

Alaska's Inside Passage | Species List

July 2 – 9, 2022 | A Cruise with Naturalist Journeys



With Naturalist Journeys Guide Peg Abbott and Sandy, Frank, Alan, Janell, Steve, Carolyn, Jim, Ken, Doni, Dori, Ron and Julie and Sarah from the Naturalist Journeys office.

Compiled by Peg Abbott

Alaska can be a great green summer playground, and a week in the great north country with its spectacular scenery and cool temperatures was a treat for all in our group. We explored the fjords and open ocean areas of Alaska's Inside Passage, tranquil bays, rugged shorelines, glacial "ice gardens" and we had a chance to go ashore and walk in some of the most remote and spectacular coastal temperate rainforest on the planet. Our expedition leader and naturalist shared their intimate knowledge, leading us into places where few get to wander. We had time to watch behavior of Orca, Sea Otter, Humpback Whales, Steller Sea Lion, Coastal Brown Bear, Tufted Puffin, Harlequin Duck, Surfbird, Black Oystercatcher, both Marbled and Kittlitz's Murrelets, Rufous Hummingbird, Sooty Grouse and most common of all – Bald Eagle, seen daily! This was not a big list trip; it was a trip to savor wilderness and wildness and witness Humpback Whales feeding in rich areas of the ocean. It was time to watch Dall Porpoise racing the boat in testing their strength in our bow waves just off the bow of our ship – incredible! We took time to find shy American Mink and a lone Porcupine. We felt the wind in our hair skiffing about searching for wildlife, with views of mountains all around. We slid on kelp and picked up intertidal creatures to learn more about their fascinating adaptations. We found Shy Maidens (a wintergreen), several orchids, Indian Paintbrush and Lupine, at times arranged in veritable rock gardens thriving in the mist and fog on cliffs above the sea. The calls of Pigeon Guillemots are etched in our minds as are endless tracks of green, unbroken forest. For a second year in a row, we had very little "liquid sunshine" and barely had to don our rain gear! In a more than crazy world we unplugged for a week and drank in the beauty of the natural world.

BIRDS: 62 species

DUCKS, GEESE, AND SWANS: Anatidae (7)

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*— (1) We encountered a big group feeding on the grassy mudflats of Dundas Bay where the freshwater river came in. Probably 50-100 birds were seen and more were likely at this verdant productive location.

Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus*— (2+pre) Wonderful to encounter this colorful species, and males were still in bright plumage. We saw several on rocky islets in the bay between Sitka and Saint Lazaria Island on our pre-trip wildlife cruise, and then we encountered them twice on our main cruise, once on rocks at the mouth of Basket Bay, 6 males and a female, and then a lone bird on our cruise around the Inian Islands' Bird Rock.

Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata*— (1) Just one lone individual, near the Anchorage used to go out to the Inian Islands in our small skiffs – this is in the back part of Icy Straits where rich currents pour in from the Gulf of Alaska.

White-winged Scoter *Melanitta deglandi*— (3) Seen from the ship and then out on our skiffs while cruising Emmons Bay at the start of the trip on Day 3, then seen again in Dundas Bay in small flocks. The largest flocks were off the beach shore at Iyoukeen Bay, seen at a distance and then by those on the skiff rides, in groups of 50+, several of them.

Black Scoter *Melanitta americana* — (1) One group seen well at the rich current upwelling around Bird Island in the Inian Island group, in flight, circling above the skiffs.

Common Merganser *Mergus merganser*— (1) A big raft, a dozen or more birds – males with bright white plumage – was using the grassy shoreline area and shallow waters at Dundas Bay.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*— (2) One individual was seen in the Magoun Island area and then later in the trip we then saw quite a few in Dundas Bay where we got close to one in the skiff that was molting and ran across the water to avoid our boat, unable to fly.

