



NOME, ALASKA KŌLEA QUEST



Join the Hawai'i Audubon Society on a five-day trip to the Alaskan Arctic tundra. The June 24 to 28, 2024 trip to Nome will focus on finding and observing kōlea (Pacific Golden Plover) on their breeding grounds. All wildlife enthusiasts will enjoy the rugged beauty and diverse species found along the three gravel roads leading from Nome, Alaska.

Daily activities and routes will be determined based on road conditions, weather, and success in finding kōlea and chicks. Ideally, the group will travel at least parts of all three Nome roads.

WHO IS THIS TRIP FOR

If you love the kōlea, this trip is for you. Members of this amazing species spend winters with us here in Hawai'i. This is your chance to see them on their breeding grounds in Alaska.

THE BIRDS

Nome sits on the southern edge of Alaska's Seward Peninsula, an area that attracts an assortment of birds. Each spring, over 100 species travel ancient migration routes to the area. Decked out in striking breeding plumage, the birds arrive ready for a short, intense summer of raising the next generation. Birds migrate for the long days and abundant food—insects, plants, seeds, aquatic creatures, and small mammals. These spring arrivals join a handful of species that inhabit the peninsula year-round.

The Seward Peninsula juts into the Bering Strait. Birds normally found on the other side of the strait sometimes land in Nome's backyard when navigation goes awry due to storms, high winds, or just a mistake. Some species that spend most of the year in Europe, Asia, Africa, or on Pacific islands travel to the Seward Peninsula annually to breed but don't venture much further into North America.

GETTING TO THE BIRDS

The Nome road system provides some 300 miles of access to a wide variety of habitats, ranging from marine waters, coastal beaches, and estuaries to wetlands, tundra, shrubby river drainages, rock outcrops, forests, and alpine ridges. Each habitat offers food, shelter and nesting opportunities that attract a variety of species.

The **TELLER ROAD** extends 73 miles west and north of Nome and terminates in the Indigenous community of Teller, population 250. This road crosses rolling upland tundra meadows with creek and river crossings and skirts the Kigluaik Mountain range. Mile 40 is the turnoff to the Woolley Lagoon road, where Wally Johnson conducted years of kōlea research. Our search for kōlea chicks will focus there.

The **KOUGAROK ROAD** extends 86 miles north of Nome. Following the Nome and Pilgrim river valleys takes us into the Kigluaik Mountains, passes Salmon Lake, and moves into the rolling lowlands of the central Seward Peninsula. Various species use the habitats along this route.

The **COUNCIL ROAD**, extending 72 miles east and north of Nome, traverses every type of habitat, from coastal beaches and wetlands, through tundra meadows and high dwarf tundra, to a river valley at the western edge of a forest. The first 30 miles parallels the Bering Sea coast.

COST AND WHAT'S INCLUDED

The per-person cost is \$2,550 and includes:

- Hotel in Nome (double occupancy, four nights)
- Field Lunch (box or deli-style lunch on the road)
- 12-passenger van transportation and gas
- Professional Nome Tour guide

This cost does not include airfare, breakfast, dinner, or other expenses.

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH THIS TRIP

AT THE HOTEL: Our hotel in Nome does not have an elevator. Be prepared to walk a flight of stairs carrying your luggage. The trip cost is based on double occupancy for rooms.

WHILE TRAVELING IN ALASKA: We will travel along dirt roads in two 12-passenger vans. Participants must be able to climb in and out multiple times per day. Those susceptible to motion sickness should bring appropriate medication for the tour's duration. The full sunlight allows for LONG days in the van. If it is sunny, we will stay out birding for a long day.

BATHROOM BREAKS: Restroom facilities are unavailable along our way in pursuit of kōlea. Travelers need to be prepared to relieve themselves in nature. Bring toilet paper plus a ziploc bag for used TP.

WEATHER: Temperatures in Nome range widely, from lows in the 30s °F to highs in the 70s °F. Travelers should dress in layers. Include a long-sleeved sun/bug shirt in case of hot weather and a puffy layer (e.g. Patagonia nano-puff), rain jacket and pants, a warm hat and gloves, sunscreen, sun hat, and sunglasses. Our tour guide recommends low-cut hiking boots. Rain is possible and wind is likely. Waterproof/windproof outerwear is essential.

