

NEBRASKA SANDHILL CRANES & PRAIRIE CHICKENS

MARCH 15-22, 2022

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A small roost of Sandhill Cranes awaits sunrise on Nebraska's Platte River © Rick Wright

The great herds of bison are gone, and the Passenger Pigeon is no more—but springtime on the Great Plains is still witness to one of the greatest migration spectacles in the world, when untold numbers of waterfowl and half a million cranes gather along the winding, braided Platte River. On the nearby prairies of Nebraska's vast Sandhills, another drama plays out: the ancient and moving courtship dances of Greater Prairie-Chickens.

Set in the very middle of the Great Plains and the North American continent, Nebraska features an avifauna that famously combines east and west, north and south. The deciduous forests lining the Missouri River are home to such Carolinian specialties as Eastern Gray Squirrel and Red-bellied Woodpecker, while the tall grass of the state's southeast is home to Western Meadowlark and Franklin's Ground Squirrel. The West truly begins in central Nebraska, where Mule Deer and Ferruginous Hawks live among the short grass and yuccas. With two days in the Nebraska Sandhills, one of America's great surviving wild lands, we will come to appreciate the tremendous biodiversity and unique human heritage of what too many travelers think of as just "flyover" country.

March 15, Day 1: Arrival in Omaha. Participants should plan to arrive in Omaha by 1:30 p.m. today (Omaha Airport code is OMA). A room will be reserved in your name at our hotel near the airport in Carter Lake, which geographic accident has placed politically in Iowa. We will meet in the hotel lobby at 2:00 p.m. for a trip across the Missouri River to Lake Manawa and an early dinner in Council Bluffs, Iowa. Here we will scan the lake for waterfowl and other early migrants, watching especially for such less common diving ducks as Greater Scaup and Hooded Mergansers, Bald Eagles, and the hordes of Ring-billed and Herring Gulls that stream in to roost for the night. At dusk we'll listen for the amazing courtship flights of American Woodcocks, their buzzing sometimes accompanied by the hoots of a Barred Owl. In most years, we hear (and usually see) woodcocks only here at Lake Manawa.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn, Carter Lake, Iowa



Red-headed Woodpecker © Rick Wright

March 16, Day 2: Missouri River Valley and West to Kearney. After breakfast at our hotel, we will spend the morning exploring the wooded bluffs and floodplain of the Missouri River, an important corridor for a wide range of migrants and home to several resident species near the northwestern edge of their range. We should find a few Harris's Sparrows among the juncos and American Tree Sparrows, and we will check blackbird flocks for wintering or migrant Rusty Blackbirds. Wild Turkeys occur in good numbers, and we might turn up Barred Owl, Pileated Woodpecker, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, or other woodland birds more typical of areas farther south and east in the U.S.

We often find a few Red-headed Woodpeckers on the ridges; their numbers explode dramatically in years with good acorn crops. They are among the most dashing of their dashing clan, are common breeders and often common winterers in the woodlands of eastern Nebraska. If any notable rarities are present within an hour or so of Omaha, we will leave the Missouri Valley to have a look.

After lunch, we will make the three-hour drive west to Kearney, arriving in time for an early supper and our first experience with the Sandhill Cranes as they mass to roost on the Platte River.

NIGHT: Fairfield Inn and Suites, Kearney, Nebraska



A quizzical Ross's Goose watches its watchers © Rick Wright

March 17, Day 3: The Central Platte Valley.

After breakfast in our hotel, we will visit another nearby crane roost, arriving just before sunrise to watch the birds leave the river and spread out over sixty miles of fields and wetlands. The rest of the day will be devoted to an exploration of back roads in search of waterfowl, raptors, and sparrows. If water conditions are favorable, we may dip south into the western Rainwater Basin, where northbound waterfowl sometimes congregate in the thousands. In some years, the Snow Goose flock here totals hundreds of thousands, and Greater White-fronted, Canada, and Cackling geese are also present in large numbers. Ross's Geese can be fairly common in the flocks, and we

will take the opportunity to study them wherever they appear. If the spring is an early one, we might also see Eared or Horned grebes, American White Pelican, Long-billed Dowitcher, Pectoral Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, or Franklin's Gull. Dusk will again find us on the banks of the Platte River, as endless lines of cranes descend onto their traditional sandbar roosts and settle noisily in for the night. We will have dinner in Kearney, then retire with the spectacular sights and sounds of the crane flight still filling our eyes, ears, and imaginations.

NIGHT: Fairfield Inn and Suites, Kearney, Nebraska

March 18, Day 4: Morning Cranes, and On to the Sandhills Prairies.

