

#### Prepared in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

# Inventory of Eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) and Seaweeds at the End of The Lower Alaska Peninsula, August–September 2012



Open-File Report 2021–1034

U.S. Department of the Interior U.S. Geological Survey

**Cover.** The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service vessel, *R/V Arlluk*, used to conduct the survey. Photograph by David Ward, U.S. Geological Survey (public domain).

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By David H. Ward, Kyle R. Hogrefe, Tyronne F. Donnelly, Neils C. Dau, Orville Lind, Kevin J. Payne, and Sandra C. Lindstrom

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# **Conversion Factors**

Multiply	Ву	To obtain
	Length	
foot (ft)	0.3048	meter (m)
mile (mi)	1.609	kilometer (km)
	Area	
square mile (mi <sup>2</sup> )	2.590	square kilometer (km <sup>2</sup> )

#### International System of Units to U.S. customary units

Multiply	Ву	To obtain
	Length	
meter (m)	3.281	foot (ft)
meter (m)	1.094	yard (yd)
kilometer (km)	0.6214	mile (mi)
kilometer (km)	0.5400	mile, nautical (nmi)
	Area	
square kilometer (km <sup>2</sup> )	0.3861	square mile (mi <sup>2</sup> )

Temperature in degrees Celsius (°C) may be converted to degrees Fahrenheit (°F) as follows: °F = (1.8 × °C) + 32

# Datum

Horizontal coordinate information is referenced to World Geodetic System 1984 (WGS 84), unless otherwise stated.

# Inventory of Eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) and Seaweeds at the End of the Alaska Peninsula, August– September 2012

By David H. Ward<sup>1</sup>, Kyle R. Hogrefe<sup>1</sup>, Tyronne F. Donnelly<sup>1</sup>, Neils Dau<sup>2</sup>, Orville Lind<sup>3</sup>, Kevin Payne<sup>3</sup>, and Sandra C. Lindstrom<sup>4</sup>

#### Abstract

Coastal communities in Alaska are undergoing rapid environmental change from increasing temperatures and baseline data are needed to monitor potential impacts. We conducted the first surveys of the abundance and distribution of eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) and seaweeds in the western part of Izembek National Wildlife Refuge at the end of the Alaska Peninsula. Six embayments and two offshore islands were surveyed in August–September of 2012. Biotic (percent cover of eelgrass/seaweeds, presence/absences of five sessile invertebrates), and abiotic (water temperature, salinity, and depth) data were recorded at 257 survey points (range =9–74 points per site) across all sites. Twenty-two genera/species of seaweeds were identified at the six embayments. New seaweed species for the offshore islands of Sanak and Caton were added to an existing seaweed collection accessioned at the University of British Columbia Herbarium. We also collected samples of eelgrass to be accessioned at U.S. Geological Survey, Alaska Science Center-Molecular Ecology Laboratory, for future genetic analyses. Fifty-three species of birds and 13 species of mammals were observed and recorded during the survey period.

#### Introduction

Increasing temperature and precipitation patterns are changing environmental conditions for the plants and animals of southwest Alaska (Stafford and others, 2000). These changes have been associated with declines in the extent and duration of winter sea ice and shifts in winter ranges of avian species (Ward and others, 2009; Petrich and others, 2014). We conducted baseline surveys to characterize the abundance, distribution, and health of eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) adjacent to Izembek National Wildlife Refuge (INWR). Eelgrass is a dominant marine macrophyte of shallow water embayments of this region, providing critical ecosystem services, food, and shelter to a wide variety of marine and terrestrial animals (McRoy, 1966, 1968, 1970; Barsdate and others, 1974; Ward and others, 2022a, 2022b). Previously, eelgrass surveys have

