NORTHERN MINNESOTA
WINTER WEEKEND

FEBRUARY 1–5, 2018

LEADERS: BRIAN GIBBONS & ERIK BRUHNKE
LIST COMPILED BY: BRIAN GIBBONS

VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, INC.
2525 WALLINGWOOD DRIVE, SUITE 1003
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78746
WWW.VENTBIRD.COM
Meeting our first afternoon in Duluth, we had no idea it would be the warmest temperature of the trip, a toasty 11° F. The next morning we would be shivering at -18° with a Black-backed Woodpecker in our sights. The remote Superior National Forest in Lake County would chill us most deeply at -27°; who knows what the windchill was! But it was all well worth it. With a good owl year and a few others, we had an excellent trip through the North Woods with amazing scenery, great food, and some wonderful birds.

On our first afternoon we worked our way up the scenic North Shore of Lake Superior as the evening progressed quickly, with the sun sinking behind the tallest spruce trees, before we found our first frozen gem: a beautiful Great Gray Owl, Tom’s lifer, on the post of a giant sign for Tom’s Logging Camp and Trading Post. Auspicious to say the least. With less than an hour and a half of birding, we scored again as the darkness gained on us: a quick sighting for some of us of a hunting Boreal Owl. We then basked in our quick successes and enjoyed an excellent dinner at the New Scenic Café. We weren’t done yet! We added a Snowy Owl after dinner, lit up by Sodium vapor lights just west of our hotel.

Our first morning in Sax-Zim Bog started at the Wilbert Café, with a hearty breakfast (we would need it). As we exited to the frigid air, we were delighted to see a sun pillar emanating from the southeast sky. Our first stop had us scoping a female Black-backed Woodpecker at -18° with trees popping from the extreme temperature. Near Meadowlands we found the Sharp-tailed
Grouse right under a bird feeder. After dining, they moved out into the field to half-heartedly initiate their lek displays. At the Sax-Zim Bog Welcome Center the feeders were abuzz with Redpolls, including a couple of pale Hoarys. Black-capped Chickadees, Gray Jay, and Hairy Woodpeckers were also working over the buffet. Along McDavitt Road in the heart of the bog, Mike pulled off an amazing spot of the Northern Hawk Owl; three layers deep, the Hawk Owl was teed up but buried amongst the spruce trees. After we struggled to find a window through the trees to attain scope views for everyone, it obliged by flying to an open snag, and we enjoyed excellent scope views!

The most ambitious feeder set-up was at MaryLou’s where the usals were gorging. A little color was added by nearly 40 Evening Grosbeaks feasting on sunflower seeds and squabbling over the prime feeder locations. All this before lunch! The afternoon proved to be less eventful, but it couldn’t have been a better day.
The next day was a little warmer and quite snowy. It snowed on us nearly every minute of the day save for a half-hour in the afternoon. This added to the aura of the North Woods as we bired our way up the north shore. Quickly we found our first Boreal Owl of the day; just the fact that I have to say “first” means this was an exceptional winter for Boreal Owls. We scoped this hearty little beast before we moved on into the woods where we found the first of several Great Gray Owls for the morning. We had good scope views of one and great binocular views of another that sat on a snowy spruce bow, watching as a lady and her dog collected her mail just 20 yards away! Blown away by our luck in finding all four Northern owls in our first two days, we were seeking other goodies. Kim Eckert, a retired VENT guide, suggested we head down West Knife River Road on our way to lunch, so we did. Bohemian Waxwings, a hoped-for target, were there, nearly 200 of them—another great find, as this winter the waxwings had been quite sparse. Again, all this before lunch. A couple more Great Grays in the afternoon padded our numbers, and our second Boreal of the day, in near dark conditions, topped off another fantastic day in this snowy landscape.

Our final day started early in frigid, bone-chilling, joint-seizing cold! It was -27° as we cruised the back roads for Spruce Grouse, which would never show despite the false alarm of a lone Ruffed Grouse feeding on buds near the road. This day was mostly about winter landscapes, as the birds did not report for duty. One exception was a fine pair of Red Crossbills as we neared Isabella. We had a delightful lunch at the family-owned Stony River Café where Blue Jays and Gray Jays livened up the parking lot on this slow bird day. Our afternoon return to Duluth was via the scenic Highway 61 down the North Shore. Erik had the intel as we left lunch, and sure enough an hour later, just past the Split Rock Lighthouse, a gorgeous little Boreal sat for us, listening and looking for its next meal, its head whipping around when it heard a rustle under the snow. Excellent scope views and hundreds of photos were captured. This little creature saved a long birding day with ease and capped off an exceptional weekend of winter birding, but it wasn’t our final bird. That title belongs to the
Snowy Owl Erik spotted flying in off Lake Superior to take a perch on an ice-encrusted railing near Duluth.