QUAIL, PHEASANTS, GROUSE and ALLIES: Phasianidae (1)

Sooty Grouse *Dendragapus fuliginosus* —(1) A very fortunate encounter let us see this species well on our free time on land at Bartlett Cove in Glacier Bay National Park. Some of us walked the coastal trail past the Tlingit Community House where Wilson was staged to steer people various directions. He noted excitedly that he was hearing a Sooty Grouse and several of us crept down the trail quietly. It turned out that a female with young was quite used to employees and visitors walking along this trail and we had superb looks at her. She was on the ground with the busy little ones, about a third of her size, and then flew up into a tree limb from which she could view the whole busy brood. At some point she thought “too much” and flew loudly and quickly right over Peg’s shoulder to land on the trail as a large human family approached. Everyone stopped to let her gather up the youngsters and walk unhurriedly into the thick underbrush. Steven got some really good photos and Peg a bit of video. All the while we observed, the male was hooting regularly, advertising his fitness and territory.

PIGEONS AND DOVES: Columbidae (1)

Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*—(2) Seen in Sitka and Juneau only.

HUMMINGBIRDS: Trochilidae (1)

Rufous Hummingbird *Selasphorus rufus*— (3) Always a surprise, these rugged tiny hummingbirds are much at home in the archipelago. The first one buzzed our skiff the first full morning in the Magoun Islands, probably attracted by the red life-vests, at Emmons Bay. We had them at Dundas Bay and then Julie spied one on the forest walk on George’s Island at the west edge of the archipelago. All were lone individuals, males.

OYSTERCATCHERS: Haematopodidae (1)

Black Oystercatcher *Haematopus bachmani*— (6 + pre) It was a highlight of the trip to see such healthy populations of this species, almost every cove we explored had several pair. We could hear their calls from the ship when anchored, and several times we saw some great territorial dog fights as they protected their space. Often there was a male guarding a female obviously incubating. We took care not to disturb them but in the ice garden at Glacier Bay we explored, one flew over very close and proceeded to flip small rocks looking for invertebrate prey – fun to watch their long red bills in action. They were seen on all six days away from Sitka and Juneau.

LAPWINGS AND PLOVERS: Charadriidae (1)

Semiplumbed Plover *Pluvialis fulva* —(1) Four adults (two pair) were on nests in Dundas Bay, seen by those on the shore walk. Alan got some photos and all enjoyed watching their guarding behavior.

SANDPIPERS AND ALLIES: Scolopacidae (4)

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*— (1) Seen on the shore walk at Dundas Bay, a backcountry location of Glacier Bay National Park seldom visited.

Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*— (1) Seen in the Magoun Islands on a beach and then later in the trip from the shore walk at Dundas Bay.

Surfbird *Calidris virgata*— (2) This species was first seen from the boat at anchorage off Emmon’s Island and then confirmed from the skiff that got closer to the exposed tidal shoreline and rocky knoll extending from the island. There were 12, originally sighted roosting on a rock, then fanning out to feed on the wave swept rocky shoreline. We also saw and were able to photograph them on the Inian Island’s Bird Rock, some had distinctive rust patches on the wing in their breeding plumage. A third probable sighting was on Sister’s Island as we turned into Icy Strait but that one was too far to be sure.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*— (pre-only) One individual seen at sea, coming back from Saint Lazaria Island to Sitka. It was on the water and flew out of the way of our boat for a quick view.

JAEGERS AND SKUAS: Stercorariidae (1)

Parasitic Jaeger *Stercorarius parasiticus*— (2) Seen at sea in Chatham and Icy straits, harassing groups of gulls. We watched one for several minutes, though at a distance, it put on quite an acrobatic flight show.

AUKS, MURRES, AND PUFFINS: Alcidae (7)

Common Murre *Uria aalge*— (2+pre) This elegant species was present near potential nesting areas, preferring rock seaside cliffs with ledges. They were active on nests on Saint Lazaria Island on the pre-tour cruise, and we found them near the Marble Islands in Glacier Bay, swimming in groups offshore.

