

So... You'd Like to Work in Alaska?

by Karen Boylan

What's that you say? You'd like to work in Alaska? So you can see for yourself why everyone says it's different up here? OK, great. But before sending in your application, please make sure you've examined the following skills and abilities needed for the job:

Must be able to:

1. Carry 50 pounds of gear through shoulder-high wet grass up a 60-degree slope on a remote island to chase and capture 82 flightless Aleutian Canada geese, place them in transport boxes, and haul them back to the ship. Tube-feed said geese with extremely slimy and smelly liquid every 2 hours aboard ship in close quarters amid large, rolling ocean swells until you reach the translocation island. Condition of own stomach has no bearing on tube feeding schedule.

2. Land inflatable boat on beach through heavy, cold surf while wearing mustang suit and seaboots. Avoid dumping self and cargo of Aleutian Canada geese in said surf.

3. Stand all day on ship's flying bridge, counting and identifying every living thing that comes within 150 meters of ship. Identify at a glance and count thousands of "USDAs" (unidentified small dark alcids) in flocks flying, sitting on the water, or diving. Differentiate between crested and whiskered auklets, murrelets and murrelets, Laysan and black-footed albatrosses, horned and tufted puffins, many others. Do this in dense fog.

4. Navigate through dense, wet Katmai forests using bear trails and aerial photographs to find wetlands to delineate. Nimbly dive into trailside bushes to allow oncoming 1,000-pound brown bear the right-of-way. Make

tremendous noise all day to warn bears of your progress through said forest. Develop creative vocal warning techniques beyond "Heyyyyyy, bear!" Photo-document wetlands. Keep camera in focus while backing away from bear.

Must have a willingness to:

1. Separate innards from seabird carcasses that are slightly past their prime for tissue analysis.
2. Perform above task in shipboard lab that is rolling in heavy seas.
3. Listen to Captain say, "Just another day on the Bering Sea" while watching anemometer hit 94 knots.
4. Stay up all "day" (never mind that in summer, "night" never comes and "day" lasts for four months).
5. Spend inordinate amounts of time waiting for airplanes in bad weather.
6. Spend a lot of money for travel that lasts longer than you thought it would. Sometimes, much longer.

Helpful to have immunity to:

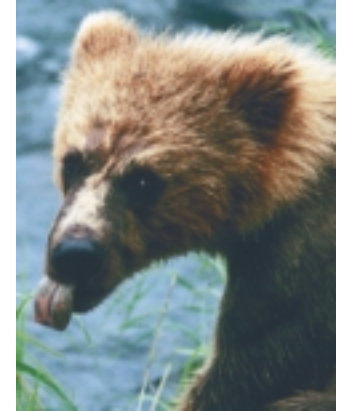
1. Seasickness
2. Biting flies
3. F16-sized mosquitoes
4. Sleep

Helpful to have indifference to:

1. Thousand-pound brown bears
2. White-knuckle landings in bush aircraft
3. Wet (very wet) beach landings through ice-cold Aleutian surf

Helpful to pay attention to:

1. 5,000-volt electrical fence around your camp tent
 2. Rustling noises in the bushes
 3. The weather
- Ready?



Corel Corp. photo

But seriously.... Although Alaska is a land of extraordinary scenic beauty, working here requires specialized, often expensive equipment, extensive safety training, and the ability to adapt to an ever-changing environment where conditions can be extreme. It often requires extraordinary measures to accomplish tasks that might elsewhere be considered ordinary. Much of remote Alaska is still unsurveyed for wildlife and plants, and there is comparatively little knowledge available on Arctic and subarctic species. Some species are found in very isolated areas, and it can be hard to track their problems and progress. Safety for our employees is paramount. Extreme weather conditions and frequent work in or near frigid waters requires special training and equipment. Virtually all of Alaska is bear country, and this fact requires all employees working in the field to have bear and firearm safety training for protection.

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