

# BIRDING ACROSS AMERICA BY TRAIN

MAY 18 - 31, 2022

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Bobolink © Michael O'Brien

*For those with an appreciation of history, train travel is an undeniable part of the American spirit, like baseball, hot dogs, and apple pie.*

*“Birding Across America by Train” is a one-of-a-kind tour offering an exciting opportunity to step back in time, to an era when train travel was the best way to move from one part of the country to another. On this remarkable adventure, we will experience the excitement produced by a cross-country train trip, complemented by marvelous birding in some of the classic landscapes of North America. Our route will take us from the Northeast, through the Midwest, and across the northern tier of the United States all the way to the blue waters of the Pacific Northwest. En route, we will interrupt our journey for days at a time to experience a sampling of ecosystems: the northeastern forests, lakes, and bogs of Upstate New York; the prairies, farmlands, and wide-open spaces of the Great Plains of North Dakota; and the snow-capped mountains, evergreen forests, and rocky coastline of Washington’s Olympic Peninsula.*

*Our trip kicks off in New York's Adirondack Mountains at the historic Great Camp Sagamore situated within a massive forest preserve, just two hours from Albany. This is a land of beautiful forests, undammed rivers, deep bogs, and lakes of all sizes. A rich variety of songbirds, all recently arrived from tropical wintering grounds, have returned for the breeding season, and these northern woods ring with the vibrant songs of warblers, thrushes, orioles, tanagers, and grosbeaks. We will likely encounter an interesting mix of eastern and northern species, with Chestnut-sided and Magnolia warblers sharing space with Winter Wrens and Yellow-bellied Flycatchers. We will have three nights at this lovely location before boarding AMTRAK for a trip west to the plains of North Dakota.*



*The Great Plains of North Dakota hold some of the finest remaining grasslands and prairie potholes in North America. Unlike the confining forests of the Northeast, this is wide open big sky country, replete with spectacular birds and equally spectacular vistas. We will have most of three days to delve into this country in search of Swainson's and Ferruginous hawks; Upland Sandpiper; Sprague's Pipit; a fine variety of sparrows including Nelson's, Baird's, and LeConte's; along with breeding waterfowl; Chestnut-collared Longspur; and Bobolink. As an added attraction, several of these species will be actively involved in their spring flight displays. We'll then reboard AMTRAK for a trip west across the prairies and Rockies and on to the Pacific Northwest.*

*Washington's Olympic Peninsula is a land of majestic mountains, darkened forests, and scenic coastlines. We will conclude our adventure with an exploration of several areas in and around Olympic National Park, experiencing a host of new birds, most of which are specialists of the Pacific Coast. We should expect to see several alcid species, as well as Sooty Grouse, Pacific Wren, Townsend's Warbler, and numerous other birds adapted to the old growth forests of the Olympic Mountains.*

*"Birding Across America by Train" provides an unforgettable experience—a fascinating journey of discovery across the United States from forest to prairie to ocean. Welcome Aboard!*

**May 18, Day 1: Arrival in Albany, New York.** Participants may plan to arrive in Albany, New York any time today and check in at the airport hotel where a room will be reserved in your name. Please schedule your arrival in good time to convene in the hotel lobby at 6:00 p.m. for a trip-welcome and orientation prior to going to dinner.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn & Suites, Albany, NY

**May 19, Day 2: Birding from Albany to Great Camp Sagamore.** From Albany, the trip to Great Camp Sagamore takes approximately three hours. Rather than making a beeline for the Adirondacks, we will kick off our time in New York with some birding southwest of Albany. The major landform here is the Helderberg Escarpment, a limestone uplift dating from the Paleozoic era (600-230 million years ago).

Half the day spent visiting select sites above and below the escarpment will produce an interesting variety of springtime songbirds, in addition to the more regularly occurring widespread eastern species. Among the possibilities are Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Bluebird, Gray Catbird, Eastern Towhee, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Baltimore Oriole, and Bobolink. This region is also a biological boundary where a number of species reach the northern limit of their ranges. As a result, we will be searching for birds that we will not likely encounter again on the trip. Prairie and Blue-winged warblers are target species, but Indigo Bunting, Eastern Towhee, and Eastern Meadowlark are equally appealing. From atop the escarpment we'll enjoy practically limitless views of the forests, farmland, and towns stretching away to the north. Time permitting, we'll visit Thompsons Lake State Park where feeders around the visitor center frequently host Red-bellied Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Tufted Titmouse.



**Blue-winged Warbler © Michael O'Brien**

Following lunch, we'll make our way west from Albany through the beautiful Mohawk River Valley, a highly scenic part of New York characterized by forest, farmland, and a splash of human history. Our journey will see us traveling west through the length of the valley all the way to Utica, at which point we will turn north and enter the Adirondacks. Before turning off, however, we will view at least two segments of the historic Erie Canal.

North of Utica, our route to Great Camp Sagamore, near the town of Raquette Lake, is a forest-lined mountain highway that passes several small settlements situated on picturesque lakes.

Great Camp Sagamore is a National Historic Landmark, and one of several "Great Camps" built during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as get-aways for wealthy families. It is set amid the 50,000-acre Moose River Plains Wild Forest, a magnificent expanse of evergreen and deciduous forest, several undammed streams and rivers, and myriad lakes and ponds. It abuts the famous Adirondack Park and holds some of the most extensive remaining habitat in the northeastern forests. The estate is rustic, yet offers comfortable accommodations and has a restaurant serving delicious buffet meals. It is truly a delightful destination, and the opportunity to explore the surrounding lakes (with calling Common Loons!) and magnificent forests provides a most unique experience. We will spend the remainder of the afternoon settling into the lodge and viewing picturesque Sagamore Lake.

The natural beauty of the Adirondacks is readily apparent to all who visit. Time spent at a place like Great Camp Sagamore provides a soothing departure from the bustle of our daily lives. The sound of automobiles and busy highways is largely absent, replaced by the cascade of singing birds and wind in the trees. Sagamore Lake is the most obvious natural feature of our surroundings, and we will spend time looking for birds from the west shoreline. Common and Hooded mergansers are regularly seen, while Tree Swallows, resplendent in their immaculate blue and white plumage, are often seen perched atop bare snags around the lake edge.