Pigeon Guillemot *Cephus columba*— (7 plus pre) Perhaps our most regular and faithful seabird, they were present in a host of environments from quiet bays to windswept shores. We watched them fish, swim, dive, fly, and court each other with their fancy red feet. Our photographers tried for that perfect photo of the red feet “landing gear” going down to splash in the sea. Their whistles were constant even into the dock in Juneau. Seen almost daily.

Marbled Murrelet *Brachyramphus marmoratus*— (7 plus pre) Southeast Alaska is a stronghold for this species which struggles further down the coast in Oregon and Washington. Here we found them plentiful, often seeing 60 or more in a day. They were often in pairs, but we saw a few family groups near Sitka with pale youngsters learning about life at sea. Fish were plentiful, one near the George’s Island at the west end of the archipelago had four in its beak at one time!

Kittlitz’s Murrelet *Brachyramphus brevirostris*— (1) Creatures of the glacial ice realm at nesting time, we got to good numbers of them near Lamplugh Glacier in Glacier Bay National Park. Our kayakers got to get close up views at almost eye-level, pretty special!

Rhinoceros Auklet *Cerorhinca monocerata*— (pre-only) Great views of this species, several hundred of them feeding on an upwelling with abundant small fish off Saint Lazaria Island NWR. The captain had seen close to 1000 the day previous – not that common here they were drawn in for the herring run.

Horned Puffin *Fratercula corniculata*—(1 plus pre) We saw three individuals among the more abundant Tufted Puffins at South Marble Island in Glacier Bay National Park. They were on the water and in flight so in time most got good views. We also went up the coast away from Saint Lazaria Island to a quiet cove where the captain thought we’d have a chance at sighting this less frequent of the puffins. Gordon spotted one in a trough of waves at sea outside the cove and then we found 5 in total – nice!

Tufted Puffin *Fratercula cirrhata*— (3 plus pre) A trip favorite for many of the group, especially Sarah which had this one high on her “most wanted” list. We got fairly close to them on skiff rides, especially in the George’s Island area, and then we had good views from the larger boat while in Glacier Bay.

GULLS AND TERNS: Laridae (9)

Note: We had far fewer individual gulls overall across the geography of the Inside Passage this year, the change was notable. Particularly at sea, we had few feeding frenzies. The main areas we had gulls were where fresh water came into quieter bays.

Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*— (3) Seen mainly in Icy Straits where currents and upwellings abound. We had a few feeding groups of 30-50 birds, but not huge congregations as in other years of our experience here. We did get to study the clean adults with the smudgy first year birds. After Glaucous-winged Gull it was the most commonly encountered species.

Sabine’s Gull *Xema sabini*— (2) Very quick looks within one of our first flocks of kittiwakes, a good chance to compare plumage as they reeled in the wind. Sadly, only Peg was on deck at that time, so a leader only bird for this trip. Icy Straits.

Bonaparte’s Gull *Chroicocephalus philadelphia*— (4 plus pre) We found them in one area of Icy Bay, seen well from the bridge and the bow, they were resting on the sea and feeding. There were also quite a good number at the back of Dundas Bay where we found a few black-headed adults, most were first year birds.

Short-billed (Mew) Gull *Larus canus*— (4+pre) Quite common near Seward, we had scattered individuals throughout the trip including at the ice gardens near Lamplugh Glacier where we did not expect them. That pair appeared to be nesting.

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*— (1) A few were seen as we left Sitka, at close range as we left the dock area.

California Gull *Larus californicus* — (Pre-only) One individual seen going out to Saint Lazaria Island NWR on the pre-tour.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*— (1 + pre) Not at all common this year, we saw them on the pre-tour going out to Saint Lazaria Island and Peg only picked up another in a seabird feeding frenzy in Icy Strait. They were notably missing from some of the quieter bays.

Glaucous-winged Gull *Larus glaucescens*— (4 plus pre) The most common gull encountered, starting when we got into the Chatham Strait and on up north into Icy Strait. We saw them in big groups loafing, feeding, and resting on rocky islets. Many were adults, and some first year

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*—(1) Ken spotted two individuals which he photographed along the Sitka Waterfront, near the salmon hatchery.