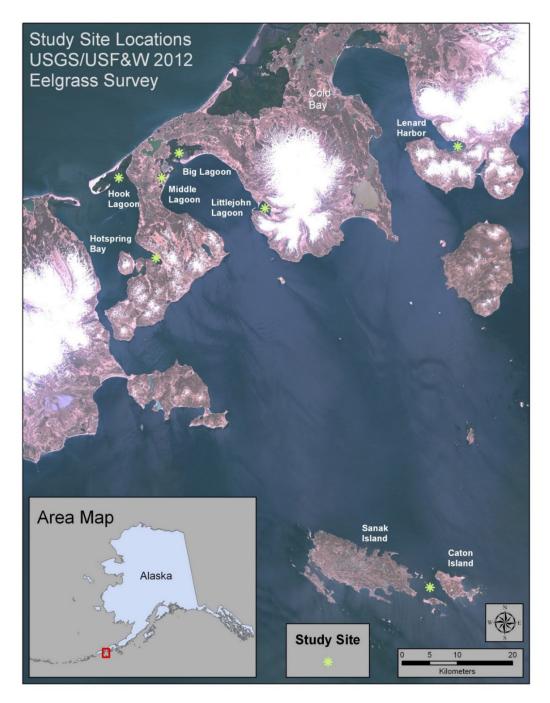
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been conducted in the eastern part of the refuge in Izembek and Kinzarof lagoons and Cold Bay (Ward and others, 2022b). No eelgrass surveys have occurred in the western part of INWR because of accessibility and logistical constraints. In August–September of 2012, we conducted a one-time boat survey in six embayments adjacent to INWR and along two offshore islands at the end of the Alaska Peninsula. The goal was to assess the abundance and distribution of eelgrass and seaweeds. We also recorded the presence and absence of five relatively sessile invertebrates: mussels (*Mytilus* spp.), sponges, sea stars (*Pisaster* and *Evasterias* spp.), gastropods, and *Telmessus* sp. crabs (fig. 1; see Ward and others, 2022a for details on methods). The primary interest was surveying Big Lagoon, Middle Lagoon, Hook Lagoon and Sanak/Caton islands because these sites were key stopover, staging and wintering sites for a variety of waterfowl and shorebird species and preliminary analysis of satellite imagery indicated that they also contain extensive beds of intertidal eelgrass. The boat survey was part of a more comprehensive project that aimed to inventory and monitor eelgrass in southwest Alaska (Ward and others, 2022a, 2022b). Here we present the accomplishments relative to the objectives of the boat survey.



**Figure 1.** Locations of the six embayments and two offshore islands surveyed to assess the abundance and distribution of eelgrass (*Zostera marina*), seaweeds and five sessile invertebrates, at the end of the Alaska Peninsula, Alaska, 2012.

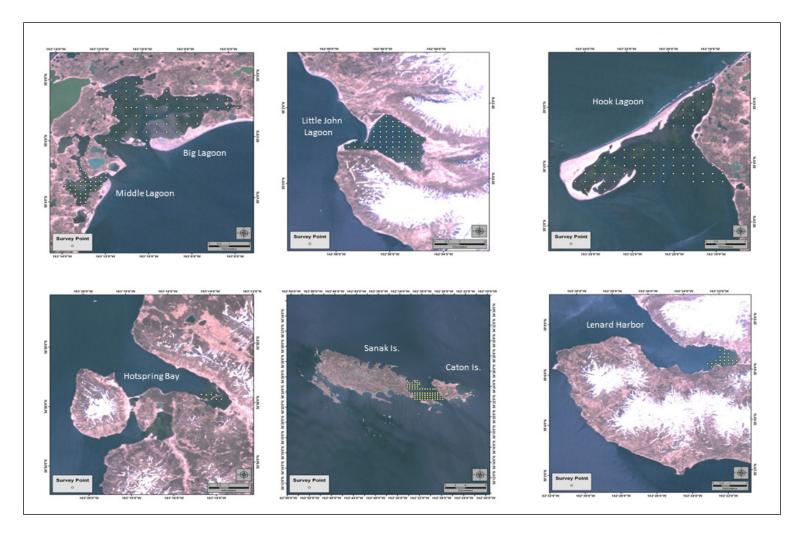
## **Objectives**

There were six main objectives during the boat survey and they were to:

