MINNESOTA & NORTH DAKOTA
JUNE 1–10, 2018

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD

LEADER: ERIK BRUHNKE
LIST COMPILED BY: ERIK BRUHNKE

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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.

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.

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 Yellow-rumped 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.

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 Red-tailed 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 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.
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.

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 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](image)

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Name</th>
<th>Scientific Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Waterfowl</em></td>
<td><em>Anatidae</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Greater White-fronted Goose</td>
<td><em>Anas albifrons</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Snow Goose</td>
<td><em>Anser caerulescens</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada Goose</td>
<td><em>Branta canadensis</em></td>
<td>Seen every day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trumpeter Swan</td>
<td><em>Cygnus buccinator</em></td>
<td>SZB, TMWR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wood Duck</td>
<td><em>Aix sponsa</em></td>
<td>SZB, TMWR, MSP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blue-winged Teal</td>
<td><em>Spatula discors</em></td>
<td>WW, PP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northern Shoveler</td>
<td><em>Spatula clypeata</em></td>
<td>SZB, PP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gadwall</td>
<td><em>Mareca strepera</em></td>
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<td>American Wigeon</td>
<td><em>Mareca americana</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mallard</td>
<td><em>Anas platyrhynchos</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Northern Pintail</td>
<td><em>Anas acuta</em></td>
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<td>Green-winged Teal</td>
<td><em>Anas crecca</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Canvasback</td>
<td><em>Aythya valisineria</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ring-necked Duck</td>
<td><em>Aythya collaris</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lesser Scaup</td>
<td><em>Aythya affinis</em></td>
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<td>Common Goldeneye</td>
<td><em>Bucephala clangula</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hooded Merganser</td>
<td><em>Lophodytes cucullatus</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Red-breasted Merganser</td>
<td><em>Mergus serrator</em></td>
<td>LS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ruddy Duck</td>
<td><em>Oxyura jamaicensis</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Pheasants, Grouse and Allies</em></td>
<td><em>Phasianidae</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gray Partridge (I)</td>
<td><em>Perdix perdix</em></td>
<td>PP - We found three of them! Very uncommon bird.</td>
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<td>Ring-necked Pheasant (I)</td>
<td><em>Phasianus colchicus</em></td>
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<td>Sharp-tailed Grouse</td>
<td><em>Tympanuchus phasianellus</em></td>
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<td>Wild Turkey</td>
<td><em>Meleagris gallopavo</em></td>
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<td><em>Grebes</em></td>
<td><em>Podicipedidae</em></td>
<td>WW, PP, MSP</td>
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<td>Pied-billed Grebe</td>
<td><em>Podilymbus podiceps</em></td>
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<td>Red-necked Grebe</td>
<td><em>Podiceps grisegena</em></td>
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<td>Eared Grebe</td>
<td><em>Podiceps nigricolis</em></td>
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<td>Western Grebe</td>
<td><em>Aechmophorus occidentalis</em></td>
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<td><em>Pigeons and Doves</em></td>
<td><em>Columbidae</em></td>
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<td><em>Columbia livia</em></td>
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<td>Eurasian Collared-Dove (I)</td>
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<td>Mourning Dove</td>
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<td>Chimney Swift</td>
<td><em>Chaetura pelagica</em></td>
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<td><em>Hummingbirds</em></td>
<td><em>Trochilidae</em></td>
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<td>Ruby-throated Hummingbird</td>
<td><em>Archilochus colubris</em></td>
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<td><em>Rails, Gallinules and Coots</em></td>
<td><em>Rallidae</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yellow Rail</td>
<td><em>Coturnicops noveboracensis</em></td>
<td>MM - Heard four of them!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Virginia Rail</td>
<td><em>Rallus limicola</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sora</td>
<td><em>Porzana carolina</em></td>
<td>TNWR, PP</td>
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<td>American Coot</td>
<td><em>Fulica americana</em></td>
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<td><em>Cranes</em></td>
<td><em>Gruidae</em></td>
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<td>Sandhill Crane</td>
<td><em>Antigone canadensis</em></td>
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<td><em>Stilts and Avocets</em></td>
<td><em>Recurvirostridae</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>American Avocet</td>
<td><em>Recurvirostra americana</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Plovers and Lapwings</em></td>
<td><em>Charadriidae</em></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Killdeer

