



# Bird Watching

Along the Dalton Highway



## Field Guide

U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
National Park Service



### Snowy Owl\*

Large, white owl. Females and young can have dense brown markings giving a speckled look.

Spends summers in the far northern tundra, hunting small mammals in the continuous daylight. Often seen flying or hunting from low perches on posts or mounds.

### Short-eared Owl

In flight, the head appears blunt from a side view. Dark back with buffy spots, fine streaks on light belly. When flying, dark wingtips and elbow patches can be seen on light underwings. Small ear tufts are hard to see.



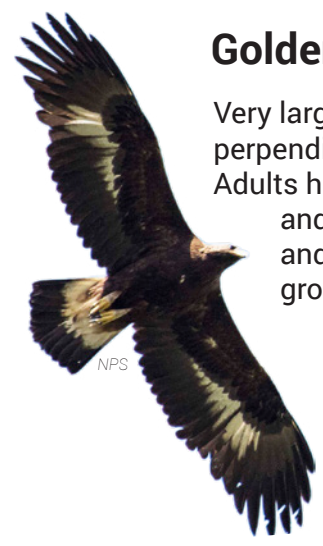
Often seen silently flying low, moth-like over open tundra expanses or perched on posts or mounds hunting small mammals using their acute hearing.



### Northern Hawk Owl\*

Medium-sized owl with white face framed in black. Brown back with white spots and long tail. Undersides are covered in thin brown horizontal stripes.

Found in open forests near fields and marshes. Often seen perched atop trees. May hover when hunting, but direct flight is hawk-like. Can be quite tame upon human approach.



### Golden Eagle

Very large; broad wings which appear perpendicular to the body in flight. Adults have a uniform brown body and tail with a golden head and large bill. Feeds mainly on ground squirrels, snowshoe hares, and large birds but can prey on Dall sheep lambs and caribou calves.

Found in arctic and alpine tundra throughout Alaska.

### Northern Harrier

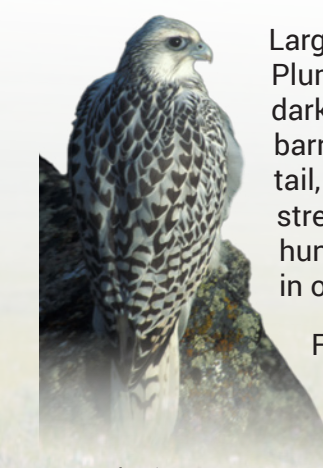
Distinct facial dish and white rump patch that shows in flight in both sexes. Northern Harrier often hunt low and slow over open country. Males are gray with black wing tips. Females are brown.



Can be seen flying low over tundra and meadows along all parts of the Dalton Highway.

### Gyrfalcon\*

Largest falcon in the world. Plumage patterns range from dark gray to nearly white. Heavily barred on the back, wings, and tail, with spotted, barred, or streaked underparts. Primarily hunts ptarmigan and other birds in open country.



Found in open country, tundra, and mountains throughout much of Alaska and nests on rocky ledges.



### American Kestrel

Small falcon with two black slashes or "sideburns" on the face. Males are rusty with steel-blue wings and reddish-brown tail. Females have reddish-brown wings and tail with black bars.

Often seen in open country perched or hovering while hunting for small birds, insects, and rodents.

### Long-tailed Jaeger

Slender, gull-like seabird with narrow wings and long, thin tail. Black cap, brownish back, dark wings, white throat, and pale yellow on the side of the neck. Hunts by hovering and may chase other birds to steal their food.



Often seen in the northern foothills of the Brooks Range and on the North Slope; sometimes seen in small patches of tundra within the boreal forest.



### Arctic Tern

Pale gray body with long, pointed wings, a long, forked tail and a black cap. Adults have a striking red bill and legs. Agile, graceful flier and elegant seabird and expert fisher.

Aggressively defends ground nests near rivers and lakes throughout Alaska. This circumpolar breeder migrates as far south as Antarctica.

### Red-necked Phalarope

Small shorebird with rusty neck, white throat, and a long, pointy bill. Males are duller, especially on head and neck.



Common in ponds north of the Brooks Range and in Deadhorse. They forage in ponds, often spinning in circles to bring food to the surface.



### Semipalmated Plover

Small shorebird with a plump body, short neck, orange-ish legs, and a short, orange and black-tipped bill. Adults are

brown with white undersides marked with a black band across the breast and head.

Nests on gravel bars along rivers or ponds. Often allows close approach.

### Lesser Yellowlegs

Grayish-brown, medium-sized shorebird with long, bright yellow legs, a lightly streaked breast, and a long, dark and slender bill. Often noisily defends territory and especially young (beginning mid-June). Raises wings when it lands on ground or treetops.



Occurs south of Pump Station 4.

### Be a Respectful Birder

**Leave no trace.** Be considerate of people, animals, and the environment by minimizing your impact on the land. Pack out all trash, walk on trails in high use areas, and respect wildlife.



**Keep your distance.** Avoid disturbing animals in their habitat. Getting too close to an animal causes it unnecessary stress. Repeated disturbances by humans or pets may cause harmful changes in behavior or cause birds to abandon their nests.

### Dalton Highway Safety

The Dalton Highway is a busy industrial road. Be alert to truck traffic. Do not stop on the road or on bridges.

Review the Dalton Highway Visitor Guide for safety tips and recommended equipment when traveling on this road.