- 1. Conduct initial baseline surveys to estimate abundance and distribution of eelgrass in six embayments and along two islands at the end of the Alaska Peninsula.
- 2. Obtain spatial data on eelgrass abundance that can be used to ground-truth preliminary maps of eelgrass spatial extent derived from satellite imagery.
- 3. Collect eelgrass samples to characterize the genetic variability and population structure within and between eelgrass populations of the Alaska Peninsula.
- 4. Identify and assess abundance and distribution of macroalgae (henceforth, seaweeds) and five sessile macroinvertebrates associated with eelgrass beds.
- 5. Collect baseline environmental information, such as substrate type, and water temperature, salinity, clarity, and depth that are known to influence eelgrass abundance and distribution.
- 6. Identify and record observations of birds and mammals during the survey.

### Accomplishments

 The abundance and distribution of eelgrass were examined at the four high-interest eelgrass sites (Big, Middle, and Hook Lagoons, and Sanak/Caton Islands) and three additional sites (Littlejohn Lagoon, Hotspring Bay, and Lenard Harbor) during the 20-day survey (19 August–7 September 2012). We collected biotic and abiotic data at 257 survey points (range =9–74 points per site) across the seven sites (figs. 2 and 3). Strong winds cut short our sampling time at four sites: Hook Lagoon, Sanak/Caton Islands, Middle Lagoon, and Hotspring Bay. Nevertheless, we were able to acquire an adequate baseline dataset to assess the status and health of the eelgrass canopy in these four under-surveyed embayments (see Hogrefe and others, 2014).

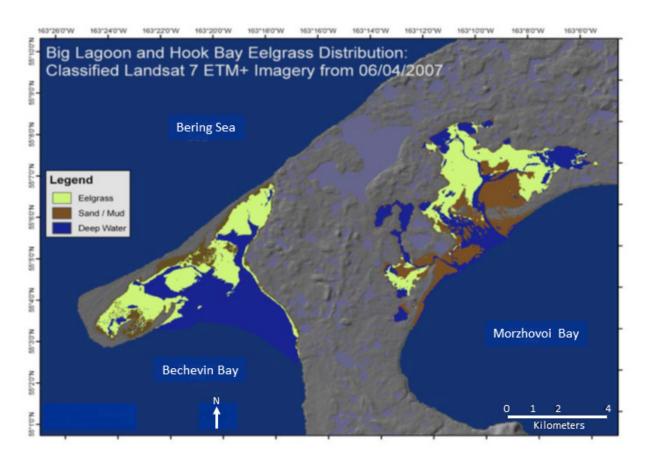


**Figure 2.** The distribution of surveyed points at six embayments and two offshore islands at the end of the Alaska Peninsula, Alaska, August–September 2012.



**Figure 3.** The 0.25 square meter sampling quadrat (left) in a dense bed of eelgrass. Eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) beds were assessed by snorkeling in dry suits at high tide. Shoot densities were high in some eelgrass beds; for example, in Hook Lagoon (right), Alaska.

2. We determined eelgrass/seaweed cover within a 20-m diameter circle around 345 points (range =9–78 points per site) and along seven additional transects in Lenard Harbor that can be used to ground-truth existing maps of eelgrass extent in Big, Middle and Hook lagoons (fig. 4; Ward, 2022). This newly acquired data can also be used to assist in the creation of new maps of eelgrass extent in Littlejohn Lagoon, Lenard Harbor and along Sanak/Caton Islands. Field survey data indicated that eelgrass extended farther into Middle Lagoon, and lower into the subtidal zone of Hook Lagoon and Sanak/Caton Islands than previous aerial views had suggested, thereby expanding preliminary estimates of eelgrass spatial extent at these sites.



**Figure 4.** Eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) spatial extent in Big and Middle Lagoons in Morzhovo Bay (see fig. 1) and Hook Lagoon in Bechevin Lagoon, Alaska. Image based on Landsat imagery and field data from boat survey.