The nearby woods truly are a haven for woodpeckers, and the sounds of drumming woodpeckers of several species are heard often. We'll likely encounter such expected species as Downy and Hairy woodpeckers and Northern Flicker. The presence of Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers speaks to our more northern locale, while the magnificent Pileated Woodpecker, also found here, hints at a more southern flavor that permeates these forests.





**Common Loon © Michael O'Brien**

Late this afternoon and into the evening we'll stay attuned for the sound of yodeling Common Loons. Perhaps no other voice is more ethereal or haunting than that of the loon. An encounter with this bird at the height of spring on its northern breeding grounds, after hours when the moon is high, is unforgettable.

NIGHT: Great Camp Sagamore, Raquette Lake, NY



**Chestnut-sided Warbler © Michael O'Brien**

**May 20-21, Days 3-4: Exploring the Adirondacks.** Over the next two days we will immerse ourselves in the beauty of our natural surroundings. Springtime in the Adirondacks is a glorious time of year. All the colorful songbirds have just arrived on their breeding grounds, the woods are alive with fresh new leaves of the season, and the sound of birdsong fills the air. By walking and driving the various roads and trails surrounding the property, we are bound to encounter a nice variety of nesting birds, including numbers of warblers, with the likes of Magnolia, Blackburnian, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Nashville, Canada, and Chestnut-sided warblers possible. Such colorful dandies as Blue-headed Vireo, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Scarlet Tanager, and Baltimore Oriole are likely as well. A trip farther afield into the Moose River Plains will bring exposure to new habitats, and chances

for Least Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe, and Hermit Thrush.

These great northern woods are also home to some of North America's most beautiful trees. Red spruce, balsam fir, and eastern hemlock predominate among the conifers while beech, birch, and aspen are examples of the deciduous trees found here.

A morning trip to nearby Ferd's Bog will give us a taste of the boreal zone, where we will hope to see Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Lincoln's Sparrow, and Canada Jay, and possibly the very scarce Boreal Chickadee or Black-backed Woodpecker. This site is not just a birding stop however. Ferd's Bog is an outstanding natural area that we will want to appreciate in full. A well-marked trail and boardwalk will give us access to a suite of northern trees and plants. Club mosses, striped and mountain maples, yellow birch, bog laurel, and Labrador tea are just some of the flora that characterize the area.

Beyond these areas, the whole region presents opportunities for exploration. Each path, each road, each grove of trees may be just different enough to harbor a previously unseen resident. The shrouded forest floor may hold a shy Winter Wren, revealing its presence through its soul-touching flute-like song. The wet thicket at the turn of the road may be just right for a skulking Hermit Thrush to call home. The clearing along the river may be patrolled by flycatchers sensing an opportunity. Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Wood-Pewee, and Least Flycatcher would surely not pass up that site! And be sure to keep an eye on those dense stands of trees! A Pileated Woodpecker might show up at any moment, while it may require a keener eye to spot the secretive Ruffed Grouse. When the sun goes down the sounds of the night will draw us back outside. If conditions are right, we may enjoy the loud hooting broadcast of the powerful Barred Owl, or the distinctive bugle of the Common Loon.

NIGHTS: Great Camp Sagamore, Raquette Lake, NY

**May 22, Day 5: Morning birding in the Adirondacks; transfer to Albany; boarding the Lake Shore Limited.**

We will have half the day to bird in the Adirondacks before returning to Albany. Our activities will be based on pursuit of those species that have eluded us to this point or visiting areas that we have not yet had the chance to see. Our morning will invariably be a rewarding one, as we are sure to turn up something unexpected. Following lunch we will make our way to Albany. We will arrive at the train station early to be sure we are in place for the incoming train.

The Lakeshore Limited (Train 49) is one of AMTRAK's most famous routes, traveling daily between New York City and Chicago. We will board around 7:00 p.m. and immediately settle into our accommodations. The train boasts small but comfortable rooms, a dining car, and a café. As we pull away from the station, we can settle into our private accommodations and let the scenery glide by.

Although most of our time aboard the train will be spent during nighttime hours, the route will take us west through the Mohawk River Valley where the setting sun may produce a pleasing site as it tints the surrounding forests and fields in gentle pink and orange. As we push toward Chicago we will pass through Utica, Syracuse, the Finger Lakes district, Rochester and Buffalo. Early in the morning we will ride through a number of Ohio cities, including Cleveland and Toledo. We will travel through Indiana in the final few hours before reaching Chicago. The trip from Albany to Chicago is approximately 15 hours.

NIGHT: Aboard Amtrak, the Lakeshore Limited

**May 23, Day 6: Travel day by train.** The Lakeshore Limited is due to arrive in Chicago this morning at 9:00 a.m. During our layover, we will spend our time in Union Station where we'll have time on our own to explore the famous station and surrounding area. Lunch will be on our own.

We will reconvene in the afternoon in time to board the Empire Builder (Train 7) for the 18-hour journey to Minot, North Dakota. The Empire Builder is one of AMTRAK's Superliner trains and runs daily between Chicago and Seattle. While on board, we will experience excellent comfort and service while the scenery of the upper Midwest glides by. Departing Chicago, we will have fine views of the city's famous skyline, followed by stunning views of the Mississippi River. As the afternoon light fades toward evening, the glowing skyline of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota will be a welcome distraction. The atmosphere aboard the train is completely relaxed, and tour participants are encouraged to take advantage of a number of possible options. For some it may be a drink before or after dinner in the lounge car; for others it may be sitting down to a delicious dinner in the dining car, or spending some time watching the countryside from the observation car. Others may simply want to relax in their private rooms and watch the miles slip by in private.

NIGHT: Aboard Amtrak, the Empire Builder

**May 24, Day 7: Arrival in Minot, North Dakota; birding around Minot.** We are scheduled to arrive in Minot, North Dakota at 8:30 a.m. We will have most of the next three days to explore the prairies, wetlands, and farmlands of north-central North Dakota. Unlike the confining boreal forests of upstate New York, the prairie country of North Dakota is one of wide-open spaces, broad vistas, and limitless sky. North Dakota may not have the towering mountains of the western states, or the stately forests of the East, but it preserves a sense of magic reserved for those places where nature seems as boundless as the open space itself. While the heavy hand of man has long been felt here, this part of the world has until recently been spared the explosive development and relentless urban sprawl that characterize many of our other states. While things have certainly changed with the encroachment of the extractive energy industry, North Dakota remains a landscape of shortgrass prairies, badlands, pothole marshes, reservoirs, and croplands. It also supports some of the highest remaining concentrations of grassland and wetland nesting species in North America.



