MINNESOTA & NORTH DAKOTA JUNE 1–10, 2018



Yellow-headed Blackbird

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VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, INC. 2525 WALLINGWOOD DRIVE, SUITE 1003 AUSTIN, TEXAS 78746 WWW.VENTBIRD.COM VENT's Minnesota & North Dakota tour combines a broad spectrum of vast scenery with incredible bird life and a great deal of locally-sourced cuisine. This birding adventure delves deep into the boreal forest, as well as the core of the prairie potholes, a unique region of the northern prairies.



North American Porcupine

An early departure took us up to the Superior National Forest. Mixed old growth woodlands sheltered warblers and provided plentiful food for the many nesting birds. Ancient white pines and red pines towered into the sky. Our first bird of the day was a Tennessee Warbler, singing proudly atop "his" boreal neighborhood. Chestnut-sided Warblers and Blackburnian Warblers flitted energetically among the leafed-out branches in search of breakfast. Several Mourning Warblers belted out their songs from the thickets, while one male was oddly observed atop a spruce tree. The Blue-headed Vireos brought smiles to our faces as both kinglet species called nearby. There were so many birds all over the forest! White Pine Campground brought forth a dapper male Northern Parula as Yellowrumped Warblers serenaded each other. In the afternoon we birded down the scenic North Shore of Lake Superior, visiting several vistas both in the town of Two Harbor and along the world's longest freshwater peninsula, Park Point.

After savoring fresh-caught walleye and a rotating 360° view overlooking Duluth on our first evening, we ventured into the renowned Sax-Zim Bog for a brief jaunt of birding. The horizons of aspen and black spruce trees welcomed us to northern Minnesota.

Numerous "fitz bews" of the Alder Flycatcher were heard along the roadside. We started the tour on an exceptional note with mammal observations that included not only an American Beaver paddling around in the water but also a North American Porcupine dining on tree bark! The air was cool and calm, smelling of sweet bog. The sense of place was incredible, and we had only birded an hour together.

Superior National Forest

The next day was our full day of birding Sax-Zim Bog. At daybreak we spotted a singing LeConte's Sparrow producing his delicate insect-like song along a sedge meadow. The elusive and sought-after Connecticut Warblers sang forcefully, deep in the waterlogged tamarack forests. A breeding pair of Sandhill Cranes bugled out in a field, and adult male Northern Harriers bounded nearby in search of rodents for their mates and young. Hearty pasties, followed by homemade pie, hit the spot. It's hard to get enough of Sax-Zim Bog, so we spent the afternoon exploring more forests, bogs, and prairies of this beautiful area. By the end of this second day of birding we had tallied twenty species of warblers!

Duluth is known for its scenery as well as great birding opportunities. After fueling ourselves with a tasty breakfast at Caribou Coffee, we headed up to Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory. The expansive tree-topped ridges and seemingly endless horizon of Lake Superior took our breaths away. While its claim to fame comes with the autumn raptor migration, Hawk Ridge is a must-visit spot for birding the summer months. Indigo Buntings, Cedar Waxwings, and Mourning Warblers sang away at the top of Hawk Ridge. As we headed west to Detroit Lakes, our home for the next two nights, we came across nesting Common Goldeneyes, Common Loons, and Trumpeter Swans. After a joyous and memorable lunch at Harry's Bar, we had fantastic looks at male Baltimore Orioles and American Redstarts. The legendary almond & parmesan-crusted walleye was a big hit at the Fireside Restaurant where we dined later in the evening.

The next morning was filled with prairie birds. Grasshopper Sparrows shuffled along grassy fields as Redtailed Hawks soared overhead. Bobolinks fluttered through the skies while boasting their impeccable songs. Following the first half of the day's prairie birding, we trekked through Tamarac National Wildlife

Refuge, one of the premier woodland gems of northern Minnesota. Clay-colored Sparrows buzzed throughout the grasses. Rose-breasted Grosbeaks dined on seeds and berries higher up in the trees. The deep-blue lakes glowed against the masses of pine trees that surrounded us. Yellow Lady's Slippers grew in clusters along the paved roads. We had an exceptionally memorable view of a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker that called and drilled sap wells right in front of us! Starting the next morning, we had our sights on a different prairie and worked our way further west into different grasslands. We went for a hike through shortgrass prairie, and the weather couldn't have



Yellow-headed Blackbird

been more welcoming. Numerous Sharp-tailed Grouse were seen flying among the hills, as were Western Meadowlarks and the cinnamon-winged Marbled Godwits. Nesting Orchard Orioles were seen in little islands of cottonwoods among the rolling grasslands. While en route to our North Dakota hotel, we visited Hobart Lake National Wildlife Refuge, where the thrill of prairie birding really took hold. Western Grebes mingled with Ruddy Ducks and Northern Pintails. Yellow-headed Blackbirds outnumbered Red-winged Blackbirds. Eared Grebes outnumbered Pied-billed Grebes. Small groups of American White Pelicans drifted overhead, a sampling of a treasure to come in the following days.