- 3. We collected samples of eelgrass for genetic analyses at three embayments: Big Lagoon along four transects, Hook Lagoon along three transects, and Sanak Island along one transect (Ward, 2022). These samples were accessioned to an existing library of genetic information held at the U.S. Geological Survey, Alaska Science Center-Molecular Ecology Laboratory, for future analyses of eelgrass population structure and genetic variability among and within coastal communities in Alaska. Previous genetic sampling of eelgrass on the Alaska Peninsula occurred at Izembek Lagoon, Kinzarof Lagoon, St. Catherine Cove, Chignik Lagoon, Wide Bay, and Sand Point (Talbot and others, 2016).
- 4. The abundance and distribution of seaweeds were assessed at the seven surveyed sites (see Hogrefe and others, 2014, for details on methods and a summary of results). We also identified seaweeds to genera, and when possible, to species at the six embayments (table 1.1). A more detailed assessment of macroalgae was made along the rocky coastline of Sanak/Caton islands, expanding the University of British Columbia Herbarium collection of seaweeds found on these islands during past expeditions (fig. 5; table 1.2).
- 5. We recorded animals observed at each site and during travel between sites (table 1.3). The list included 53 species of birds and 13 species of mammals.



Figure 5. Rack line of drift Ahnfeltia fastigiata.seaweed along the rocky shoreline of Sanak Island, Alaska.

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# **Appendix 1. Species Lists**

**Table 1.1.** Seaweed genera and species identified on sample points at the six embayments surveyed, August–September 2012, end of the Alaska Peninsula, Alaska. Seaweed taxonomy is based on Guiry and Guiry (2020).

[Phylum: C, Chlorophyta; O, Ochrophyta; R, Rhodophyta. Embayments: —, not present; X, present]

						Embay	ments		
No.	Phylum	Genus	Species	Big Lagoon	Middle Lagoon	Little John Lagoon	Hook Bay	Hotspring Bay	Lenard Harbor
1	R	Ahnfeltia	fastigiata	Х			Х	Х	
2	0	Alaria	marginata	Х	Х	Х			
3	С	Acrosiphonia	sp.	Х		Х	Х		Х
4	R	Ceramium	pacificum	Х		_			
5	С	Chaetomorpha	spp.	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	
6	0	Chorda	borealis	Х	Х	Х	Х		
7	0	Chordaria	flagelliformis	Х	Х	Х	Х		Х
8	С	Cladophora	sericea	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х
9	0	Desmarestia	viridis	Х	Х	Х			
10	0	Devaleraea	firma	_	Х				
11	0	Dictyosiphon	tenuis	Х		Х			
12	0	Eudesme	borealis	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х
13	0	Fucus	distichus	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х
14	0	Hildenbrandia	sp.	Х					
15	0	Leathesia	marina			Х	Х		
16	R	Melanothamnus	akkeshiensis	Х					
17	R	Neorhodomela	spp.	Х	Х	Х		Х	Х
18	R	Petalonia	fascia	_					Х
19	R	Pylaiella	sp.						Х
20	R	Saccharina	latissima	Х		Х			
21	R	Soranthera	ulvoidea		Х				
22	R	Savoiea	bipinnata	Х					
23	0	Sphaerotrichia	divaricata	Х					
24	С	Úlva	fenestrata	Х		Х	Х		

**Table 1.2.** Seaweed genera/species recorded at Sanak/Caton islands during the 2012 survey and collected in prior years (1966, 2004, 2006, and 2007), end of the Alaska Peninsula, Alaska. All collections are accessioned at the University of British Columbia herbarium.