**Yellow-headed Blackbird © Michael O'Brien**

After leaving the train station, we will not have to travel far to experience the richness of the region. Oak Park, situated in Minot, is a neat little natural area that provides a nice introduction to birding in North Dakota. Tall trees, dense understory, and open lawns form a simple diversity of habitats in a relatively small area. The park supports a number of nesting species of forest and water, some of which tend not to range much further north. Wood Duck, Belted Kingfisher, Great Crested Flycatcher, Yellow-throated Vireo, and Lazuli Bunting are all possible. Another draw of Oak Park is that it serves as a wonderful magnet for migrating birds, a place where anything is possible! If birds are pushing through, we may encounter a handful of late passerine migrants such as Tennessee, Blackpoll, or even Mourning warblers.



**Wilson's and Red-necked phalaropes © Michael O'Brien**

We will spend the remainder of the afternoon just outside Minot at the city's water treatment facility where hundreds of birds are often present. Numerous shorebirds and waterfowl may be seen staging on and around the various impoundments and surrounding fields before continuing their northward journeys. An assortment of late migrant shorebirds are possible such as White-rumped, Baird's, Pectoral, Least, and Semipalmated sandpipers. Tanks of impounded water often host hundreds of Wilson's and Red-necked phalaropes, often side-by-side, and a great number of ducks are likely. Surrounding fields are chock full of sparrows and Bobolinks, and fence rows will be checked for Eastern and Western kingbirds and Say's Phoebe.

**NIGHT: Hampton Inn and Suites, Minot, ND**



**May 25, Day 8: Lostwood and Des Lacs National Wildlife Refuges.** For the next two days, you can expect full and rewarding days in the field. Using Minot as our base, we will venture into the surrounding prairies and agricultural lands to search for a variety of specialized but declining bird species. We will focus on the likes of Baird's Sparrow and Sprague's Pipit, but a great many waterfowl, raptors, shorebirds, and landbirds are possible. If the days are warm, we may rejoice in the freshness of springtime on the prairie. The air is filled with the rejuvenating sound of birdsong, and wildflowers may add a touch of color to the landscape.

On the first day we will likely visit the vitally important Lostwood National Wildlife Refuge. Lostwood was established in 1935 as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife. At nearly 27,000 acres, the refuge encompasses the largest contiguous block of prairie pothole habitat in federal ownership. As native prairie has been destroyed over the majority of its original range, Lostwood plays an important role in the survival of numbers of threatened and endangered species. Lostwood National Wildlife Refuge was officially named one of America's top 500 Globally Important Bird Areas by the national non-profit organization, American Bird Conservancy.

Our exploration of the refuge will see us in pursuit of a variety of grassland sparrows including Field, Clay-colored, Lark, Grasshopper, Baird's, Le Conte's, Nelson's, Savannah, Song, and Vesper. We hope to encounter vibrant Upland Sandpipers, Sprague's Pipits, Bobolinks, and Chestnut-collared Longspurs as they stake out their territorial claims with vigor. Significant numbers of Sharp-tailed Grouse live on the refuge and we hope to start the day at a lek where we can watch male grouse in full display. In addition to the birding, Lostwood provides spectacular prairie scenery.



**Chestnut-collared Longspur © Michael O'Brien**

In the afternoon we will drive along a portion of Des Lacs (pronounced deh-lack) National Wildlife Refuge. At nearly 20,000 acres, Des Lacs stretches from the Canadian border to a point eight miles south of Kenmare, North Dakota. An impressive mix of natural lakes and wetlands in the valley provide a haven for migrating and nesting waterfowl and marsh birds. More than 250 species of birds have been recorded on the refuge. While our list won't be that high we will surely have some memorable experiences. Stops at several reservoirs, marshes, and coulees (wooded draws), will undoubtedly turn up Eared and Western grebes. Even Horned and Clark's grebes are possible. Black and Forster's terns hunt over the marshes and Soras and Virginia Rails reside among the cattails and bullrushes. Black-billed Magpies are occasionally seen moving through isolated groves of shade trees.

**NIGHT: Hampton Inn and Suites, Minot, ND**



Franklin's Gull © Michael O'Brien

**May 26, Day 9: J. Clark Salyer National Wildlife Refuge.** The northern Great Plains are about more than grasslands and prairies, for they are also the site of some of the most prodigious waterfowl reproduction zones on the planet. The prairie pothole marshes are as classic a symbol of the Great Plains as the rolling grasslands. A by-product of ancient glacial activity, these gouged out depressions in the prairie fill with rainwater and annually host an amazing assortment of waterfowl, shorebirds, gulls, terns, and blackbirds.

Perhaps no place in North Dakota embodies the spirit of the prairie-pothole ecosystem more than J. Clark Salyer National Wildlife Refuge, where we will spend part of the day. Established in 1935 for the preservation and propagation of migratory waterfowl and other wildlife, J. Clark Salyer NWR, the largest national wildlife refuge in the state, is 58,700 acres in size. It extends along the Souris River for 50 miles in north central North Dakota. Originally called Lower Souris Refuge, it was renamed in 1967 in honor of J. Clark Salyer II, who was a biology teacher in Minot, North Dakota before becoming the Chief of Refuges for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The refuge serves as an important feeding and resting area for hundreds of thousands of waterfowl which annually migrate through the Central Flyway. The refuge has developed into one of the most important duck production areas in the United States.

We will drive a portion of the auto tour route simply taking our time exploring this remarkable site. Stops at major overlooks should provide all the expected marsh and waterbird species, many of which have formed huge breeding colonies. Double-crested Cormorants and American White Pelicans are abundant. We might encounter as many as five species of grebes (including Horned and Clark's), 14 species of ducks, and a variety of breeding shorebirds, including American Avocet, Willet, Marbled Godwit, and Wilson's Phalarope. Enormous concentrations of California and Franklin's gulls nest around many of the larger bodies of water; Black and Forster's terns course over reservoirs and canals; and Yellow-headed Blackbirds issue their abrasive songs from seemingly every stand of cattails. All the while we will scan the skies for Swainson's and Ferruginous hawks, the two great raptors of the prairie.