LOONS: Gaviidae (2)

Pacific Loon *Gavia pacifica*— (1) Lone individuals seen in the channel coming out of Sitka, we had them here in a previous year as well.

Common Loon *Gavia immer*— (4) We had lone individuals in a couple of places near our anchorages, and a pair at Iyoukeen Bay. We heard one calling by Lamplugh Glacier early in the morning, pretty magical with all the ice.

CORMORANTS: Phalacrocoracidae (1)

Pelagic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pelagicus*— (4 + pre) Quite common near the offshore islands on the west end of the journey, and in Glacier Bay. Actively nesting, we saw brown first year birds resting on rocks offshore, but mature colorful adults on sea cliffs incubating on nests.

HERONS AND EGRETS: Ardeidae (1)

Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias*— (2) Seen in the Magoun Islands, two individuals feeding in a quiet bay, early on in the trip. We then had two quite vocal in some kind of altercation in the wetland around Bartlett Cove of Glacier Bay.

HAWKS, KITES, AND EAGLES: Accipitridae (1)

Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*— (8 + pre) Seen DAILY, we had them so often but never tired of watching them fly, or seeing their regal shapes atop conifer trees and rocky ledges. They chirped a lot, vocal to each other, some were nesting. They were harassed often by American (Northwest) Crows and just seemed to endure it. They live here in the land of plenty, with abundant food readily available.

KINGFISHERS: Alcedinidae (1)

Belted Kingfisher *Megaceryle alcyon*— (1) One individual flew from conifer to rock and back to conifers along the shore of George's Island on the west side of the archipelago.

TYRANT FLYCATCHERS: Tyrannidae (1)

Pacific-slope Flycatcher *Empidonax difficilis*— (3) Quite vocal in their breeding time, we heard them on forest walks and even a few times from the ship. They often stayed high so viewing was difficult, but they were readily present in forest habitat.

CROWS AND JAYS: Corvidae (2)

Northwestern Crow *Corvus caurinus*— (7 + pre) Quite common and widespread, they were often in groups along the wet shore margin feasting on invertebrates. They were noisy, and often dive-bombed Bald Eagles roosting or nesting. They showed up as singles in surprising places like South Marble Island in Glacier Bay. They seem to be expanding north and were seen in more locations this year than in previous years.

Common Raven *Corvus corax*— (5 + pre) The raven symphony of Sitka is rather remarkable! Several live close to the waterfront and keep up a constant repertoire of gurgles and burbles, more than in other locations we've experienced them. Some along the Juneau waterfront also seem to boldly vocalize, it would be great to record them. We had scattered pairs here and there throughout the trip but found them most commonly in Sitka and Juneau.

SWALLOWS AND MARTINS: Hirundinidae (3)

Violet-green Swallow *Tachycineta thalassina*— (1) Seen near town in Juneau, flying with other swallow species

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*— (3) Seen on the last three days of our tour, in Glacier Bay, the George's Island area and Juneau.

Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota* — (1) Seen in urban Juneau around our hotel, probably nesting.

TITS AND CHICKADEES: Paridae (1)

Chestnut-backed Chickadee *Poecile rufescens*—(2) We heard them on a forest walk in the Magoun Islands and then again on the forest walk on the George's Island where many of the groups got good looks at them.

WRENS: Troglodytidae (1)

Pacific Wren *Troglodytes pacificus*— (4) We heard this little Pavarotti of the forest even from the ship when we anchored near forests. We finally had super views on a shore walk at Iyoukeen Bay.

KINGLETS: Regulidae (1)

Golden-crowned Kinglet *Regulus satrapa*— (3) Heard on our forest walk in the Magoun Islands, George's Island and Glacier Bay. More often seen as quick glimpses, they move so fast! But as they are constantly vocal, persistence pays off in time.

