Grouse*
- p Willow Ptarmigan*
- p Rock Ptarmigan*
- p White-tailed Ptarmigan [2]

LOONS, GREBES

- s Red-throated Loon*
- a Arctic Loon [5]
- s Pacific Loon*
- s Common Loon*
- m Yellow-billed Loon
- s Horned Grebe*
- s Red-necked Grebe*

PETRELS, SHEARWATERS

- a Northern Fulmar
- a Mottled Petrel
- a Sooty Shearwater
- m Short-tailed Shearwater
- m Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel

CORMORANTS

- c Double-crested Cormorant*
- c Red-faced Cormorant*
- s Pelagic Cormorant*

EAGLES, HAWKS, FALCONS

- s Osprey*
- s Bald Eagle*
- a White-tailed Eagle
- s Northern Harrier*
- c Sharp-shinned Hawk
- p Northern Goshawk*
- a Swainson's Hawk
- s Red-tailed Hawk*
- s Rough-legged Hawk*
- p Golden Eagle*
- c American Kestrel [6]
- s Merlin*
- p Gyrfalcon*
- s Peregrine Falcon*

CRANES

- s Sandhill Crane*

PLOVERS

- s Black-bellied Plover*
- s American Golden-Plover*
- s Pacific Golden-Plover*
- c Lesser Sand-Plover
- s Semipalmated Plover*
- c Killdeer

SANDPIPERS

- a Common Greenshank
- s Greater Yellowlegs*
- s Lesser Yellowlegs*
- s Solitary Sandpiper*
- s Wandering Tattler*
- a Gray-tailed Tattler
- a Common Sandpiper
- s Spotted Sandpiper*
- a Terek Sandpiper
- m,x Eskimo Curlew [7]
- s Whimbrel*
- s Bristle-thighed Curlew*
- s Hudsonian Godwit*
- s Bar-tailed Godwit*
- a Marbled Godwit
- s Ruddy Turnstone*
- s Black Turnstone*
- s Surfbird*
- m Red Knot
- m Sanderling
- s Semipalmated Sandpiper*
- s Western Sandpiper*
- a Red-necked Stint
- s Least Sandpiper*
- s Baird's Sandpiper*
- s Pectoral Sandpiper*
- m Sharp-tailed Sandpiper
- s Rock Sandpiper*
- s Dunlin*

SANDPIPERS (CONTINUED)

- a Curlew Sandpiper
- a Buff-breasted Sandpiper
- a Ruff
- s Short-billed Dowitcher*
- s Long-billed Dowitcher*
- a Jack Snipe
- s Wilson's Snipe*
- a Wilson's Phalarope
- s Red-necked Phalarope*
- s Red Phalarope*

JAEGERS

- m Pomarine Jaeger* [1]
- s Parasitic Jaeger*
- s Long-tailed Jaeger*

GULLS

- a Little Gull
- a Black-headed Gull
- s Bonaparte's Gull*
- a Black-tailed Gull
- s Mew Gull*
- s Herring Gull [8]
- c Slaty-backed Gull*
- s Glaucous-winged Gull*
- s Glaucous Gull*
- s Sabine's Gull*
- s Black-legged Kittiwake*
- a Red-legged Kittiwake
- a Ross's Gull
- a Ivory Gull

TERNs

- c Caspian Tern*
- a Common Tern
- s Arctic Tern*
- s Aleutian Tern*

MURRES, AUks, PUFFINS

- s Common Murre*
- c Thick-billed Murre
- a Black Guillemot [9]
- s Pigeon Guillemot*
- a Marbled Murrelet
- a Ancient Murrelet
- s Parakeet Auklet*
- a Least Auklet
- s Crested Auklet*
- s Horned Puffin*
- s Tufted Puffin*

CUCKOOS

- a Common Cuckoo

OWLS

- p Great Horned Owl*
- p Snowy Owl* [1]
- p Northern Hawk Owl [2]
- p Great Gray Owl*
- s Short-eared Owl*
- p Boreal Owl [2]

HUMMINGBIRDS

- a Rufous Hummingbird

HOOPOES, KINGFISHERS

- a Eurasian Hoopoe
- s Belted Kingfisher*

WOODPECKERS

- a Sapsucker (sp.?) [10]
- p Downy Woodpecker*
- a Hairy Woodpecker [11]
- p American Three-toed Woodpecker*
- a Northern Flicker