American White Pelicans near Chase Lake

The air was crisp the upcoming morning.

The daily prairie winds hadn't quite picked up yet with our early departure. Numerous potholes (lakes) were visited over the course of the day. Each one hosted a rich array of waterfowl diversity. American Avocets fed gracefully among the shallow waters as California Gulls flew by with Franklin's Gulls. Dining opportunities are few and far between while birding in central North Dakota. We enjoyed a tasty

lunch topped with a selection of homemade pie at Carol's Kitchen, a standalone diner in the petite town of Robinson. In the afternoon we birded Chase Lake, home to the largest concentration of American

White Pelicans in North America! Thousands of them moved across the sky in a sense of controlled chaos. Even grander amounts of pelicans were seen on the distant island within Chase Lake. Words fall short when trying to describe seeing so many pelicans at one time. On the drive home we found a small flock of Snow Geese and a Greater White-fronted Goose. The Prairie Pothole region is known as the "duck capital of the Midwest" for good reason. By the end of the day, we had tallied 15 waterfowl species.



Copulating American Avocets

A gorgeous hike through native shortgrass prairie was in store for us the following morning. Upon starting our hike at the select field, we were greeted by Chestnut-collared Longspurs, notably the most abundant bird on that tract of land. A short trek over rolling hills took us to one of the primary target birds of the tour, a Baird's Sparrow. The handsome male



Baird's Sparrow

Baird's Sparrow projected his robust song over the prairie as his golden-orange crown showed proudly. To our delight, a second major target of the tour flew into view, a Sprague's Pipit. This pale-bellied songbird skylarked astoundingly high into the sky as it sang its melodious trickle of high notes. Both species are declining at alarming rates. It was a privilege to be in the presence of both of these species—a moment of shortgrass prairie birding zen. That afternoon we made

an obligatory visit to the world's tallest Sandhill Crane in the town of Steele.



Where Prairie Potholes meet Boreal Forest

Our last full day together combined maple forest birding with a scenic drive back to northeastern Minnesota. Every hour of driving offered a different spectrum of prairie, a different variety of forest, a different flow of water. Maplewood State Park was a great break to the long drive, offering many birds and a pleasant hike through the woods. Our last evening together was spent walking along the McGregor Marsh after sundown. Sedge Wrens and LeConte's Sparrows sang among hundreds of illuminated lightning bugs. We heard a total of four Yellow Rails among the sedge meadow. Some were quite close to the road, whereas others were farther away. Their sharply strung-together series of calls were heard clearly under the calm star-filled skies.

The bird life between northern Minnesota and central North Dakota is truly exceptional. We met amazing folks along the way and enjoyed a rich sense of place every day.

KEY:

SZB - Sax-Zim Bog

SNF - Superior National Forest

LS - Lake Superior

HR - Hawk Ridge

WW - Walker Water Treatment

and Nearby Area

HS - Hamden Slough National

Wildlife Refuge

TNWR - Tamarack National

Wildlife Refuge

FP - Felton Prairie

PP - Prairie Potholes (central

North Dakota)

MSP - Maplewood State Park

MM - McGregor Marsh

BIRDS:

COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	
Waterfowl	Anatidae	-
Greater White-fronted Goose	Answer albifrons	PP
Snow Goose	Anser caerulescens	PP
Canada Goose	Branta canadensis	Seen every day
Trumpeter Swan	Cygnus buccinator	SZB, TMWR
Wood Duck	Aix sponsa	SZB, TMWR, MSP
Blue-winged Teal	Spatula discors	WW, PP
Northern Shoveler	Spatula clypeata	SZB, PP
Gadwall	Mareca strepera	PP
American Wigeon	Mareca americana	PP
Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos	Seen every day
Northern Pintail	Anas acuta	PP
Green-winged Teal	Anas crecca	PP
Canvasback	Aythya valisineria	PP
Redhead	Aythya americana	PP
Ring-necked Duck	Aythya collaris	WW, PP
Lesser Scaup	Aythya affinis	PP
Common Goldeneye	Bucephala clangula	WW
Hooded Merganser	Lophodytes cucullatus	MSP
Red-breasted Merganser	Mergus serrator	LS
Ruddy Duck	Oxyura jamaicensis	PP
Pheasants, Grouse and Allies	Phasianidae	
Gray Partridge (I)	Perdix perdix	PP - We found three of them! Very uncommon bird
Ring-necked Pheasant (I)	Phasianus colchicus	PP
Sharp-tailed Grouse	Tympanuchus phasianellus	PP
Wild Turkey	Meleagris gallopavo	SZB, TNWR, MSP
Grebes	Podicipedidae	- , -
Pied-billed Grebe	Podilymbus podiceps	WW, PP, MSP
Red-necked Grebe	Podiceps grisegena	PP
Eared Grebe	Podiceps nigricollis	PP
Western Grebe	Aechmophorus occidentalis	PP
Pigeons and Doves	Columbidae	
Rock Pigeon (I)	Columba livia	Seen every day PP. Seen in small drive through prairie towns, ofter
Eurasian Collared-Dove (I)	Streptopelia decaocto	associated with grain elevators.
Mourning Dove	Zenaida macroura	SZB, HR, WW, HS, TNWR, PP, MSP
Swifts	Apodidae	
Chimney Swift	Chaetura pelagica	PP
Hummingbirds	Trochilidae	
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Archilochus colubris	HR, TNWR
Rails, Gallinules and Coots	Rallidae	
Yellow Rail	Coturnicops noveboracensis	MM - Heard four of them!
Virginia Rail	Rallus limicola	PP
Sora	Porzana carolina	TNWR, PP
American Coot	Fulica americana	PP, MSP
Cranes	Gruidae	
Sandhill Crane	Antigone canadensis	SZB, PP
Stilts and Avocets	Recurvirostridae	
American Avocet	Recurvirostra americana	PP
Plovers and Lapwings	Charadriidae	

Killdeer	Charadrius vociferus	SZB, PP
Sandpipers and Allies	Scolopacidae	
Upland Sandpiper	Bartramia longicauda	FP, PP
Marbled Godwit	Limosa fedoa	FP, PP
Sanderling	Calidris alba	LS
White-rumped Sandpiper	Calidris fuscicollis	PP
Semipalmated Sandpiper	Calidris pusilla	PP
American Woodcock	Scolopax minor	MSP
Wilson's Snipe	Gallinago delicata	HS, TNWR, PP
Spotted Sandpiper	Actitis macularius	SZB
Willet	Tringa semipalmata	PP
Wilson's Phalarope	Phalaropus tricolor	PP
Gulls, Terns and Skimmers	Laridae	
Franklin's Gull	Leucophaeus pipixcan	PP
Ring-billed Gull	Larus delawarensis	Seen every day
California Gull	Larus californicus	PP
Herring Gull	Larus argentatus	LS
Caspian Tern	Hydroprogne caspia	WW, PP
Black Tern	Chlidonias niger	PP
Common Tern	Sterna hirundo	LS
Forster's Tern	Sterna forsteri	WW, PP, MSP
Loons	Gaviidae	
Common Loon	Gavia immer	LS, TNWR, MSP
Cormorants	Phalacrocoracidae	
Double-crested Cormorant	Phalacrocorax auritus	SZB, WW, HS, TNWR, PP, MSP
Pelicans	Pelecanidae	
American White Pelican	Pelecanus erythrorhynchos	WW, HS, TNWR, FP, PP, MSP
Herons, Egrets and Bitterns	Ardeidae	
American Bittern	Botaurus lentiginosus	PP
Great Blue Heron	Ardea herodias	SZB, PP, MSP
Great Egret	Ardea alba	PP
Snowy Egret	Egretta thula	PP
Cattle Egret	Bubulcus ibis	PP
Black-crowned Night-Heron	Nycticorax nycticorax	PP
Ibises and Spoonbills	Threskiornithidae	
White-faced Ibis	Plegadis chihi	PP
New World Vultures	Cathartidae	
Turkey Vulture	Cathartes aura	SZB, HR, HS, TNWR, PP, MSP
Osprey	Pandionidae	
Osprey	Pandion haliaetus	HR, TNWR
Hawks, Eagles and Kites	Accipitridae	,
Bald Eagle	Haliaeetus leucocephalus	SZB, HR, TNWR
Northern Harrier	Circus hudsonius	SZB, HS, FP, PP, MSP
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Accipiter striatus	WW
Cooper's Hawk	Accipiter cooperii	PP
Red-shouldered Hawk	Buteo lineatus	MSP
Broad-winged Hawk	Buteo tineatus Buteo platypterus	SZB
Swainson's Hawk	Buteo swainsoni	PP
Red-tailed Hawk	Buteo jamaicensis	PP, MSP
Ferruginous Hawk	*	PP
Kingfishers	Buteo regalis Alcedinidae	T 1°
Belted Kingfisher		WW, MSP
Detted Ixiligitation	Megaceryle alcyon	VVVV, IVIOF