The refuge also contains sizeable tracts of native prairie, and many of the associated nesting species, including LeConte's Sparrow and Sedge Wren. The refuge is also good for upland "game" birds and we may encounter Ring-necked Pheasant, Gray Partridge, or Wild Turkey.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn and Suites, Minot, ND

**May 27, Day 10: Travel Day by train.** This morning we will reboard the Empire Builder at 8:30 a.m. for the final leg of our journey. We will be on the train for the next 24 hours, in which time our participants will experience a wonderful slice of the northern United States. Leaving Minot, we will head west through the Great Plains, skirt the Missouri River, and enter the Big Sky country of western North Dakota and Montana. Featuring endless vistas, rolling prairie, and robust agricultural lands, participants will gaze out on a landscape once occupied by millions of buffalos, Native-Americans of the plains, and pioneers heading west. We will also follow in the footsteps of Lewis and Clark, who passed through this country some 210 years ago as they were laying the groundwork for westward expansion.

As the hours and miles pass, the train will roll through the prairie towns of Havre, Shelby, and Cut Bank, Montana. Approaching Browning, we will be in the heart of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. This is a most remarkable place as it signals the end of the prairie country and the appearance of the Rocky Mountain Eastern Front. Replete with dramatic natural beauty, the Eastern Front is wild and rugged country, lightly populated, and full of wildlife. Elk, moose, and grizzly bears still roam the mountains and foothills in healthy numbers.



Appearing first as blue specks on the horizon, the Rockies begin to take more distinct shape as snow-capped mountains as we close in on them. Together with the lush green grasses of spring and track-side ponds and streams, this country is one of glorious visual scenery.

We will cross the mountains late in the day, cruising for miles along the impressive Flathead River, and even touching the boundary of Glacier National Park. For many, the crossing of the Rockies represents the most beautiful portion of the trip. We'll pass through western Montana and Idaho by night and eventually wind up in Spokane, Washington. Early the next morning we will find ourselves out on the Columbia Plateau peering out at the mighty Columbia River. From there it's on to and over the Cascades, and finally down to Puget Sound country and the Pacific Northwest, with an expected midmorning arrival in Edmonds, Washington.

NIGHT: Aboard Amtrak, the Empire Builder

**May 28, Day 11: Arrival in Edmonds, WA; Diamond Point and Sequim Bay.** We are due to arrive in Edmonds, Washington this morning at 9:00 a.m. Lying on the protected waters of Puget Sound, Edmonds is approximately 20 miles north of Seattle and is a perfect jumping off point for the Olympic Peninsula. We will proceed to the attractive waterfront and board a ferry for a trip across the sound. The 20-minute ride will serve as a brief introduction to the Pacific Northwest, with forested islands, rocky coastlines, and placid waters providing a picturesque sight before us. If the weather is clear, the rugged snow-capped summits of the Olympic range loom up in front of us in stark contrast to the rolling green forests below.

As the ferry transits the sound, a few birds are likely, and we may see our first Pelagic Cormorant, Pigeon Guillemots, Glaucous-winged Gull or Bald Eagle.

Arriving on the Olympic Peninsula is always an exciting event. The lush, second growth coniferous forests surrounding us are composed primarily of Douglas fir, western red cedar, and western hemlock. Making our way west, the landscape is one of thick, dark forests interspersed with grassy pastures, stands of red maple, and quaint country homes. Depending on our schedule, we will likely stop to look for Red-breasted Sapsuckers before enjoying lunch at a site overlooking a beautiful bay.



**Red-breasted Sapsucker © Michael O'Brien**

Our afternoon activities will include a visit to small nature center near the town of Gardiner. Feeders here are often alive with birds, and will give us our first views of many typical western species such as Anna's Hummingbird, Steller's Jay, White-crowned Sparrow, Spotted Towhee, and Black-headed Grosbeak. Later, we may also visit Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge and the mouth of the Dungeness River, both offering quality scenery and birds. Common Raven, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Pacific Wren, Hutton's Vireo, and Black-throated Gray-Warbler inhabit these wet forests, and if tide levels are right, mud flats may harbor a few lingering shorebird migrants.

Upon leaving Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge, we will depart immediately for our hotel in Port Angeles, where we can expect a late afternoon arrival.

NIGHT: Olympic Lodge, Port Angeles, WA

**May 29, Day 12: Olympic National Park (Hurricane Ridge).** Today will be a day of discovery, featuring ancient old growth forests, glorious mountain scenery, and great birding. Our destination is wondrous Olympic National Park and the 17-mile scenic drive leading from Port Angeles to Hurricane Ridge.

Olympic National Park is as diverse a place in North America as any, containing an improbable assortment of ecosystems ranging from wild, wave-cut beaches to extraordinary temperate rainforests, to lush alpine meadows, and imposing mountain glaciers. Olympic is, in fact, really three parks in one: the coast, the forests, and the mountains, all interfacing in a mosaic of habitats supporting a rich array of wildlife.

The story of Olympic dates back to the middle 1800s and to a time when the first settlers were coming into the Pacific Northwest. Native-Americans had been living here for thousands of years of course, but the first white people to the region stayed mostly along the protected waters of Puget Sound and the coastal zone of the Olympic Peninsula. It wasn't until 1885 that the first systematic exploration, led by Lt. Joseph P. O'Neil, of the interior of the peninsula took place. Four years later, in 1890, another expedition led by James Christie made a north-south crossing in five and a half months. The next year Lt. O'Neil returned and made an east-west crossing. What these expeditions revealed was a country of untarnished wilderness.

With the settlement of the Olympic Peninsula, the trees began to fall. The earliest days of the logging industry in Washington are traced, at least in part, to operations on the Olympic Peninsula. So as the expeditions of the late 1800s concluded, a movement slowly came about to protect this tremendous country, with some championing the cause that some of the peninsula be set aside as a national park. The first effort toward preservation was realized in 1897 when President Grover Cleveland signed into law the Olympic Forest Reserve. In 1909 President Theodore Roosevelt designated a portion of the reserve as a national monument, largely to protect the endemic Roosevelt Elk. Nearly thirty years later, in 1939, Franklin Roosevelt signed into law Olympic National Park, and finally in 1988, nearly 96 percent of the park was given the designation of Federal Wilderness.