STARLINGS AND MYNAS: Sturnidae (1)

European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*— (1) Seen in urban Sitka

THRUSHES: Turdidae (4)

Varied Thrush *Ixoreus naevius*—(3) Julie spied the first one in the forest while on a bushwhack in the Magoun Islands. We could hear them from some of our anchorages, and in the forest at Iyoukeen Bay two gave us a quick fly by.

Swainson's Thrush *Catharus ustulatus*— (2) In Sitka and Juneau in forests that came down to the edge of town they were singing loudly. We could hear them from the boat as we docked in Juneau our final morning.

Hermit Thrush *Catharus guttatus*— (6) One of the most ever-present songbirds, heard and sometimes seen on our forest walks at various locations on the tour. Often when anchored by several small islands we could hear one on each, calling and calling, flutes in the woods.

American Robin *Turdus migratorius*—(1) A few individuals seen at Bartlett Cove in Glacier Bay National Park.

FINCHES AND EUPHONIAS: Fringillidae (1)

Red Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*— (2) Small flocks were working the abundant cones of spruce on two of our early shore walks, first heard and then glimpsed in flight from the beach at the forest edge.

NEW WORLD SPARROWS: Passerellidae (3)

Fox Sparrow *Passerella iliaca*— (4) These loud songsters were heard from several anchorages, and seen well on a couple of forest walks, best looks probably at George's Island on the west end of the archipelago.

Dark-eyed Junco *hyemalis*—(5) Seen in Sitka and Juneau, around town and our hotels. Present in most forest areas explored.

Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia*— (1) Seen well in Sitka, perching up on fences of residences as we walked to the National Historic Park.

NEW WORLD WARBLERS: Parulidae (5)

Orange-crowned Warbler *Oreothlypis celata*— (3) Seen well in Sitka from the Castle viewpoint after we had dinner at the Beak. We heard them in the Magoun Island forests, and then saw them at the forest margin as we walked to the Tlingit Tribal house at Bartlett Cove in Glacier Bay.

Yellow Warbler *Setophaga petechia*— (Pre-only) Heard loudly from the brushy habitat we got close to on Saint Lazaria Island as the water was so calm.

Yellow-rumped Warbler *Setophaga coronata*— (1) A bright individual with yellow patches on the side was photographed on the forest walk on George's Island.

Townsend's Warbler *Setophaga townsendi*— (3) Ken described one well in a mixed flock on George's Island, seen far up in the canopy as they walked. There was also a resonant one singing as we skiffed into the waters of the grotto on Basket Bay.

Wilson's Warbler *Cardellina pusilla*— (1) Seen and photographed on George's Island on the last day's forest walk back to the WWII artillery site.

MAMMALS: 13 species

Brown (Grizzly) Bear *Ursus arctos*— (2) Alan saw the first one on Emmon's Island, a glimpse in the later evening when most had retired. But we all got superb views of a large individual on the shore and open vegetation area of Tidal Bay in Glacier Bay National Park one evening. We were far enough away not to change its behavior and it was great to watch it feed and maneuver the thick brush margin just being a bear.

Harbor Seal *Phoca vitulina*— (5) We saw this species often, heads with big round eyes in the water or hauled out on rocks. Perhaps most memorable were those hauled out on ice, 6-8 at a time as if sharing big ice couches. The area had been closed for this species not to be disturbed during pupping season, when they go up Glacier Bay to give birth on the ice chunks away from potential predation by Orca. Those kayaking at times had them very close to the boats, curious.

Steller's Sea Lion *Eumetopias jubatus*— (3) This species was wildly active on the rocks roaring and jockeying for position or in the sea. We watched them catch huge salmon and devour them. In the water they romped and played like puppies, lots of energy. On land they lay in piles, those out of the water for some time taking on a light color as their pelage dried. Seen in Icy Strait, the Inian Islands, George's Island and the outer waters by the western edge of the archipelago.

American Mink *Neovision vision*— (2) Gordon and Sally saw the first one while on a kayak trip, then those skiffing in Basket Bay got to watch one thread its way through the rocks on shore.