No.	Category	Phylum	Genus	Species	No.	Category	Phylum	Genus	Species
1	/	0	Agarum	clathratum	71	*	R	Bossiella	frondescens
2		0	Alaria	marginata	72	*	R	Bossiella	manzae
3	*	0	Analipus	japonicus	73	*	R	Callithamnion	pikeanum
4	/	0	Chorda	borealis	74	*	R	Ceramium	pacificum
5	*	0	Chordaria	flagelliformis	75	*	R	Clathromorphum	circumscriptum
6	*	0	Chordaria	gracilis	76	*	R	Clathromorphum	undescribed
7		0	Coilodesme	bulligera	77		R	Constantinea	rosa-marina
8		0	Coilodesme	californica	78	/	R	Constantinea	subulifera
9		0	Coilodesme	fucicola	79	*	R	Corallina	arbuscula
10		0	Colpomenia	peregrina	80	*	R	Corallina	officinalis
11	*	0	Compsonema	serpens?	81	*	R	Corallina	vancouveriensis
12		0	Costaria	costata	82	/	R	Cryptosiphonia	woodii
13		0	Dactylosiphon	bullosus	83	*	R	Devaleraea	callophylloides
14	/	0	Desmarestia	aculeata	84	*	R	Devaleraea	mollis
15		0	Desmarestia	viridis	85		R	Dilsea	californica?
16	*	0	Dictyosiphon	tenuis	86	*	R	Dumontia	alaskana
17	*	0	Ectocarpus	siliculosus	87	*	R	Endocladia	muricata
18	*	0	Elachista	fucicola	88	/	R	Gloiopeltis	furcata
19	/	0	Eualaria	fistulosa	89	*	R	Halosaccion	glandiforme
20	/	0	Eudesme	borealis	90	*	R	Halosaccion	undescribed
21	*	0	Fucus	distichus	91	*	R	Hildenbrandia	rubra
22	/	0	Hedophyllum	nigripes	92	*	R	Holmesia	sp.
23	*	0	Hedophyllum	sessile	93	*	R	Hymenena	ruthenica
24	*	0	Laminaria	longipes	94		R	Lithothamnion	pacificum
25		0	Laminaria	yezoensis	95	*	R	Lithothamnion	sp.
26	*	0	Leathesia	marina [as L. difformis]	96	*	R	Mastocarpus	alaskensis
27	/	0	Melanosiphon	intestinalis	97	*	R	Mastocarpus	pacificus
28	/	0	Nereocystis	luetkeana	98	*	R	Mazzaella	parksii
29	*	0	Petalonia	fascia	99	*	R	Mazzaella	phyllocarpa
30	*	0	Pleurophycus	gardneri	100	*	R	Mazzaella	parvula
31		0	Punctaria	latifolia	101	*	R	Membranoptera	spinulosa
32		0	Punctaria	lobata	102		R	Mesophyllum	conchatum

[Species in **bold** type indicate a new record. Category: Seaweed taxonomy is based on Guiry and Guiry (2020). /, seen but not collected in 2012; \*, specimen collected and accessioned; C, Chlorophyta; O, Ochrophyta; R, Rhodophyta. See Ward, 2022]