Woodpeckers Picidae

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker Sphyrapicus varius TNWR

Downy Woodpecker Picoides pubescens SZB, MSP

Hairy Woodpecker Picoides villosus HR

Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus* SZB, HR, TNWR, MSP Pileated Woodpecker *Dryocopus pileatus* SZB, WW, MSP

Falcons and Caracaras Falconidae

American Kestrel Falco sparverius SZB, PP, MSP

Tyrant Flycatchers Tyrannidae

Olive-sided Flycatcher Contopus cooperi SZB

Eastern Wood-Pewee Contopus virens HR, TNWR, MSP

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher Empidonax flaviventris SZB

Alder Flycatcher Empidonax alnorum SZB, TNWR

Willow Flycatcher Empidonax traillii PP

Least FlycatcherEmpidonax minimusSZB, TNWR, MSPEastern PhoebeSayornis phoebeSZB, TNWR, MSP

Great Crested Flycatcher Myiarchus crinitus HS, MSP
Western Kingbird Tyrannus verticalis PP

Eastern Kingbird Tyrannus tyrannus Seen every day

Vireos Vireonidae

Yellow-throated VireoVireo flavifronsHS, MSPBlue-headed VireoVireo solitariusSNF, MSPWarbling VireoVireo gilvusFP, PP

Red-eyed Vireo Vireo olivaceus SZB, WW, TNWR

Crows, Jays and Magpies Corvidae

Blue Jay Cyanocitta cristata SZB, WW, HS, TNWR, MSP

Black-billed Magpie Pica hudsonia SZB

American Crow Corvus brachyrhynchos Seen in every habitat visited

Common Raven Corvus corax SZB, SNF

Larks Alaudidae

Horned Lark Eremophila alpestris TNWR, FP, PP, MSP

Swallows Hirundinidae

Purple Martin Progne subis HS

Tree Swallow Tachycineta bicolor Seen every day
Northern Rough-winged Swallow Stelgidopteryx serripennis SZB, MSP
Bank Swallow Riparia riparia PP

Cliff Swallow Petrochelidon pyrrhonota WW, HS, TNWR, PP, MSP
Barn Swallow Hirundo rustica SZB, HS, FP, PP, MSP

Chickadees and Tits Paridae

Black-capped Chickadee Poecile atricapillus SZB, WW, TNWR, MSP

Nuthatches Sittidae

Red-breasted Nuthatch Sitta canadensis SZB
White-breasted Nuthatch Sitta carolinensis TNWR

Wrens Troglodytidae

House Wren Troglodytes aedon FP, PP, MSP

Sedge Wren Cistothorus platensis SZB, HS, TNWR, FP, PP

Marsh Wren Cistothorus palustris PP, MSP

Kinglets Regulidae

Golden-crowned Kinglet Regulus satrapa SZB, SNF Ruby-crowned Kinglet Regulus calendula SZB, SNF

Thrushes and Allies Turdidae

Eastern Bluebird Sialia sialis SZB, WW, HS, TNWR, FP, PP, MSP

SZB. HR. TNWR. MSP Veerv Catharus fuscescens

Hermit Thrush Catharus guttatus **SNF**

American Robin Turdus migratorius Seen every day

Mockingbirds and Thrashers Mimidae

Gray Catbird Dumetella carolinensis HS. MSP Brown Thrasher HS, PP, MSP Toxostoma rufum

> **Starlings** Sturnidae

European Starling (I) Sturnus vulgaris Seen every day

> Waxwings Bombycillidae

Cedar Waxwing Bombycilla cedrorum HR. TNWR. PP. MSP

Old World Sparrows Passeridae

House Sparrow (I) Seen in all towns Passer domesticus

Wagtails and Pipits Motacillidae

Sprague's Pipit PP Anthus spragueii

Siskins, Crossbills and Allies Fringillidae

House Finch HS, PP Haemorhous mexicanus

Purple Finch Haemorhous purpureus SZB, SNF, TNWR

Pine Siskin ww Spinus pinus

American Goldfinch Spinus tristis SZB, WW, HS, TNWR, FP, PP, MSP

Longspurs and Snow Buntings Calcariidae

Chestnut-collared Longspur Calcarius ornatus

PP **New World Sparrows** Passerellidae

Chipping Sparrow Spizella passerina HR, SZB, HS, TNWR, PP, MSP Clay-colored Sparrow HR, SZB, HS, TNWR, MSP Spizella pallida