Olympic is indeed a wild place. The public roads surrounding the park are limited to the coastal zone and foothills, meaning that almost all the interior is virtually free of any human activities. Wildlife, consequently, is abundant, and black bears and mountain lions are still known to venture from their mountain strongholds down to the deserted beaches.

While we may not encounter any of these spectacular beasts, our day in the mountains is bound to be an exciting one. We will visit three of the four major forest types and bird all the way from the coast to the treeline. Departing quaint Port Angeles, we will immediately strike out on the road to Hurricane Ridge. This corridor is one of the few park roads that offer penetration into the national park's vast interior, providing an interesting opportunity to sample several distinct life zones. We will observe the birds and other natural history of the varied and ever-changing habitats, and will do so with numerous stops along the way.



**Chestnut-backed Chickadee**  
© Michael O'Brien

The Heart O' the Hills campground is our first destination. With its ancient cathedral-like trees, Heart O' the Hills preserves a fantastic vestige of old growth, lowland forest. Emerging from our touring van, we will be in the company of giants. Ancient Douglas Fir, Western Red Cedar, and Western Hemlock tower up around us, their gnarled, twisted limbs and shattered crowns belying their ages. Peering about the dark forest around us, we'll notice the fern-laden understory, where the moss often grows thick as carpet, and the rhododendrons flourish like cactus in the desert. We will take time to walk the various roads and trails of the campground in our quest for birds and to simply marvel at this magical forest. We should find many of the birds considered typical of the wet forests of the Pacific Northwest including Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Violet-green Swallow, Common Raven, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Pacific Wren, Brown Creeper, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Swainson's Thrush,



Song Sparrow, and Purple Finch. Aside from these more common species, we will be on the lookout for several infrequently seen birds that also call these forests home.

Careful listening might alert us to the soft tapping of the Red-breasted Sapsucker, a quieter denizen of the woods, or the haunting call of the Varied Thrush as it vocalizes from a moss-covered stump of some long dead tree.

Moving up the road, we will begin to gain altitude. To our west the hillside will fall away before us, providing distant views of the coastal valleys and even the contours of some of the distant ridges. Eventually we will enter the next forest zone, the mountain forests of the middle elevations. We will stop at scenic overlooks where Puget Sound is visible. Perhaps most interesting is that these roadside overlooks may give us our best chances for finding Canada Jay and Olive-sided Flycatcher. At this elevation the western red cedars will be noticeably fewer and farther between, and are ultimately replaced by the Alaska (yellow) cedar. Also on the scene now are the elegant Pacific silver firs.



**Sooty Grouse © Michael O'Brien**

The road continues up, up, and up, all the way into the Canadian zone, where dense stands of subalpine fir and mountain hemlock intermingle in the final zone before treeline. The road tops out at this elevation amid rolling higher altitude meadows broken by islands of trees. The scenery is simply magnificent. In practically all directions are limitless views of the interior of Olympic National Park. Snow-capped peaks highlight rugged ridgelines that will remind some of the Rockies. Large mountain glaciers accentuate the distant ridges, all gleaming bright white under the late spring sun. A bird flying to the horizon would pass alternately over lofty, snowy ridges and plunging, forest-clad river valleys. From our vista point at Hurricane Ridge, all we can do is simply gaze out at the distant mountains and valleys. The birding is often on a par with the scenery. The surrounding trees and meadows frequently harbor Sooty Grouse and we will definitely be on the watch for this sought after species. Larger stands of forest may yield more Red-breasted Nuthatches and Golden-crowned Kinglets but, additionally, we are now in the nesting zone for Hermit Thrush, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Hammond's Flycatcher. This elevation is also good for seeing a number of the finches. Pine Siskins are always expected, but even Red Crossbills and Pine Grosbeaks are possible.

Our time at Olympic National Park will conclude with a trip to the park visitor center where a variety of literature, maps, lists, gifts, and artwork are available.

**NIGHT: Olympic Lodge, Port Angeles, WA**



**May 30, Day 13: Port Angeles waterfront; drive to Seattle.** Today marks the final day of our adventure across America. A trip that started in the deciduous forests of upstate New York will conclude on the scenic waterfront of Puget Sound, on the Strait of Juan de Fuca, some 2,000 miles to the west. We will have part of the day to explore this fascinating and beautiful region before heading back to Seattle later this afternoon.

A morning at Ediz Hook, just outside Port Angeles, is an excellent way to end a trip to the Olympic Peninsula. Essentially a man-made barrier against the open ocean, Ediz Hook is a reinforced peninsula of rock, sand, and pavement that protects the near shore waters off Port Angeles and serves as a base for the U.S. Coast Guard. The short drive out the length of the peninsula is essential for the visiting birder, as a wide variety of birds are usually present here at any time of year. By working the pullouts and assortment of microhabitats, we are virtually assured of encountering an array of loons, grebes, cormorants, waterfowl, alcids, shorebirds, gulls, and terns. Some of the species of particular interest are specialists of the Pacific Coast such as Harlequin Duck, Pelagic Cormorant, Black Oystercatcher, Western Gull, Pigeon Guillemot, Marbled Murrelet, and Rhinoceros Auklet.



**Black Oystercatcher © Michael O'Brien**

As we make our way east toward the ferry that takes us off the peninsula, a short stop at the Quilcene National Fish Hatchery may give us time to locate the resident pair of American Dippers that live along the rocky stream here. The surrounding forest may also give up its other hidden treasures, such as Band-tailed Pigeon and Pacific-slope Flycatcher. The afternoon ferry will again take us across the placid waters of Puget Sound, with the memories of snowy peaks and rolling forest behind us and the sensational waterfront of Seattle in our immediate future. Participants should expect a late afternoon arrival in Sea-Tac.

**NIGHT:** Marriott Sea-Tac Airport Hotel, Seattle

**May 31, Day 14: Departure from Seattle.** Tour participants may make arrangements to depart from Seattle at any time today.

**EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS:** Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 12 participants.

**TOUR LEADERS:** Willy Hutcheson and Rick Wright



**Willy Hutcheson** began birding in the South Carolina Lowcountry at age six. As a teenager, he attended VENT's Camp Chiricahua for two years, where he discovered that there were indeed other adolescents in the world who shared his all-consuming obsession with birds. After obtaining one Master's Degree in Conservation Biology and another in teaching science, he began a career in education. For the last decade, he has taught Biology and Environmental Science at a boarding school in Concord, Massachusetts, where he lives with his wife and two teenage sons. In the summers, Willy escapes with his family to Great Wass Island in downeast Maine and enjoys hiking, sailing, kayaking, and birding the maritime boreal ecosystem.