TYRANT FLYCATCHERS

- s Olive-sided Flycatcher*
- s Alder Flycatcher*
- a Willow Flycatcher
- s Say's Phoebe*
- a Eastern Kingbird

SHRIKES

- p Northern Shrike*

CORVIDS

- p Gray Jay*
- a Steller's Jay
- p Black-billed Magpie*
- p Common Raven*

LARKS

- s Horned Lark*

SWALLOWS

- s Tree Swallow*
- s Violet-green Swallow*
- s Bank Swallow*
- s Cliff Swallow*
- c Barn Swallow*

CHICKADEES

- p Black-capped Chickadee*
- p Boreal Chickadee*
- a Gray-headed Chickadee

NUTHATCHES, CREEPERS

- c Red-breasted Nuthatch
- a Brown Creeper

WRENS, DIPPERS

- a Winter Wren
- p American Dipper*

KINGLETS

- c Golden-crowned Kinglet
- s Ruby-crowned Kinglet*

OLD WORLD WARBLERS

- a Middendorff's Grasshopper-Warbler
- s Arctic Warbler*

THRUSHES

- c Bluethroat*
- a Red-flanked Bluetail
- s Northern Wheatear*
- a Mountain Bluebird
- s Gray-cheeked Thrush*
- s Swainson's Thrush*
- s Hermit Thrush*
- a Eyebrowed Thrush
- a Dusky Thrush
- s American Robin*
- s Varied Thrush*

MOCKINGBIRDS, STARLINGS

- a Northern Mockingbird
- a European Starling

ACCENTOR

- a Siberian Accentor

WAGTAILS, PIPITS

- s Eastern Yellow Wagtail*
- c White Wagtail*
- c Red-throated Pipit*
- s American Pipit*

WAXWINGS

- s Bohemian Waxwing*

WOOD-WARBLERS

- s Orange-crowned Warbler*
- s Yellow Warbler*
- a Magnolia Warbler
- s Yellow-rumped Warbler*
- a Palm Warbler
- s Blackpoll Warbler*
- s Northern Waterthrush*
- s Wilson's Warbler*

SPARROWS AND ALLIES

- s American Tree Sparrow*
- s Savannah Sparrow*
- s Fox Sparrow*
- s Lincoln's Sparrow*
- a Harris's Sparrow
- s White-crowned Sparrow*
- s Golden-crowned Sparrow*
- s Dark-eyed Junco*
- s Lapland Longspur*
- a Rustic Bunting
- p Snow Bunting*
- w McKay's Bunting

BLACKBIRDS

- a Red-winged Blackbird
- s Rusty Blackbird*
- a Brown-headed Cowbird

FINCHES

- a Brambling
- s Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch*
- p Pine Grosbeak*
- a Common Rosefinch
- a Purple Finch
- a Red Crossbill
- p White-winged Crossbill*
- p Common Redpoll*
- p Hoary Redpoll*
- a Pine Siskin
- a Eurasian Bullfinch

* Documented to nest in the Yukon Delta NWR.

Status

- p Permanent Resident: Some members of the species are present on the refuge all year, but not necessarily the same individuals.
- s Summer Resident: Includes all species present only during the breeding (i.e., "snow-free") season, except those which occur solely as passage migrants
- w Winter Resident: Present only in the non-breeding season.
- m Migrant: Includes those species which occur on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta only as migrants en route to other destinations; does not include migrant species in which some fraction of the population regularly remains on the Delta during the breeding season.
- c Casual: Includes 1) species reported 5 or more times, but not to be expected on an annual basis (e.g., Red-breasted Nuthatch), 2) species which may appear fairly regularly as non-breeders or post-breeding dispersers, but in very small numbers (e.g., Eurasian Wigeon, Golden-crowned Kinglet), and 3) very rare and/or sporadic breeders (e.g., Red-throated Pipit).
- a Accidental: Includes all species which have been reported fewer than 5 times on the Delta; two very different groups fall into this category: 1) true vagrants (e.g., Common Cuckoo, Eurasian Hoopoe, Siberian Accentor), and 2) species which probably owe their accidental status to a lack of ornithological field work at the right time of year in the appropriate habitat and location, and which might be expected in the future (e.g., Hairy Woodpecker).
- x Extinct: No longer occurs on the Delta.