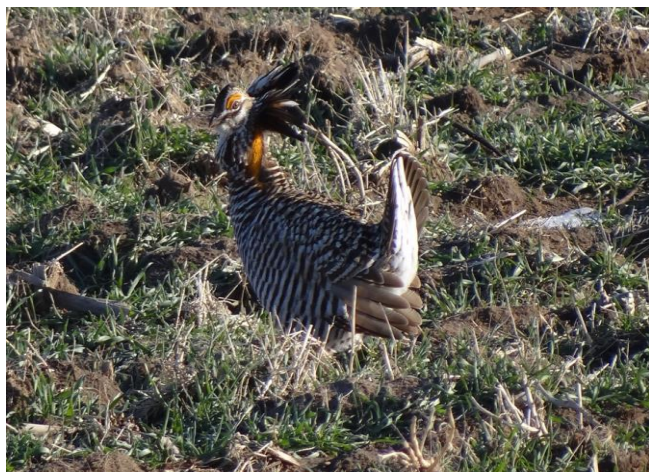
The Platte River at dawn affords a spectacle unlike any on earth. As the sky brightens, what seemed at first islands resolve into vast flocks of cranes crowding the shallow water and sandbars; the low murmur of the roosting birds turns to an unearthly rattling howl when the odd eagle or coyote passes. Soon the cranes swarm across the sky, spreading out onto the nearby fields and wetlands to feed, their prehistoric trumpeting drowning out all other sounds.

After witnessing this moving sight, we'll leave the Platte and its many thousands of cranes behind. As we move west toward North Platte, we should run across more waterfowl and a good selection of raptors, sometimes including Ferruginous Hawk or Prairie Falcon among the common Red-tailed Hawks, Northern Harriers, and American Kestrels. Greater Prairie-chickens are occasionally seen flying across the road, but we can hope for far better views of that species to come. We will have lunch in North Platte, then turn south and bird our way to McCook, arriving there in the late afternoon. After checking in to our hotel, we will attend a short, illustrated presentation by a local naturalist about southwest Nebraska's grouse and their behavior, then have dinner in town.



A Ferruginous Hawk takes advantage of a rare elevated perch in the Nebraska Sandhills © Rick Wright

NIGHT: Holiday Inn Express, McCook, Nebraska



This male Greater Prairie-Chicken is no doubt irresistible to the hens—and he seems to know it. © Rick Wright

March 19, Day 5: Dancing Chickens. We will rise before dawn to be driven by our local guide to the dancing grounds of the Greater Prairie-chickens, where we will take our places in a small blind as the males perform their oddly captivating courtship displays on the sparsely vegetated ground. If the morning is warm and bright, Horned Larks and Western Meadowlarks will also be singing from the ground and the fence posts or in the prairie sky. Mule Deer often pick their way across the lek; the grouse react more vehemently if a Coyote or a Ferruginous Hawk appears.

We can expect to be in the blind for about two hours, then return to McCook and what will be by then its very welcome restrooms. After a good hot breakfast and perhaps a short mid-morning break, we will drive out onto the sandsage prairies in search of specialties such as

Trumpeter Swan, Northern Shrike, and the dramatically declining Black-billed Magpie. Depending on the weather, local reservoirs may have good numbers of ducks, American White Pelicans, and grebes, possibly including Western or Eared. We will be back in McCook in time for a rest before dinner.

NIGHT: Holiday Inn Express, McCook, Nebraska

March 20, Day 6: Return to the Platte. We'll check out of our hotel this morning, then start our drive east to Grand Island, two and a half hours away. Our precise route will be determined by news of recent rarities or remarkable concentrations of birds, but we will make a point of visiting at least one site in Nebraska's Rainwater Basin, where large marshes and sheetwater on the fields attract sometimes startling numbers of migrant birds. The million-strong flocks of geese pass through in February or early March, but we may encounter large numbers of Redheads, American Wigeon, and other ducks, while the first Baird's and Pectoral Sandpipers, Long-billed Dowitchers, and American Golden-Plover of spring may be present. Once back in Grand Island, we will have an early supper in our hotel before paying a final evening visit to the cranes.



A male Sharp-tailed Grouse pauses in his frantic display. © Rick Wright

NIGHT: Quality Inn and Conference Center, Grand Island, Nebraska



Whooping Crane © Rick Wright

March 21, Day 7: The Lower Platte and Return to the East. The migration of the Whooping Crane through central Nebraska typically begins in early April, but recent years have seen one or two birds appearing in the Grand Island area as early as mid-March. The return of the Whooping Crane is one of the great conservation stories of the past 100 years, the result of the unflagging efforts of talented scientists and responsible landowners. If one of these birds—or an even rarer Common Crane, an annually occurring needle in the big gray

feathered haystack—has been reported, we will spend the morning in search of the rarity; otherwise, after breakfast, we will make the two-hour drive back to the Omaha area, with a stop at one of the most productive birding sites on the lower Platte River, Schramm State Park. Outstanding views of Harris's Sparrows and a good variety of junco "flavors" can often be had here, and if the winter has been warm or the spring early, we have a chance at finding a Hermit Thrush, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, or Myrtle Warbler around the ponds or in the steep, heavily wooded ravines. We plan to arrive in Omaha in time for a break before our final meal together.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn, Carter Lake, Iowa

March 22, Day 8: Departure for Home. Our hotel provides free transportation to the nearby Omaha airport. Participants may plan to return home 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 7 participants.

