

KODIAK, ALASKA

15-28th July 2012

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I. INTRODUCTION

This filming trip took myself and the small film crew of Available Light Productions, and presenter Jonnie Kingdom, to the stunning wilderness of Kodiak Island in Alaska, to make a BBC4 film about the brown bears and salmon run at this time of year. The trip was a very memorable one in all sorts of ways, with the image of dozens of Grizzly Bears wandering around beside us at Hallo Bay, in Katmai National Park, perhaps the enduring memory of the trip. But the feeding flocks of Bald Eagles and trip out to the Aleutian Islands also provided some stunning encounters, all set against the verdant greenery and blue seas of this very untouched part of the world. Below are just a few brief notes on some of the birds encountered across the trip.

II. NOTABLE BIRDS

Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus*

Good views of a female on the fast-flowing Sargent Creek at Women's Bay, between Kodiak and Chiniak.

Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*

Wonderful encounters across the trip, with one memorable nest at the playing fields of Women's Bay containing three chicks, an exceptionally good number. Up to fifty birds seen at any one time, in Kodiak Harbour, collecting fish remains from the trawlers here.

Black Oystercatcher *Haematopus bachmani*

Seen in sheltered coastal bays around the east side of the island, such as Kodiak Harbour.

Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*

Seen carrying out a distraction display on disturbed ground next to the road between Kodiak and Chiniak.

Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*

Seen on the tidal mudflats of the Olds River, north of Chiniak, with a range of other wading birds.

Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri*

Flocks seen on the tidal mudflats of the Olds River, north of Chiniak, with a range of other wading birds.

Glaucous-winged Gull *Larus glaucescens*

Extremely common throughout trip, with largest abundance around the fishing vessels in Kodiak Harbour.

Pigeon Guillemot *Cephus columba*

Seen leaving Kodiak Harbour in sheltered eastern bays as headed out on boat towards the islets off the east coast.

Marbled Murrelet *Brachyramphus marmoratus*

One seen close to the seabird islets off Kodiak Bay – not observed nesting at breeding colonies.

Horned Puffin *Fratercula corniculata*

Superb views of birds on their breeding islets in Kodiak Bay, from pelagic trip taken with Lee Robbins.

Tufted Puffin *Fratercula cirrhata*

Amazing 'inverse puffins' – as above, superb views of birds on their breeding islets in Kodiak Bay, from pelagic trip taken with Lee Robbins.

Black-capped Chickadee *Poecile atricapillus*

Seen in bushy areas around Kodiak Airport and Woman's Bay where apparently fairly common.

Pine Grosbeak *Pinicola enucleator*

Superb views of a small flock beside Kodiak Airport, associating with sparrows and pine siskins feeding on open ground near pines.

Pine Siskin *Spinus pinus*

Common around pine trees besides Kodiak Airport and also seen frequently around gardens in Woman's Bay.

Sooty Fox Sparrow *Passerella unalaschcensis*

Common in cultivated areas beside Kodiak Airport and Woman's Bay.

Golden-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia atricapilla*

Common in cultivated areas beside Kodiak Airport and Woman's Bay.

Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis*

Seen along the coastal road between Kodiak and Chiniak.

Winter Wren *Troglodytes hiemalis*

Seen in gardens around Woman's Bay.

III. NOTABLE MAMMALS

Kodiak Brown Bear *Ursus arctos middendorffi*

Whilst most of our filming took place in Katmai National Park, I did gain superb views of a female of this largest-race of brown bear as she crossed the road in front of me near Woman's Bay, heralded by alarming birds.

Grizzly (Alaskan Brown Bear) *Ursus arctos alascensis / horribilis*

Incredible encounters with females and cubs, and wrestling adult males, with over fifteen individuals seen, after landing by seaplane in Hallo Bay in Katmai National Park, on the Alaskan Mainland. The experience of standing on a beach that in some respects resembles the coast of Cornwall or Pembrokeshire, yet with the rather noticeable addition of fairly unbothered bears wandering around, digging up clams, is not a sight easily forgotten. The most impressive males, on their hind legs, are some of the largest bears of any species on the planet, and two of the highly-charged adult males, wrestling, must have clocked in at twelve feet tall. All in all, an incredible experience.

Northwestern Wolf *Canis lupus occidentalis*

One of the most frustrating wildlife encounters of all time, getting out of the sea plane to see a white-coated wolf walking calmly across the mudflats at Hallo Bay. By the time I'd fetched my binoculars the animal had gone, but was one of a small number of fishing wolves that became stars in the DisneyNature film *Bears* over the course of this summer.

Northern Sea Otter *Enhydra lutris kenyoni*

Unforgettable views of a raft of these 'floating cuddly toys' off the eastern coast of Kodiak Bay. Even with severe declines, which, in recent years, are believed to be the result of increased predation by Orca, there are still around 90,000 sea otters in Alaska and the fish populations here are well-protected and monitored by the local government.

Steller's Sea Lion *Eumetopias jubatus*

Seen rafting on rocks and hauled out in the area around Kodiak Bay, and further out to sea to the east, porpoising beside the boat.

Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae*

Amazing encounters with breaching animals in the waters east of Kodiak Bay, some extremely close to the boat and almost leaving the water entirely, barnacle-encrusted and thoroughly impressive.