Footnotes

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| [1] Very rare, sporadic breeder. | [9] Only confirmed record was a carcass found on Nunivak Island. |
| [2] Presumed breeder, not confirmed. | [10] Single spring record in Bethel, species not confirmed. |
| [3] No confirmed breeding in recent years. | [11] One confirmed refuge record, known to visit winter feeders just east of the refuge. |
| [4] Occasional reports of overwintering birds on open sections of rivers. | |
| [5] Perhaps casual as migrant, requires confirmation. | |
| [6] Has nested just east of refuge, along the Tuluksak River. | |
| [7] No records since 19 th century; presumably extinct. | |
| [8] One record of Herring Gull paired with Glaucous Gull on Kigigak Island. | |
- All species names are in accordance with the American Ornithologists' Union, 1998, Check-list of North American Birds, 7th ed., and Supplements 42-48 (American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, DC). This checklist was updated by Brian McCaffery of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge in March 2008. Check with the refuge for updates.

A Note About the Checklist

Many regional check-lists partition species occurrence into four seasons and several classes of abundance (or likelihood of detection). We have refrained from that practice, however, for several reasons.

First, seasonal divisions are not straightforward, and breeding efforts of some species conspicuously overlap with the migratory season of others. As a result, seasonal designations linking specific calendar dates with particular stages of the annual cycle inadequately reflect the biology of birds in this region. In addition, although we have reasonably good data on when birds arrive, data on when birds actually depart is much spottier. Assigning birds to specific calendar intervals would require an unacceptably high frequency of guesswork.

Second, with only a relatively few exceptions, most birds that migrate to the Delta stop here to breed. Compared to sites farther south, there are few passage migrants, so identifying a spring or fall migration "season" means little more than noting when breeding species arrive and depart.

Third, although we have reasonable estimates of relative abundance in specific habitats at several local sites, we are not comfortable with attempts to extrapolate the status of the birds across habitats and across the refuge. Given our current state of knowledge, the refuge is too large to be confident about such expansions. For many species in many areas of the refuge, we simply don't have enough information yet.

In this checklist, we have developed a system which provides, as concisely as possible, the information that we do actually have. We have modified the standard seasonal classifications (see Status section) and have eliminated abundance categories. Visitors interested in observing particular species should contact Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge for information about when, where, and in what habitats those species are most readily detected.



REPORTING RARITIES

Beringia Birders is a listserv open for viewing by nonmembers; however, you must be a member to post. First postings to the list are moderated to ensure they are on topic so you may experience a delay. This list serve covers the entire Aleutians, western, and northern Alaska so be sure to indicate the specific community or area you are birding. groups.yahoo.com/group/beringia_birders/

If you have an Eskimo Curlew sighting, or any other rarities, please also notify both Yukon Delta NWR staff in Bethel at (907) 543-1014 and the Alaska Rare Birds Listserv moderator Ed Clark at akbirder@eagle.ptialaska.net or (907) 457-1526 (home, in Fairbanks).

YUP'IK COUNTRY BEYOND THE DELTA

Birdwatching opportunities to the south and west of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta provide diverse opportunities worth exploration.

Villagers in Quinhagak (pronounced Quin-a-hawk) and Goodnews Bay to the south have expressed interest in guiding and hosting birders. The limited birding to date indicates these areas may provide interesting opportunities during spring migration when the Ahklun Mountains funnel migrants along the narrow coastal strip.

Nunivak Island sits in the Bering Sea, about 30 miles to the west of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. Rugged cliffs and varied upland habitat offers species complementing those of the Delta. The Pribilof Islands, to the southwest, and St. Lawrence Island, to the north, have both proven to be key birding locations for Asiatic vagrants, indications are that Nunivak Island could prove to be of similar interest, especially during the fall storms. Guiding, transportation, and lodging services are available in Mekoryuk.



TRIP PLANNING INFORMATION



Birding in Yup'ik Country can be extremely rewarding, but it can also be very challenging. The biggest surprise for many visitors is that none of the communities on the Delta are connected by road to any other part of the state. As a result, most travel to the Delta, and among Delta villages, must be done by plane. Regularly scheduled jet flights depart several times a day from Anchorage to Bethel, the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta's largest town and a very worthwhile birding destination itself.

