

24 December 2019

Dear Friends and Family,

Eileen and I hope that you and your families have had a good year. We had a fine time in 2019, taking birding tours to Ecuador and Madagascar, and driving our truck camper to the Arctic. These travels are described in 16 blog posts (see end of letter for link and instructions), so I'll just hit the high points here.

We visited Ecuador with Field Guides, Inc. for 20 days in January and February, sampling most areas except Amazonia, which we had visited on our own in 2011. In total we saw 417 species of birds, of which about 40% were lifers (species we had never seen before)! Hummingbirds were a particular focus of the trip, with 54 species seen well. There were only three new mammal species for us, but that included the charismatic Spectacled Bear, seen well twice!

We traveled to Madagascar in November, also with Field Guides. This is arguably the most interesting place in the world from an evolutionary viewpoint. We saw the five bird families that are endemic (restricted) to Madagascar or the nearby Comoros Islands, as well as all five families of lemurs, which are also endemic. Reptiles were also a highlight, particularly chameleons and geckos. The most notable milestone of the trip was Eileen seeing her 400th worldwide native mammal, a Gray Bamboo Lemur.

Our camping tour this year ran from February 22 to October 8. We drove over 23,000 miles, covering an average of just over a hundred miles per day. The map on the next page shows places we camped and/or added natural history records to our database in 2019. The camping this year was of especially high quality, with over one-quarter of the camping spots being dispersed sites (not in campgrounds) and most of the remainder being in small, quiet, picturesque campgrounds. It was also a very good year for canoeing; we paddled 167 miles of flatwater in 22 locations. We were fortunate to experience spectacular wildflower displays in three areas: the Sonoran Desert in early March; the lower Mojave Desert in early April; and the Columbia River Gorge in Oregon and Washington in late April. We also enjoyed visiting friends in southern California, the Bay Area, northern California, Oregon, and on Vancouver Island.

We spent May to September in Canada and Alaska, with most of that time in Alaska, the Yukon, and British Columbia. The highlight of our entire 7.5-month journey was a marvelous week in Nome, Alaska, featuring Muskox and Bristle-thighed Curlew. It was also exciting to reach the Arctic Ocean twice, at Prudhoe Bay, Alaska, after driving the Dalton Highway; and at Tuktoyaktuk, Northwest Territories, after driving the scenic Dempster Highway. While in the Canadian Rockies, I recorded my lifetime, worldwide, 10,000th native species (plants and animals combined), a long-anticipated milestone! Our return to Texas took us through the Great Basin. In New Mexico, we visited Eileen's sister Kathleen, brother Tommy, niece Claire, and nephew Thomas, who took us to the Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta, which was great fun.

Our plans for 2020 are to focus on the Great Basin and southern Rockies, then make a large arc east and back to Texas.

Our contact info, which has not changed, is given below. We'd love to hear from you! Happy holidays --

Brian and Eileen Keelan

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Nomadic Naturalists: Blog Details

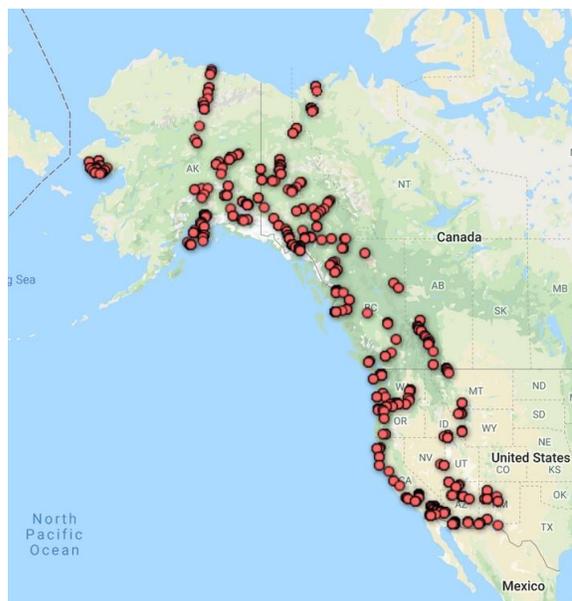
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Brian after keying out species #10,000.



Eileen after seeing her 400th native mammal.



Places visited on our 7.5-month, more or less clockwise road trip. The cluster of points in far western Alaska are from the Nome area, to which we flew for a one-week visit.