**Rick Wright** is a widely published author and sought-after lecturer and field trip leader. A native of southeast Nebraska, Rick studied French, German, Philosophy, and Life Sciences at the University of Nebraska before making a detour to Harvard Law School. He took the Ph.D. in German Languages and Literatures at Princeton University in 1990, then spent a dozen years as an academic, holding successive appointments as Assistant Professor of German at the University of Illinois, Reader in Art and Archaeology at Princeton University, and Associate Professor of Medieval Studies at Fordham University. His numerous scholarly publications include two books on the Latin animal literature of the later Middle Ages.

Among Rick's recent books are the *ABA Field Guide to Birds of New Jersey* and the *ABA Field Guide to Birds of Arizona*; his *Peterson Reference Guide to American Sparrows* was published in 2019. He is also the co-author with Sanford Sorkin of *Watching Birds in Montclair* and *Watching Birds in the New Jersey Meadowlands*. Especially interested in the history and culture of birding, he is hard at work on a study of hummingbird collecting in France from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. In his spare time, he teaches Latin courses online for the Paideia Institute. Rick lives with his family, Alison Beringer and Avril Huang, and their black lab, Quetzal, in northern New Jersey, where he offers private birding tours to the marshes, woodlands, and ocean beaches.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the tour is **\$8920** per person in double occupancy from Albany, New York. This includes all meals beginning with dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 13 (excluding lunch on Day 6 in Chicago), accommodations as stated in the itinerary, accommodations on AMTRAK in Sleeper Cabins, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Albany with return from Seattle, Washington, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$1850** which includes guaranteed single accommodations while on Amtrak and in hotels.

**Special Note:** Deluxe Sleeper Cabins onboard AMTRAK are limited and will be reserved on a first-come first-serve basis (i.e., assigned to those who register first). The total numbers of Deluxe Sleeper Cabins available from Albany to Chicago are 4; from Chicago to Minot are 6; and from Minot to Edmonds are 3. After all Deluxe Sleeper Cabins have been reserved, you will be assigned a Standard "Roomette" Cabin. Deluxe Sleeper Cabins are equipped with an upper and lower berth, toilet, vanity/sink and shower. Standard "Roomette" Cabins have an upper and lower berth, a toilet and sink but share shower facilities. Participants accommodating Standard "Roomette" Cabins will receive a discount of **\$290** for each portion of the trip travelled in that category. Following are the cabin dimensions for the Deluxe Sleeper Cabin and Standard "Roomette" Cabin.

**Albany to Chicago onboard the Lakeshore Limited**

Deluxe: 6'8" x 7'1"

Lower Berth: 3'4" x 6'0"

Upper Berth with Ladder: 2'4" x 6'2"

Capacity for 2 suitcases

Standard: 3'6" x 6'8"

Lower Berth: 2'4" x 6'6"

Upper Berth with Steps: 2'4" x 6'2"

Capacity for 2 small suitcases and garment bag

**Chicago to Minot and Minot to Edmonds onboard the Empire Builder**

Deluxe: 6'6" x 7'6"

Lower Berth: 3'4" x 6'3"

Upper Berth with Ladder: 2'4" x 6'2"

Capacity for 2 suitcases

Standard: 3'6" x 6'6"

Lower Berth: 2'4" x 6'6"

Upper Berth with Steps: 2'0" x 6'2"

Capacity for 2 small tote bags (larger luggage may be checked)

**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at <https://ventbird.com>) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

**PAYMENTS:** All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days (December 19, 2021) prior to the tour departure date.

**EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES (CANADA):** In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

**CANCELLATION & REFUNDS:**

**Cancellation by Participant:**

Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 180 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$250** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre- and post-tour extensions. **For participants' protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

**If participant cancels:**

180 days or more before departure date

179 to 151 days before departure date

150 days or less before departure date

**Participant's refund will be:**

Participant's deposit minus \$250\*

No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded

No refund available

\*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

**Cancellation by VENT:**

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A **"Force Majeure"** event means any act beyond VENT's control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional



emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.**

**FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES:** In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

**TRAVEL INSURANCE:** To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with Redpoint Travel Protection as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend their **Ripcord** plan. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most comprehensive travel protection programs available.

Critical benefits of Ripcord include a completely integrated program with a single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims; **medical evacuation and rescue services** from your point of injury or illness to your **hospital of choice**; comprehensive travel insurance for **trip cancellation/interruption**, primary medical expense coverage, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as security evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or other security events, **waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion**, and a “**Cancel for Any Reason**” benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.\*

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: [ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird](http://ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird); or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help and Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

\*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 14 days of making your tour deposit. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, mid-payment, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 14 days in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

#### **Coronavirus (COVID-19):**

The coronavirus pandemic has brought uncertainty for many people currently holding travel insurance policies or who are considering future travel and purchasing such insurance. Redpoint has added a **Coronavirus FAQ page** to its website that addresses questions and concerns regarding its travel insurance and the impact of COVID-19. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of topics such as policy coverage and limitations, policy modifications, cancellation, refunds, and more. Among the most important points: 1) Trip cancellation solely for concern or fear of travel associated with COVID-19 is not covered; 2) Should you request cancellation of your policy, a full refund of your premium is available only under a limited set of conditions; and 3) Should you request cancellation, you may be eligible to receive a pro-rated refund of the unused portion of your premium or a travel

insurance credit. Travel insurance credit ("Premium Credit") is for the value of the policy purchased and may be applied to future policies. Premium Credits have no expiration dates. Rules and regulations apply.

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ** page at the following link:

[https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid\\_19\\_faq/](https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/)

Additionally, as countries begin opening up for travel, many are instituting an array of COVID-19 entry requirements, including mandates to purchase travel insurance covering medical expenses due to COVID-19 illness and accommodation in case of quarantine. Ripcord's comprehensive travel insurance plans are designed to satisfy the various country-specific travel insurance entry requirements. Those who purchase a Ripcord policy will receive a "letter of confirmation" that affirms that the policy satisfies such requirements.