KŌLEA OBSERVATIONS: There are important differences between experiencing kōlea while they are wintering with us in Hawai'i and when they are on their breeding grounds in Alaska. On their summer breeding grounds, they are much more wary of humans and disperse widely over the tundra, where they defend breeding territories. We will be aided in our quest to find and observe breeding kōlea by a knowledgeable local guide and by kōlea expert Wally Johnson, but **participants should be aware there we cannot guarantee that we will find breeding kōlea or chicks.**



WHAT WE ASK OF EACH PARTICIPANT

1. Be a member of Hawai'i Audubon (you can sign up today at <https://hiaudubon.org>)
2. All must sign a Hawai'i Audubon Society liability waiver and photo release.
3. All must have completed a full COVID vaccination course at least two weeks prior to the tour (including a booster for those eligible).
4. We strongly recommend that all participants purchase travel insurance.
5. Participants must be prepared to share a room (double occupancy, generally be flexible, be prepared for long days of birding, and be part of a convivial bird-loving group). Participants must meet with trip coordinators prior to commitment.

PAYMENT

The per-person cost is \$2,550, based on double occupancy. The number of participants will be limited to 14+ trip guides and biologists, due to available rooms and logistics. Participants must meet with trip coordinators prior to commitment. If interested, email office@hiaudubon.org with the subject line Alaska.

Reserve your place with a 25% down payment via PayPal or Credit Card (\$637.50) by April 30, 2024, at <https://hiaudubon.org/donate/>, memo "Nome Trip" to sign up.

The remaining 75% is due on May 15, 2024.

Cancellation policy: Down payment is non-refundable

GETTING TO NOME

Participants are responsible for their own travel to and from Nome.

There are limited flights available on Alaska Air from Anchorage to Nome.

You should arrive on Monday, June 24. Check-out is Friday, June 28.

ALASKA, the SEWARD PENINSULA, and NOME'S ROAD SYSTEM



The Seward Peninsula



This map and some habitat descriptions above were taken from the 156-page *Alaska's Nome Area Wildlife Viewing Guide*, published by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game in 2012. While some of the guide's content is dated, it includes valuable information about bird species to be found along the road system. View and download the guide here: www.tinyurl.com/nomeguide

MEET OUR NOME GUIDE

Carol Gales was born and raised in rural Iowa and now regrets that she didn't pay much attention to the rich diversity of birds in that environment. She moved to Nome, Alaska, in 1996 and noticed but couldn't understand the binocular groups that drove the roads each summer in search of birds. It was only after setting up a Birds of Alaska course as part of her job at the Nome campus of the University of Alaska Fairbanks in 2008—and then taking the course because the instructor was a friend—that Carol's eyes and ears were opened to the avian world. Carol has a background in news reporting, public communications, and publication layout and design. In 2018 she left her job at the university and started Roam Nome, a tour company that allows her to share her enthusiasm for Nome's birds, wildlife, landscapes and history with visitors. She and her husband Jim live in Nome's oldest surviving gold rush building, the former Discovery Saloon, built in 1899.



MEET OUR KŌLEA EXPERT

Oscar W. (Wally) Johnson received a PhD in bird anatomy at Washington State University in 1964. While studying seabird kidneys in 1970 at the University of Hawai'i's Mid-Pacific Marine Laboratory on Enewetak Atoll, Wally had his first contact with Pacific Golden-Plovers.

Seeing those birds on a tiny speck of land in the vast Pacific Ocean was a life-changing experience for Wally, who shifted his research to study the species. In 1979, Wally began the Plover Project. Its ongoing research arm uses the latest technology to track plovers' remarkable transoceanic migrations throughout Alaska and the Pacific.

Wally is professor emeritus of biology at Minnesota State University–Moorhead. He lives in the mountain West, where he's an affiliate research scientist in the Ecology Department at Montana State University, Bozeman. He's published over sixty scientific papers on plovers and other birds, and is the science advisor to the Hawai'i Audubon Society's citizen science project, "Kōlea Count." After five decades of studying Pacific Golden-Plovers, Wally is recognized as the world expert on the species.



MEET OUR HAWAII AUDUBON TRIP AMBASSADORS WENDY & SUSAN

Susan Scott is the Hawaii Audubon Board President and author of 10 books about nature in Hawai'i, including Hawai'i's Kōlea Book. She has a degree in Biology from the University of Hawai'i and is an ocean and wildlife conservation advocate. For many years Susan wrote the Ocean Watch articles for our local paper and she has helped to expand Hawaii Audubon's education and outreach programs. Susan and Wally recently launched the Kōlea Count project for students and citizen scientists across Hawai'i.

Wendy Kuntz has been a Hawaii Audubon Society Board Member since 2018 and is a Professor of Biology and Ecology and Kapi'olani Community College. She received her Ph.D. in Zoology with a specialization in Ecology, Evolution, and Conservation Biology from the University of Hawai'i. Wendy's students are involved in a variety of urban ecology and restoration projects, including researching our native Manu o Ku and Kōlea. She has traveled with students around the world and loves sharing Hawai'i's unique birds.