![Superior National Forest at twenty below © Brian Gibbons](image)

Until our next birding adventure, wherever in the world that might be…hopefully someplace warmer!

Brian and Erik

**ITINERARY**

1 **February 2018** – Afternoon birding up the North Shore, dinner New Scenic Cafe

2 **February 2018** – Sax-Zim Bog all day, Breakfast and lunch at Wilbert Café, Dinner At Sara’s Table
3 February 2018 – North Shore all day, lunch at Blackwoods in Two Harbors, Dinner JJ Astor

4 February 2018 – Superior National Forest and Lake County all day, lunch at Stoney Creek Cafe, return to Duluth via North Shore, Dinner Bellisio’s

BIRDS

Waterfowl
- Common Goldeneye
- Common Merganser
- Red-breasted Merganser

Phasians, Grouse and Allies
- Ruffed Grouse
- Sharp-tailed Grouse

Pigeons and Doves
- Rock Pigeon (I)

Gulls, Terns and Skimmers
- Herring Gull

Hawks, Eagles and Kites
- Bald Eagle

Owls
- Snowy Owl
- Northern Hawk Owl
- Great Gray Owl
- boreal Owl

Woodpeckers
- Downy Woodpecker
- Hairy Woodpecker
- Black-backed Woodpecker
- Pileated Woodpecker

Shrikes
- Northern Shrike

Crows, Jays and Magpies
- Gray Jay
- Blue Jay
- Black-billed Magpie
- American Crow
- Common Raven

Chickadees and Tits

Anatidae
- Bucephala clangula
- Mergus merganser
- Mergus serrator

Phasianidae
- Bonasa umbellus

Columbidae
- Columba livia

Laridae
- Larus argentatus

Accipitridae
- Haliaeetus leucocephalus

Strigidae
- Bubo scandiacus
- Surnia ulula
- Strix nebulosa
- Aegolius funereus

Picidae
- Picoides pubescens
- Picoides villosus
- Picoides arcticus
- Dryocopus pileatus

Laniidae
- Lanius excubitor

Corvidae
- Perisoreus canadensis
- Cyanocitta cristata
- Pica hudsonia
- Corvus brachyrhynchos
- Corvus corax

Paridae

Two Harbors and North Shore
Duluth from the hotel
North Shore Lake Superior
NE of Duluth & Superior National Forest
Sax-Zim Bog (SZ)
Towns
Lake Superior
North Shore Lake Superior & SZ
Duluth & Lake Superior shore
SZ & St Louis County
St Louis County, several locations!
4 sightings! North Shore
SZ
SZ & Lake County
SZ & Stoney Point
SZ, glimpsed by a couple folks
SZ several sightings

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours
Northern Minnesota Winter Weekend 2018
Black-capped Chickadee  
Poecile atricapillus  

Nuthatches  
Sittidae  
Sitta carolinensis  

White-breasted Nuthatch  
Sturidae  
Sturnus vulgaris  

Starlings  
Bombycillidae  
Bombycilla garrulus  

European Starling (I)  
Passeridae  
Passer domesticus  

Waxwings  
Fringillidae  

Bohemian Waxwing  
Pinicola enucleator  

Old World Sparrows  
Loxia curvirostra  

Siskins, Crossbills and Allies  
Acanthis flammea  

Pine Grosbeak  
Acanthis hornemanni  

Red Crossbill  
Coccothraustes vespertinus  

Hoary Redpoll  
Cardinalidae  

Evening Grosbeak  
Cardinalis cardinalis  

Cardinals and Allies  

European Starling (I)  
SZ, only seen by a few folks  

Swarms  
SZ  

Waxwings  
West Knife River Rd, 200 birds!  

Old World Sparrows  
SZ, odd location  

Siskins, Crossbills and Allies  
NE of Duluth  

Starlings  
Near Isabella, MN  

Siskins, Crossbills and Allies  
Common at feeders SZ  

Red Crossbill  
A few at feeders SZ  

Siskins, Crossbills and Allies  
MaryLou's feeders in SZ  

Cardinals and Allies  
North Shore, rare in winter  

MAMMALS  

Squirrels & Allies  
North Shore, 1 black individual  

Eastern Gray Squirrel  
Common at feeders SZ  

Red Squirrel  
One in Duluth, seen by a couple folks  

Rabbits & Hares  
A few sightings  

Eastern Cottontail  

Deer  

White-tailed Deer  

White-tailed Deer  

Squirrels & Allies  

Red Squirrel  

Rabbits & Hares  

Eastern Cottontail  

Deer  

White-tailed Deer  

Sciuridae  

Sciurus carolinensis  

Tamiasciurus hudsonicus  

Leporidae  

Sylvilagus floridanus  

Cervidae  

Odocoileus virginianus  