**AIR INFORMATION:** Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

**BAGGAGE:** Since some of our travel will be aboard AMTRAK trains, it is essential that participants pack as efficiently and economically as possible. Space in the sleeping quarters will be limited, and accommodating large, heavy bags can be difficult. Soft-sided, pliable duffle bags are always preferred over the more rigid, hard-sided suitcases.

**Please note that on the train, participants are encouraged to check bags from Albany to Minot, and again from Minot to Edmonds. This is not essential for passengers traveling in Deluxe Sleeper Cabins (Empire Builder only) as these rooms are large enough to accommodate luggage, but participants traveling in Standard "Roomette" Cabins will find this an essential option, as these rooms are too small to accommodate large bags. For convenience, all participants should bring a backpack or small duffel for toiletries and a change of clothes to keep in your rooms overnight while larger bags are checked.**

**CLOTHING:** Due to limited luggage space aboard the train, participants should pack as lightly as possible. We recommend a couple pairs of pants, several t-shirts (long and short-sleeved) and several long-sleeved shirts. Many outdoor stores carry the designer clothing that many travelers now favor. This includes shirts and pants made of light but durable material, well ventilated, and with numerous pockets.

**You should definitely bring a few items of heavier clothing in the likely event of our encountering cold and/or wet weather.** Examples of items of this nature include flannel shirts, down or fleece sweaters, a warm, **waterproof** jacket, and possibly thermal underwear. For footwear, a light hiking boot or trail-walking shoe is adequate. Due to space considerations, rubber boots are not practical on this tour, but since wet weather is a high possibility, you may wish to bring **gore-tex shoes or "Neos" overshoes** for walking on damp or muddy trails. A hat for protection from the sun is essential. A pair of warm, lightweight gloves is also recommended. Participants are encouraged to bring an appropriate supply of socks and undergarments for the entire tour, but note that, if needed, a washer and dryer are available at our hotel in Minot.

**CLIMATE:** Due to the fact that this tour covers a broad cross section of the United States at a transitional time of year, participants should expect a wide variety of weather conditions. Springtime in the northeastern and central United States can be among the most pleasant times of the year. The days are generally warm, with temperatures in the 70s to low 80s and the evenings cool, with temperatures ranging from the 40s to upper 50s. However, springtime also sees its share of unstable weather. Precipitation is likely at some point during the trip, usually in the form of rain associated with late cold fronts. Under these conditions, plummeting temperatures (daytime highs in the 40s) and wintry conditions are possible, with snowfall in the Adirondacks not out of the question.

Springtime on the North Dakota Plains is notoriously variable. One day may see strong winds, rain showers, and high temperatures in the 40s, while the next day may be calm and sunny with temperatures soaring into the 80s or 90s.

In the Pacific Northwest, the weather can either be gorgeous, with clear skies and mild conditions, or it can be cool, cloudy, and rainy. On the Olympic Peninsula, we should expect cool to warm weather, with daytime temperatures in the 60s and 70s. The expected conditions are clear skies, with the possibility for morning fog; however, past tours have also experienced overcast and rain. On the day we visit Olympic National Park, we will venture up to the tree line, where the weather will be 10 to 20 degrees cooler. At this elevation wind is a distinct possibility, in which case we may experience conditions that can be downright cold. More likely though, we can expect a mild day with temperatures in the 50s. Nighttime temperatures in Port Angeles can range from the upper 40s to low 60s.

**TOUR CONDITIONS:** The pace of this tour will be moderately brisk, with typically long days in the field. Many days will start with at 6:00 a.m. breakfast, followed by a full day of birding, while a few will begin with an optional pre-breakfast outing at 5:30 or 6:00 a.m., followed by a later breakfast. In all sections, though some of our birding will be along roadsides, there will also be a moderate amount of walking on uneven or hilly terrain, such as forest trails or open prairie. Some mud or wet grass is certain to be encountered along the way. Due to the remote location of some of our birding sites, it will sometimes be necessary for rest room breaks to be primitive. This tour also includes a few lengthy drives of two hours or more to reach the best birding locations.

Great Camp Sagamore is rustic, yet offer clean and comfortable accommodations. Our group will stay in an historic building with mainly double-occupancy rooms with twin beds. Shared bathrooms, many with footed tubs, are in the hallway. There are no telephones in the rooms, and usually no cell service. Wifi is available in the dining area.

Travel aboard the train is comfortable, but not luxurious and space is tight. We will travel aboard the train in three stages in stretches of 15, 18 and 24 hours respectively; but participants should read the itinerary carefully for a better idea of what to expect from the trip. Participants need to be aware that considerable delays of arrivals and departures of the train are possible. In the event of such delays, our travel/birding plans may need to be altered. Please pack as efficiently as possible.

In Albany, Minot, Port Angeles, and Seattle, we will be staying in standard, comfortable hotels with typical amenities.

**Special Note:** On some tours and in certain areas, the larger 15-passenger vans are not available. Every effort will be made to secure the larger vehicle for this tour. However, when smaller vans are reserved, participants will not always have a window seat and you will be asked to rotate daily.

**BITING INSECTS:** Some biting insects are certain to be encountered on the Adirondacks section of this tour. Mosquitos are possible almost anywhere, particularly in warmer weather and in shady areas or under cloud cover. Black flies are also likely, particularly near spruce forest and under warmer conditions. For both, the best protection is to keep covered up. Wearing **long-sleeve shirts** and **long pants** are essential, and we also recommend bringing **light gloves** to keep your hands covered. Using **bug spray** (particularly with 100% DEET) is also recommended. A **neck buff** can be helpful to keep your neck covered, and those who are particularly sensitive to bites may also wish to bring a **mosquito head net**.

Ticks are also possible on this tour, mainly in grassy areas around Albany and locally in North Dakota. They are less likely, but also possible, in the Adirondacks. The best protection against ticks is to **avoid walking through tall grass or brushy areas** where ticks are likely. Using **bug spray** (particularly with 100% DEET) and tucking your pants into your socks are also helpful preventive measures. Your leaders will advise you when you are in tick country and discuss preventive measures.



**EQUIPMENT:** As this is a nature tour, you will want to bring your binoculars first and foremost. Many people like to bring their own spotting scopes. This is fine and acceptable, but your tour leaders will have their personal scopes available for group use. “Birding Across America by Train” is designed to provide participants with time birding and traveling through several ecosystems of great natural beauty. You will, therefore, want to bring your camera. For overall conditions, sunglasses and sunscreen are essential, as the sun can be intense, even in the spring.