Field Sparrow **MSP** Spizella pusilla PP Vesper Sparrow Pooecetes gramineus Lark Sparrow PP Chondestes grammacus

Savannah Sparrow Passerculus sandwichensis SZB, WW, HS, TNWR, FP, PP, MSP

Grasshopper Sparrow HS, FP, PP Ammodramus savannarum Baird's Sparrow PP Ammodramus bairdii LeConte's Sparrow Ammodramus leconteii SZB, MM Song Sparrow Seen every day Melospiza melodia

Lincoln's Sparrow SZB Melospiza lincolnii

Swamp Sparrow SZB, WW, HS, PP, MSP Melospiza georgiana

SZB, SNF White-throated Sparrow Zonotrichia albicollis

Troupials and Allies Icteridae Xanthocephalus

Yellow-headed Blackbird HS, FP, PP xanthocephalus HS, FP, PP Bobolink Dolichonyx oryzivorus Western Meadowlark FP, PP Sturnella neglecta Orchard Oriole Icterus spurius FP. PP WW, MSP **Baltimore Oriole** Icterus galbula

Red-winged Blackbird Seen every day Agelaius phoeniceus Brown-headed Cowbird SZB. HS. TNWR. FP. PP. MSP Molothrus ater

Brewer's Blackbird Euphagus cyanocephalus PPHS, FP Common Grackle Seen every day Quiscalus quiscula

New World Warblers Parulidae

Ovenbird Seiurus aurocapilla SNF, SZB, MSP

Northern Waterthrush SNF Parkesia noveboracensis

Golden-winged Warbler TNWR, MSP Vermivora chrysoptera Black-and-white Warbler SNF, SZB, HR, MSP Mniotilta varia

Tennessee Warbler SNF Oreothlypis peregrina

Nashville Warbler Oreothlypis ruficapilla SNF, SZB, MSP Connecticut Warbler SZB Oporornis agilis

Mourning Warbler Geothlypis philadelphia SNF, SZB, HR

Common Yellowthroat Geothlypis trichas SNF, SZB, HR, HS, TNWR, PP, MSP

American Redstart SNF, HR, HS, TNWR Setophaga ruticilla

Cape May Warbler Setophaga tigrina SNF Northern Parula SNF Setophaga americana Magnolia Warbler Setophaga magnolia SNF, SZB Blackburnian Warbler **SNF** Setophaga fusca

Yellow Warbler SNF, SZB, HR, HS, TNWR, FP, PP, MSP Setophaga petechia

Chestnut-sided Warbler Setophaga pensylvanica SNF, SZB, HR, TNWR Pine Warbler SNF, SZB, TNWR Setophaga pinus

Yellow-rumped Warbler SNF, SZB Setophaga coronata Black-throated Green Warbler **SNF** Setophaga virens Canada Warbler Cardellina canadensis SZB

Cardinals and Allies Cardinalidae

Northern Cardinal Cardinalis cardinalis ww Rose-breasted Grosbeak SZB, WW Pheucticus ludovicianus Dickcissel PΡ Spiza americana

MAMMALS Squirrels, Prairie Dogs & Marmots

SZB, SNF, WW, FP Eastern Gray Squirrel Sciurus carolinensis

tridecimlineatus

Sciuridae

Eastern Fox Squirrel HS Sciurus niger Red Squirrel SZB Tamiasciurus hudsonicus Eastern Chipmunk SZB Tamias striatus Richardson's Ground-Squirrel PΡ Spermophilus richardsonii

Spermophilus Thirteen-lined Ground-Squirrel HS, PP, MSP

Beavers Castoridae

American Beaver SZB Castor canadensis

> Rats & Mice Muridae

Common Muskrat Ondatra zibethicus HS. MSP

> **Porcupines** Erethizonitidae

Erethizon dorsatum North American Porcupine SZB

> **Rabbits & Hares** Leporidae

White-tailed Jackrabbit FΡ Lepus townsendii

> Raccoons Procyonidae

Northern Raccoon **TNWR** Procyon lotor

> Deer Cervidae

White-tailed Deer Seen most days Odocoileus virginianus

AMPHIBIANS & REPTILES

Toads & Frogs Anurans

Northern Spring Peeper SZB Hyla crucifer

> **Turtles Testudines**

Painted Turtle Chrysemys picta TNWR, PP, MSP

> INSECTS Butterflies

Tiger Swallowtail Papilio glaucus SZB, TNWR
Monarch Danaus plexippus TNWR
Checkered White Pontia protodice FP

Dragonflies

Chalk-fronted Corporal Ladona julia HS
Common Green Darner Anax junius HS