33	*	0	Pylaiella	littoralis	103	*	R	Microcladia	borealis
No.	Category	Phylum	Genus	Species	No.	Category	Phylum	Genus	Species
34	*	0	Ralfsia	fungiformis	104	*	R	Neodilsea	borealis
35		0	Saccharina	latissima	105		R	Neohypophyllum	middendorfii
36	*	0	Saundersella	simplex	106		R	Neopolyporolithon	arcticum
37		0	Scytosiphon	dotyi	107	*	R	Neopolyporolithon	reclinatum
38	*	0	Soranthera	ulvoidea	108		R	Neoporphyra	perforata
39	/	0	Stephanocystis	geminata	109	*	R	Neorhodomela	aculeata
40	/	0	Thalassiophyllum	clathrus	110	*	R	Neorhodomela	larix
41	*	С	Acrosiphonia	arcta	111	/	R	Neorhodomela	oregona
42		С	Acrosiphonia	coalita	112	*	R	Odonthalia	floccosa
43		С	Acrosiphonia	duriuscula	113	*	R	Odonthalia	floccosa f. comosa
44	*	С	Acrosiphonia	sp. [undescribed]	114	*	R	Palmaria	hecatensis
45		С	Blidingia	chaudefaudii	115	*	R	Palmaria	undescribed
46		С	Blidingia	marginata	116		R	Pantoneura	juergensii
47	/	С	Blidingia	minima	117		R	Peyssonnelia	pacifica
48	/	С	Chaetomorpha	cannabina	118	*	R	Phycodrys	fimbriata
49		С	Chaetomorpha	melagonium	119	*	R	Polysiphonia	hendryi
50	*	С	Chaetomorpha	picquotiana	120	*	R	Polysiphonia	pacifica
51	*	С	Cladophora	sericea	121		R	Polysiphonia	senticulosa
52		С	Kornmannia	leptoderma	122	/	R	Ptilota	asplenioides
53		С	Monostroma	grevillei	123		R	Ptilota	sp.
54	*	С	Prasiola	borealis	124		R	Pyropia	abbottiae
55	*	С	Prasiola	meridionalis	125		R	Pyropia	nereocystis
56		С	Pseudothrix	borealis	126	*	R	Pyropia	undescribed
57	*	С	Rosenvingiella	polyrhiza	127	*	R	Pyropia	pseudolanceolata
58	*	С	Spongomorpha	aeruginosa	128		R	Rhodomela	tenuissima
59	*	С	Ulva	fenestrata	129	*	R	Savoiea	bipinnata
60	*	С	Ulva	intestinalis	130	*	R	Scagelia	occidentale
61	*	С	Ulva	prolifera	131		R	Schizymenia	pacifica
62	*	С	Ulva	undescribed	132		R	Smithora	naiadum
63		С	Ulvaria	<i>obscura</i> var. <i>blyttii</i>	133	/	R	Sparlingia	pertusa
64		С	Urospora	sp.	134		R	Stenogramma	sp.
65	*	R	Ahnfeltia	fastigiata	135	*	R	Tokidadendron	bullatum
66	*	R	Antithamnionella	pacifica	136		R	Turnerella	mertensiana
67		R	Bangia	sp.	137	*	R	Wildemania	norrisii
68	*	R	Boreophyllum [as Porphyra]	aestivalis	138		R	Wildemania	variegata
69	*	R	Boreophyllum	ambiguum	-				0
70		R	Bossiella	chiloensis					

#### Table 1.3. Avian and mammalian observations at each site and travel between sites, August–September 2012, end of the Alaska Peninsula, Alaska.

[Avian breeding codes (S, singing male; Y, downy or recently fledged young detected with breeding evidence; X, detected with no evidence of breeding); ?, not sure of the species; abundance code (A, abundant [>25 birds/day]; C; common [5–25 birds/day]; U, uncommon [0–4 birds/day]); Mammalian (V, visual; T, tracks; S, scat)]

Туре	Common name	Genus	Species	Morzhovoii Bay (August 19–23)	Bechevin Bay (August 25–28)	Sanak-Caton Islands (August 31–September 3)	Lenard Harbor (Sepember 7)
А	Brant	Branta	bernicla nigricans		X-C		
А	Tundra Swan	Cygnus	columbianus	—	—	Y	
А	Northern Pintail	Anus	acuta	X-U		X-C	
А	Harlequin Duck	Histrionicus	histrionicus	—	—	X-C	
А	Black Scoter	Melanitta	nigra	—	—		Х
А	Red-breasted Merganser	Mergus	serrator	X-A	—	X-U	
А	Rock Ptarmigan	Lagopus	muta	—	—	X-C	
А	Common Loon	Gavia	immer	X-U	—	X-C	
А	Pacific/Common Loon	Gavia	pacifica/immer	—	—		
Α	Northern Fulmar	Fulmaris	glacialis	—	—	?	
Α	Sooty/Short-tailed Shearwater	Puffinus	griseus/tenuirostris	—	—	Х	
Α	Fork-tailed Storm Petrel	Oceanodroma	furcata	—	—	Х	
Α	Leach's Storm Petrel	Oceanodroma	leucorhoa	—	—	Х	
А	Double Crested Cormorant	Phalacrocorax	auritus	X-U	—	Х	
А	Red-faced Cormorant	Phalacrocorax	urile	X-U	—	Х	
Α	Pelagic Cormorant	Phalacrocorax	pelagicus	X-U	—	—	
А	Red-faced/Pelagic Cormorant	Phalacrocorax	urile/pelagicus	—	—		
Α	Rough-legged Hawk	Buteo	lagopus	X-U	—	?	
А	Bald Eagle	Hailiaeetus	lecucocephalus	—	—	X-U	
А	Peregrine Falcon	Falco	peregrinus	—	—	X-U	
А	Sandhill Crane	Grus	canadensis	—	—	Y-U	
А	Black Oystercatcher	Haematopus	bachmani	—	—	X-U	
А	Semipalmated Plover	Calidris	mauri	X-U	—	X-C	
А	Greater Yellowlegs	Tringa	melanoleuca	X-U	—		
А	Whimbrel	Neumenius	phaeopus	—	—		
Α	Black Turnstone	Arenaria	melancephala	X-U	—	X-U	
Α	Ruddy Turnstone	Arenaria	interpres		—		
А	Rock Sandpiper	Calidris	ptilocnemis	X-A	X-U	X-U	
А	Dunlin	Calidris	alpina	X-U	—	X-U	
А	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	Calidris	acuminata	—	—		
А	Black-legged Kittiwake	Rissa	tridactyla	X-U	X-A	X-U	
А	Glaucous-winged Gull	Larus	glaucescens	X-A		X-C	