*\* Resident species; can be seen throughout the year.*

### Arctic Interagency Visitor Center

Dalton Highway, Milepost 175, Coldfoot  
(Open daily from late May to mid-September)  
907-678-5209 office  
907-678-2005 fax

<https://www.blm.gov/learn/interpretive-centers/aivc>

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## King Eider



Large-bodied sea duck with sloping forehead profile. Males have white back, dark sides, and a blueish head with a red-and-orange bill. Females have barred, reddish-brown plumage.

Seen around Deadhorse and on ponds north of the Brooks Range. Also look for **Common** and **Spectacled Eiders** on North Slope and note the sloping forehead typical of eiders.

## Common Loon\*

Large, diving waterbird with elegant black-and-white patterning, black head, and large black bill.

Found in large lakes with sufficient room for a “running” take-off. Listen for their haunting, yodeling vocalizations. The larger, **Yellow-billed Loon** looks similar but with a creamy yellow bill.

## Pacific Loon



Gray head and neck, black throat with white stripes down sides, white and black checkered back. Common on tundra lakes and ponds near Deadhorse.

Another gray-headed loon, the **Red-Throated Loon**, lacks the checkered back, has vertical stripes on the back of the neck, and has a red throat patch. Sometimes found diving for fish in rivers. Breeds on tundra lakes and ponds.

## Northern Pintail



A handsome, medium-sized dabbling duck with a long tail and a long slender neck. Breeding males have a brown head with a white neck stripe, gray body, and an especially long tail. Females have longish tails, and finely barred, brown plumage.

Very common along the Dalton Highway and often seen foraging in Grayling and Chapman Lakes.

## Lesser and Greater Scaup



The ranges of these similar-looking diving ducks overlap along the Dalton Highway. Breeding males have a dark head and rump and a gray back. The dark-brown females have a white area at the base of the bill. White stripes show on wings, especially when they take flight.

In spring, pairs are commonly seen on boreal and arctic ponds and lakes. By late summer females with ducklings can be seen.

## Common Raven\*

The raven plays important roles in many mythologies, writings, and cultures, including many Alaska Native cultures. Characterized by a strong heavy bill and wedge-shaped tail. Smart and highly social; able to learn and problem-solve.

Widespread and adaptable, and can be found in the boreal forest or open tundra year-round.



## Willow Ptarmigan\*

Alaska’s state bird. They are white in winter and a camouflage mix of browns during the summer. As snow melts, females change color quickly, while males retain a white body with brown head.

Feathered feet help them to walk on deep snow and to dig for refuge from the cold.

Found in treeless areas, especially willow-lined waterways on the Coastal Plain and in the foothills.

## Northern Flicker (Yellow-shafted)

Large colorful woodpecker. Conspicuous white rump-patch that is seen especially in flight, black bib and spotted breast. The yellow shafts can be seen on the tail feathers and flash underwing with flight. Males have a black “mustache” extending back of the bill.



## Canada Jay\*

Formerly known as Gray Jay. A hardy, year-round resident of the boreal forest. Overall gray, with round, dark head, fluffy plumage, long tail, and short bill.



Found in forested areas and often around campgrounds, earning its nickname “camp robber!”

## Cliff Swallow

Swift and acrobatic fliers, often seen flying over water feeding on mosquitoes and other insects. Light forehead, rump patch, short, rounded wings, and square tail.

Builds nests made of mud on cliffs, under bridges, and on buildings, including the garage at the Coldfoot Camp.

## Boreal Chickadee\*

This small songbird is often seen hanging from branches and cones of spruce trees feeding on insects. Brown cap and back, black throat, white cheeks, and cinnamon sides. Well-adapted to endure Alaska’s harsh winters, with dense, insulating plumage and a special ability to put on fat quickly.

Found in spruce forests along the Dalton Highway.

## Common Redpoll\*

Small brown and white finch with heavy streaking, red forehead and yellow bill. Males have a red flush on their chest. They ravel in flocks.

These tiny birds are found year-round in northern forests; surviving extremely cold winters. During the summer, they expand north, nesting in open spruce forests and shrublands as far north as the Coastal Plain.



## Northern Wheatear

Medium to small-sized bird that bobs its tail when walking. In flight, a bold, white rump-patch with an inverted, black “T” can easily be seen. Breeding males have a black eye

mask. Wheatears migrate from sub-Saharan Africa to their breeding grounds in Alaska.

Found in high rocky areas, especially Atigun Pass.

## Yellow-rumped Warbler

Small and mostly gray with yellow patches on rump and sides, and a white throat. Rump-patch is easily seen in flight. Males are darker with a black mask. Seen actively foraging on the trunks and branches of spruce and birch trees.



## White-crowned Sparrow

Pale-gray with distinct black-and-white stripes on the head. Pale pink or yellow-orange bill.



Found in brushy, weedy habitat. Very common along the Dalton Highway. Look and listen for males singing conspicuously on prominent perches and birds foraging on the ground in open areas at the edge of brushy habitat.



## Lapland Longspur

Males have a bold, black face, bordered by white, with a rust-colored patch on back of neck. Females lack bold markings. Males perform a warbling song while gliding to the ground to attract mates.

Common in tundra areas north of Atigun Pass.

## Snow Bunting

Breeding males are white with a black back and bold black-and-white wing patches that are distinctive in flight. Breeding females are more brownish. They are Arctic specialists that nest farther north than any other songbird.



Snow Buntings are the first spring migrant to return each spring and often seen in large flocks along the Dalton in late winter.

Found nesting around Deadhorse.

## Swainson’s Thrush

Medium-sized thrush with distinct light-colored “spectacles” and spotted breast.

It is heard more often than seen. Its melodic, upwardly spiraling song can be heard through the long summer evening in spruce forests.