Sea Otter *Enhydra lutris*— (5+pre) A trip highlight for many, we saw them so often. The first one encountered was out in Icy Strait, just bobbing along in totally open water. We then saw more and more, often clusters of them in kelp beds surrounding various islets. At Dundas Bay we encountered a huge nursery group, many with big babies (last year's) still opting to crawl atop mom for a rest or view. We heard them bark to each other, watched them groom – pulling their loose skin every which way to get to each important insulating hair. Photography was challenging from moving boats but we scored a few good shots, whiskers and all.

Sitka Deer *Odocoileus hemionus*— (1) Several saw a lone individual Wilson pointed out on the beach of one our anchorages at dawn.

Mountain Goat *Oreamnos americanus*— (1) Gordon found the first one, and Peg and Bobby honed in so many of the group could see them in the scope on deck. There were at least four individuals on Gloomy Knob in Glacier Bay, at a distance but great to take in the grandeur of their realm.

Minke Whale *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*— (1 + pre) We were thrilled to see the characteristic small dorsal fin, curved, of this whale near the Saint Lazaria Island area out of Sitka. And then equally thrilled to get good views of a lone individual that surfaced multiple times in the bay surrounding George's Island at the very western edge of North America.

Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae*— (6 + pre) This signature species of our Alaskan voyage was always a thrill to see. We saw them often, multiple times a day, sometimes just a quiet rising in the water with a blow, sometimes dramatic breaching, hurling their massive body out of the water much to our delight. We saw mothers with calves and some really huge individuals. They occurred often in groups, and in the most productive ocean waters, like those off Point Adolphus we shared the viewing with day trip whale viewing boats out of Hoonah or Gustavus. But often we had the views all to ourselves, just remarkable.

Killer Whale (Orca) *Orcinus orca*— (2) The first pod we encountered was so memorable, over a dozen, rising and blowing and moving about a quiet bay at 8AM just as we were supposed to go into breakfast. Watching them of course took priority and the captain so skillfully moved about them, moving with them as they moved off to a very inviting passage between two islands. Before they left, they thrilled us with a visit to the boat, curious about the rushing water off the bow wave, so close! We watched them for 15 minutes or more, hearing them blow, watching them as Carolyn described, looking like synchronous swimmers at a show. They were in such close contact with each other, and in calm water with great views, so it was particularly memorable. We encountered them again at the junction of Icy Strait and Chatham Strait, and this time that pod was very spread out, the big male off on his own, and the females with young maybe a half mile away. Sandy pondered what it would be like to try to study them, just how do you find your study subjects in such a vast terrain!

Harbor Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena*— (3) Smaller and more elusive, we were lucky to encounter this species on three days, in open ocean areas. Best views were in the quiet waters of Dundas Bay.

Dall's Porpoise *Phocoenoides dalli*— (3) Our first views of this species were at a distance and they were acrobatic and fast, Bobby said the fastest of all the porpoises. But our next views were sporting – they came to the ship to ride the bow waves and they stuck with it for ten minutes or more each time. They are so strong, all muscle, and so fast, so agile it was just a thrill to watch them! Another trip highlight species for many of the group.

Hoary Marmot *Marmota caligata*— (1) Seen by the “charger” hikers that scaled a rocky ridge above Lamplugh Glacier.

Porcupine *Erethizon dorsatum* — (1) Seen by several of the group at different times while on shore at Bartlett Cove.

Other species of note (casual observation):

Dragonflies – at least two species photographed, pending id

Damselfly – one species photographed, pending id

Salmon – best views in the mouths of Steller Sea Lion at the Inian Islands

Herring – running at times on the water surface!

Rock Gannel fish - Favorite meals for the various seabirds, we got photographs of them in seabird beaks...

Western Toad *Anaxyrus boreas* – (1) Seen by the first “charger” group of hikers in the Magoun Islands

And multiple intertidal creatures including

- multiple species of sea stars
- anemones
- sea cucumbers
- mussels
- clams
- barnacles of several species
- and more!