A travel alarm clock is recommended. Either a small travel umbrella or rain jacket and waterproof shoes are essential in the event we encounter rain. Insect repellent is recommended, and those participants particularly sensitive to insect bites may also wish to bring a mosquito head net and light gloves.

**HEALTH:** VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers’ Information Line (800) CDC-INFO (800-232-4636). You can check the CDC website at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html> (click on Travel Health).

This tour does visit elevations up to 7,000 feet. Tour participants with any pre-existing conditions associated with cardiac or pulmonary disorders should check with their doctor before registering for this tour. Your tour leaders will have a first aid kit available in the event of minor injury. Tour participants might consider a variety of over-the-counter drugs in the event of mild illness or negative reaction due to springtime allergies.

**COVID-19:** The world has been in the grip of a pandemic since early 2020, a result of the uncontrolled spread of SARS-CoV-2, the novel coronavirus that causes the illness COVID-19. COVID-19 is transmitted through person-to-person contact, almost always through inhaling respiratory aerosols or droplets exuded from an infected person. Common signs of COVID-19 illness include fever or chills, fatigue, shortness of breath, cough, loss of taste or smell, and more. Based on what is known about the disease, COVID-19 is far more serious than seasonal flu. Few places in the world have been unaffected. The impact on travel has been substantial, as demonstrated by the fact that VENT did not operate a tour between late March 2020 and late April 2021. The development and deployment of COVID-19 vaccines, particularly in the United States, has allowed VENT to return to tour operations. We emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. **With this in mind, VENT instituted a COVID-19 vaccination requirement.** All tour participants and tour leaders must be fully vaccinated in order to travel with us while we are still in a declared public health emergency. In accordance with the latest guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), full vaccination is defined as an individual being 14 days beyond having received the required amount of vaccine for reaching full immunity to the degree specific vaccines confer. In the United States, so far, this means either the two-shot sequence for the Moderna or Pfizer vaccines or the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Proof of vaccination must be provided to our office at least one week before the start of the tour and kept with you while on the tour. Because the world is a very different place than it was before the pandemic, we’ve made a number of important adjustments to our processes to ensure that our tours can operate as safely as possible. Please visit the **Coronavirus Travel Update** page of our website <https://ventbird.com/covid-19>, where you may view our **COVID-19 Protocols for VENT Tours** document, which details the guidance VENT will follow in the operation of its tours in the time of pandemic. Our decision and policy are firmly rooted in the latest CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-

19. As we move forward, VENT will continue to follow the latest information from the CDC and will update our policy accordingly. Please visit the CDC website for the most up to date information about COVID-19 and associated guidance for proper health and hygiene: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>.

**Insect Repellents** – There are insect repellents for the skin and an insect repellent used to treat clothing that should not be applied to the skin.

Insect repellents for the skin are commonly available in three forms:

- DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF!®, Cutter™, Ultrathon™, etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The formulations will state a percentage of the active ingredient DEET on the packaging. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.
- Picaridin: A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.
- Herbal insect repellents: Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

An insect repellent for clothing is marketed in one approved formulation:

- Permanone® (Permethrin) is an odorless spray-on repellent that may be used for **pre-treatment** of clothing, gear, and tents. It should not be used directly on the skin or sprayed on clothing while it is being worn. The pre-treatment process requires a number of hours to complete and must be done outdoors, so is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment has to be repeated more often than commercial treatment using Insect Shield® technology. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online.
- Insect Shield® apparel: Clothing pre-treated with Permanone is made by a variety of manufacturers. It is available for purchase from some sporting goods suppliers. The clothing is advertised as retaining its repellency for up to 70 washings.

The US EPA offers a search tool to help choose a repellent that is best for a particular situation. For example, some repellents work for mosquitoes, but not for ticks.

<https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/which-insect-repellent-right-you>

**SUGGESTED READING:** A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) which has a wide selection; [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) and [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com) which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

### ***Birds:***

Any of the following guides are excellent choices for this tour:

Kaufman, Kenn. *Kaufman Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2005.

National Geographic Society. *Field Guide to North American Birds*. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 7<sup>th</sup> edition, 2017.

Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Guide to Eastern Birds*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016.

Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Guide to Western Birds*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016.

### ***Bird References:***

Ehrlich, Paul R., et. al. *The Birder's Handbook: A Field Guide to the Natural History of North American Birds*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988. (An excellent reference guide full of essays and Information about North American birds.)

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Kaufman, Kenn. *Lives of North American Birds*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996. (An excellent and underrated resource to the natural history of North American birds.)

### ***Mammals:***

Reid, Fiona. *Peterson Field Guide to the Mammals of North America*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Fourth Edition, 2006.

### ***Butterflies:***

Brock, Jim P. & Kaufman, Kenn. *Butterflies of North America*. New York, NY. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003.

### ***Trees:***

Petrides, George A. *Peterson Field Guide to Eastern Trees*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1988.

Petrides, George A. and Olivia. *Peterson Field Guide to the Western Trees*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Second Edition, 1998.

### ***History:***

Ambrose, Stephen E. *Nothing Like it in the World: The Men Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad*. New York, NY. Simon & Schuster, 2001 (paperback). Since the central feature of this tour is a cross-country train trip, it would only be appropriate to read the story of the construction of the first cross-country train. Stephen Ambrose, author of *Undaunted Courage* and *D-Day*, takes us back to the 1860's, to a time when the first "railroad minds" were pushing Congress to fund the nation's first transcontinental railroad. Ambrose documents the year-by-year progress of the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads as each company pushed across the country in an effort to finish the line. A first rate read.

Koeppel, Gerard. *Bond of Union: Building the Erie Canal and the American Empire*. Philadelphia: De Capo Press, 2009.

### **SUGGESTED APPS:**

*Merlin Bird ID by Cornell Lab*. Cornell University. Highly recommended! This free download from the App store is a remarkable tool to help beginners identify birds, based on a few simple questions. ID text and audio recordings included for each species. The current version (1.5.3) covers all of North and Central America, Europe, and parts of South America. Free "Bird Packs" need to be downloaded for each region.

**TIPPING:** Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

**RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT:** Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, "**VENT**") act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).



VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on September 30, 2021 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant's Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant's risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the "**Airline**") is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline's aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

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