Туре	Common name	Genus	Species	Morzhovoii Bay (August 19–23)	Bechevin Bay (August 25–28)	Sanak-Caton Islands (August 31–September 3)	Lenard Harbor (Sepember 7)
А	Arctic Tern	Sterna	paradisaea			X-A	
А	Parasitic Jaeger	Stercorarius	parasiticus			X-U	
А	Marbled Murrelet	Brachyramphus	marmoratus	_		X-U	
А	Parakeet Auklet	Aethia	psittacula	_		X-U	
А	Common/Thick-billed Murre	Uria	aalge/lomvia	_	X-U	X-U	
А	Pigeon Guillemot	Cepphus	columba	_	X-C	Х	
А	Horned Puffin	Fratercula	corniculata	X-C	X-C		
А	Tufted Puffin	Fratercula	cirrhata	X-U	X-A	X-C	
А	Short-eared Owl	Asio	flammeus	_	_	X-A	_
А	Black-billed Magpie	Pica	hudsonia	_	X-U	X-U	
А	Common Raven	Corvus	corax	X-U	X-U		
А	American Pipit	Anthus	rubescens	X-U	X-U	X-U	
А	Orange-crowned Warbler	Oreothlypis	celata	_	X-U	X-U	
А	Yellow Warbler	Setophaga	petechia	_	S-U		
А	Wilson's Warbler	Cardelina	pusillla		X-U		
А	Savannah Sparrow	Passerculus	sanwichensis	_	X-U		
А	Fox Sparrow	Passerella	iliaca	_	X-U	X-C	
А	Song Sparrow	Melospiza	melodia	_		X-C	
А	Golden-crowned Sparrow	Zonotrichia	atricapilla	_	X-C	X-C	
А	Lapland Longspur	Calcarius	lapponicus	_	X-U		
А	Common Redpoll	Acanthis	flammea	_	X-U	X-C	
М	Brown Bear	Urus	arctos	V	V		
М	Caribou	Rangifer	tarandus	_	V		
М	Gray Wolf	Canis	lupus	_	Т		
М	Red Fox	Vulpes	vulpes	V			
М	Arctic Ground Squirrel	Urocitellus	parryii	V		_	
М	Northern River Otter	Lontra	canadensis	V	_		
М	Tundra Vole	Microtus	oeconomus	_		S	
М	Horse	Equus	ferus caballus	_	_	V-C	
М	Cow	Bos	taurus	_		V-C	
Μ	Humpback Whale	Megaptera	novaeangliae	V	V	_	
Μ	Killer Whale	Orcinus	orca			V	
M	Harbor Seal	Phoca	vitulina	_	V		
M	Steller Sea Lion	Eumetopias	jubatus		V	?	

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