**Sandpipers and Allies**

- Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus*  
  **Scolopacidae**
- Sandpiper
- 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**
- 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 macularia*  
  **SZB**
- Willet *Tringa semipalmata*  
  **PP**
- Wilson’s Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor*  
  **PP**
- **Gulls, Terns and Skimmers**
- Franklin’s Gull *Larus 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**
- Common Loon
- **Cormorants**
- Double-crested Cormorant
- **Pelicans**
- American White Pelican
- **Heron, Egrets and Bitterns**
- American Bittern
- Great Blue Heron
- Great Egret
- Snowy Egret
- Cattle Egret
- Black-crowned Night-Heron
- **Ibises and Spoonbills**
- White-faced Ibis
- **New World Vultures**
- Turkey Vulture
- **Osprey**
- Osprey
- **Hawks, Eagles and Kites**
- Bald Eagle
- Northern Harrier
- Sharp-shinned Hawk
- Cooper’s Hawk
- Red-shouldered Hawk
- Broad-winged Hawk
- Swainson’s Hawk
- Red-tailed Hawk
- Ferruginous Hawk
- **Kingfishers**
- Belted Kingfisher
- **Swinson’s Hawk
- Red-tailed Hawk**
- **Ferruginous Hawk**
- **Kingfishers**
- Belted Kingfisher
**Woodpeckers**
- Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
- Downy Woodpecker
- Hairy Woodpecker
- Northern Flicker
- Pileated Woodpecker

**Picidae**
- Sphyrapicus varius
- Picoides pubescens
- Picoides villosus
- Colaptes auratus
- Dryocopus pileatus

**Falcons and Caracaras**
- American Kestrel

**Tyrant Flycatchers**
- Olive-sided Flycatcher
- Eastern Wood-Pewee
- Yellow-bellied Flycatcher
- Alder Flycatcher
- Willow Flycatcher
- Least Flycatcher
- Eastern Phoebe
- Great Crested Flycatcher
- Western Kingbird
- Eastern Kingbird

**Vireos**
- Yellow-throated Vireo
- Blue-headed Vireo
- Warbling Vireo
- Red-eyed Vireo

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

**Larks**
- Horned Lark

**Swallows**
- Purple Martin
- Tree Swallow
- Northern Rough-winged Swallow
- Bank Swallow
- Cliff Swallow
- Barn Swallow

**Chickadees and Tits**
- Black-capped Chickadee

**Nuthatches**
- Red-breasted Nuthatch
- White-breasted Nuthatch

**Wrens**
- House Wren
- Sedge Wren
- Marsh Wren

**Kinglets**
- Golden-crowned Kinglet
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet

**Thrushes and Allies**
- Eastern Bluebird

**Falconidae**
- Falco sparverius

**Tyrannidae**
- Contopus cooperi
- Contopus virens
- Empidonax flaviventris
- Empidonax alnorum
- Empidonax traillii
- Empidonax minimus
- Sayornis phoebe
- Myiarchus crinitus
- Tyrannus verticalis
- Tyrannus tyrannus

**Vireonidae**
- Vireo flavifrons
- Vireo solitarius
- Vireo gilva
- Vireo olivaceus

**Corvidae**
- Cyanocitta cristata
- Pica hudsonia
- Corvus brachyrhynchos
- Corvus corax

**Alaudidae**
- Eremophila alpestris

**Hirundinidae**
- Progne sabis
- Tachycineta bicolor
- Stelgidopteryx serripennis
- Riparia riparia
- Petrochelidon pyrrhonota
- Hirundo rustica

**Paridae**
- Poecile atricapillus

**Sittidae**
- Sitta canadensis
- Sitta carolinensis

**Troglodytidae**
- Trogodytes aedon
- Cistothus platensis
- Cistothus palastris

**Regulidae**
- Regulus satrapa
- Regulus calendula

**Turdidae**
- Sialia sialis

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours 8 Minnesota & North Dakota, 2018
Veery
Hermit Thrush
American Robin

Mockingbirds and Thrashers
Gray Catbird
Brown Thrasher

Starlings
European Starling (I)

Waxwings
Cedar Waxwing

Old World Sparrows
House Sparrow (I)

Wagtails and Pipits
Sprague's Pipit

Siskins, Crossbills and Allies
House Finch
Purple Finch
Pine Siskin
American Goldfinch

Longspurs and Snow Buntings
Chestnut-collared Longspur

New World Sparrows
Chipping Sparrow
Clay-colored Sparrow
Field Sparrow
Vesper Sparrow
Lark Sparrow
Savannah Sparrow
Grasshopper Sparrow
Baird's Sparrow
LeConte's Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Lincoln's Sparrow
Swamp Sparrow
White-throated Sparrow

Troupials and Allies
Yellow-headed Blackbird
Bobolink
Western Meadowlark
Orchard Oriole
Baltimore Oriole
Red-winged Blackbird
Brown-headed Cowbird
Brewer's Blackbird
Common Grackle