Beyond Bethel, in most of the Delta's more remote villages, customary lodging and amenities are few and far between and boats are needed to access some of the best birding. Advanced planning is required. Not all villages are ready to host birders and other visitors. Lands around all of the villages are privately owned by village corporations so permission must be sought before you visit. Land use permits may be required. Villages that are embarking on birding tourism prefer that birders use local guiding services where available (whether booked direct or through a tour operator) to provide benefit to the community and ensure that activities respect local traditions and cultures.

Would-be visitors will need to do some research and make some phone calls to arrange for lodging and guided birding trips. In the villages, expect that the business phone is also the family phone, and tourism-related calls are not the norm. E-mail is not checked obsessively, so allow a few days for replies. For many in Yup'ik Country, English is their second language. For most, life is still lived at a pace and rhythm closer to the land than to urban America.

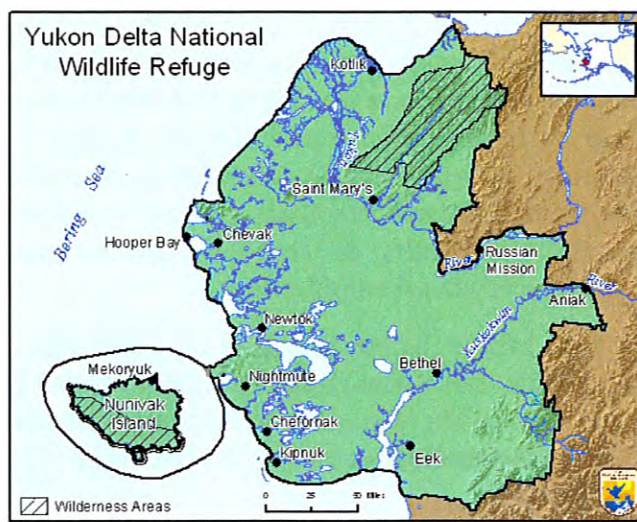
The Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge staff can tell you who has permits to operate on refuge lands, though in some villages all birding may take place on private lands within the refuge boundaries. *A Birder's Guide to Alaska*, 2nd edition (to be published by American Birding Association in late 2008), has a chapter describing birding opportunities in Bethel, Chevak, St. Mary's, and on Nunivak Island in detail, including contacts as of early 2008. A new website for visitors to the region, www.yupikcountry.com, is under development. And, tourism contacts may be found at www.southwestalaska.com/yukon/.

With careful planning and preparation, birders should have an exciting and rewarding experience on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. We look forward to seeing you!

Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge

The Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge includes nearly 22 million acres, making it larger than 11 states and almost equal in size to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, America's largest. The refuge headquarters is located in Bethel at 807 Chief Eddie Hoffman Road (between the airport and downtown). The visitor center and offices are open year round, Monday through Friday, regular business hours. Birders are encouraged to stop by for the latest birding information from experts on the refuge staff. A small natural history shop sells area topographic maps, field guides, and items of local interest.

<http://yukondelta.fws.gov> • Phone: (907) 543-3151
yukondelta@fws.gov for general refuge information
brian_mccaffery@fws.gov for birding information



Togiak National Wildlife Refuge

The Togiak National Wildlife Refuge, immediately to the south of Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge, encompasses another 4.7 million acres of land, from rocky sea cliffs and coastal tundra to glaciated mountain peaks and valleys. The northern part of the refuge is accessed from Bethel, the southern part from Dillingham, where the refuge headquarters is located. Over 200 bird species have been identified on the Togiak Refuge and private lands within, including some rarities not yet identified on the Yukon Delta NWR. A Togiak refuge checklist is found at the refuge website.

<http://togiak.fws.gov> • Phone: (907) 842-1063 • togiak@fws.gov for general refuge information



This publication was created in 2008 with assistance from Alaska Department of Fish and Game, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Economic Development Administration, and Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges. Photos were contributed by Jim Williams (© Sabine's Gull, Eastern Yellow Wagtail, Emperor Goose, Black Turnstones, wetlands near Chevak), Joanna Hubbard (© birders on beach outside Quinhagak, birding Bethel's boardwalk), Brian McCaffery, US Fish and Wildlife Service (Bluethroat), and Chris Dau, US Fish and Wildlife Service (Spectacled Eider). The Yup'ik Country logo was developed by John Oscar of Mekoyruk.