New World Warblers
Ovenbird
Northern Waterthrush
Golden-winged Warbler
Black-and-white Warbler
Tennessee Warbler
Nashville Warbler

Veery
Catharus fuscescens
Catharus guttatus
Turdis migratorius

Mimidae
Dumetella carolinensis
Toxostoma rufum

Sturnidae
Sturnus vulgaris

Bombycillidae
Bombycilla cedrorum

Passeridae
Passer domesticus

Motacillidae
Anthus spragueii

Fringillidae
Haemorhous mexicanus
Haemorhous purpureus
Spinus pinus
Spinus tristis

Calciardiidae
Calcarius ornatus

Passerellidae
Spizella passerina
Spizella pallida
Spizella pusilla
Poecetes gramineus
Chondestes grammacus
Passerulus sandwichianus
Anmodramus savannarum
Anmodramus bairdii
Ammodramus leconteii
Melospiza melodia
Melospiza lincolnnii
Melospiza georgiana
Zonotrichia albicollis

Icteridae
Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus
Dolichonyx oryzivorus
Sturnella neglecta
Icterus spurius
Icterus galbula
Agelaius phoeniceus
Molothrus ater
Euphagus cyanocephalus
Quiscalus quiscula

Parulidae
Seiurus aurocapilla
Parusia noveboracensis
Vermivora chrysoptera
Mniotilta varia
Oreothlypis peregrina
Oreothlypis ruficapilla

SZB, HR, TNWR, MSP
SNF
Seen every day

HR, MSP
HS, PP

HR, TNWR, PP, MSP

Seen in all towns

SR

HR, SZB, HS, TNWR, PP, MSP

HR, SZB, HS, TNWR, MSP

MSP

PP

SZB, WW, HS, TNWR, FP, PP, MSP

HR, FP, PP

SZB, MM

SZB

SZB, WW, HS, PP, MSP

SZB, SNF

SNF, SZB, MSP

SNF

TPWS, FP

SNF, SZB, HR, MSP

SNF

SNF, SZB, MSP
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<th>Connecticut Warbler</th>
<th>Oporornis agilis</th>
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<td>Mourning Warbler</td>
<td>Geothlypis philadelphia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Common Yellowthroat</td>
<td>Geothlypis trichas</td>
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<tr>
<td>American Redstart</td>
<td>Setophaga tigrina</td>
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<td>Cape May Warbler</td>
<td>Setophaga americana</td>
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<td>Magnolia Warbler</td>
<td>Setophaga fusca</td>
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<td>Blackburnian Warbler</td>
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<td>Yellow Warbler</td>
<td>Setophaga pinus</td>
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<td>Chestnut-sided Warbler</td>
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<td>Pine Warbler</td>
<td>Setophaga virens</td>
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<td>Yellow-rumped Warbler</td>
<td>Cardellina canadensis</td>
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<td>Black-throated Green Warbler</td>
<td>Cardinalis cardinalis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada Warbler</td>
<td>Pheucticus ludovicianus</td>
<td>SZB, WW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardinals and Allies</td>
<td>Spiza americana</td>
<td>PP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**MAMMALS**

**Squirrels, Prairie Dogs & Marmots**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eastern Gray Squirrel</th>
<th>Sciurus carolinensis</th>
<th>SZB, SNF, WW, FP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Fox Squirrel</td>
<td>Sciurus niger</td>
<td>HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Squirrel</td>
<td>Tamiasciurus hudsonicus</td>
<td>SZB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Chipmunk</td>
<td>Tamias striatus</td>
<td>SZB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richardson’s Ground-Squirrel</td>
<td>Spermophilus richardsonii</td>
<td>PP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thirteen-lined Ground-Squirrel</td>
<td>Spermophilus tridecimlineatus</td>
<td>HS, PP, MSP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Beavers**

| American Beaver | Castor canadensis | SZB |

**Rats & Mice**

| Common Muskrat | Ondatra zibethicus | HS, MSP |

**Porcupines**

| North American Porcupine | Erethizon dorsatum | SZB |

**Rabbits & Hares**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>White-tailed Jackrabbit</th>
<th>Lepus townsendii</th>
<th>FP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raccoons</td>
<td>Procyon lotor</td>
<td>TNWR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Deer**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Northern Raccoon</th>
<th>Odocoileus virginianus</th>
<th>Seen most days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White-tailed Deer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**AMPHIBIANS & REPTILES**

**Toads & Frogs**

| Northern Spring Peeper | Hyla crucifer | SZB |

**Turtles**

| 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