TOUR LEADER: Rick Wright



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 **TBA** (\$2495 in 2018) per person in double occupancy from Omaha. This includes all food from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 8, all lodging and ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leader/s. It does not include airfare from your home to Omaha and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **TBA**.

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 (October 16, 2021) prior to the tour departure date.

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; 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/

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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: Please limit your baggage to one piece of luggage and one smaller carry-on or day pack. Hard suitcases are not recommended; softer bags and bags with wheels are preferred. As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, other valuables, a warm change of clothing, toiletry items, medications, and travel documents in your carry-on bag.

CLOTHING: We will hope for a warm early spring, but participants should plan on dressing for winter weather, with a warm coat, insulated boots (if not snow, there will be mud), hat, gloves, and thermal underwear. A sweater or two and a rain coat/jacket are also recommended. The grouse blinds will be cold in the mornings, so consider bringing a small blanket or thick towel from home to sit on. Some participants place chemical hand warmers in their gloves and boots the night before our visits to the blinds, and hotel hair dryers were created for nothing if not to warm woolen socks in the early morning. Informal dress is the rule throughout the tour.

LAUNDRY: Coin-operated washing machines and dryers are available in our hotels, but it is a far better idea to simply bring enough clothing to see you through the tour.

FOOTWEAR: Bring a broken-in pair of insulated hiking boots or heavy trail shoes, ideally waterproof, for our time afield; snow or mud can be encountered anywhere on this trip. Normal walking shoes or tennis shoes will be fine for evenings.

EQUIPMENT: We recommend a pair of binoculars in good condition and a camera for capturing memorable moments. Feel free to bring a spotting scope, though the leader will also have his. Sunglasses, sunscreen, and lip balm are highly recommended as protection against sun and, especially, wind. A bottle for carrying water in the field is a good idea, though we will always have bottled water and other drinks available in the van. An alarm clock will be helpful for our early morning visits to the grouse blinds. A belt pack or day pack will be handy for books, sunscreen, extra clothing layers, field guides, etc. We recommend National Geographic's *Field Guide to the Birds of North America* or *The Sibley Guide to Birds* by David Sibley.

CLIMATE AND WEATHER: March weather varies wildly on the Great Plains. In a "typical" season, highs on the central Platte River will be in the upper 40s and lows in the low 30s F; temperatures are often a few degrees higher in the Omaha area and a few degrees lower in the Sandhills. It is not unusual on this tour to experience a temperature range of over 60° in the course of the week. We can expect wind most of the time, ranging from a light (but often still chilly) breeze to strong winds. Precipitation is possible at any time. On average, rain is more likely in eastern Nebraska and snow in the Sandhills, but any combination is possible—as is a solid week of warm, bright, clear days. Whatever the weather, our mornings spent sitting still in the grouse blinds are likely to feel cold. The weather's variability and the possibility of rapid changes make dressing in layers essential.

CONDITIONS: We will be staying in four hotels of good standard quality. Birding activities will include easy walks along level roadsides and on wide trails; many of our destinations can also be birded from the vehicle, an important consideration should the weather turn cold or rainy. Though the physical demands posed by this tour are modest, and there will be occasional opportunities to sit out a particular walk, you will benefit most from our birding if you are able to walk a mile at a normally slow birding pace. Most of our days will start with breakfast at 6:00, followed by a full morning in the field before stopping for lunch, generally in a fast-food restaurant. We

will usually visit new areas in the afternoon, then have a break before dinner. On our first evening, weather permitting, we will venture out to look for dancing American Woodcock, returning to our hotel around 8:30 p.m. Our mornings in the Sandhills will be earlier, with starts around 5:45 a.m.—but we will have the advantage of having entered a new time zone, making it feel like (small consolation) 6:45. If the birds are active, we generally sit in the blind until after 8:00 a.m., then return to Mullen for a large breakfast before continuing with the rest of the day's birding plans.

TIME: Eastern Nebraska is in the Central Time Zone; during our time in the Sandhills, we will be in the Mountain Time Zone, which is one hour behind Central Time. In both time zones, Daylight Saving Time begins on Sunday, March 13, two days before our tour begins.

MONEY MATTERS: Your trip to Nebraska includes most necessary expenses. You will want to bring enough cash to cover personal expenses not included in the program, such as alcoholic beverages, taxi rides, gifts, laundry, gratuities, and personal items. It is best to carry cash in small denominations, as many places we visit may be unable to provide change for large bills.

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 United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line 800-CDC-INFO (232-4636), or you can check the website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

Those who are not fit for light to moderate physical activity, including those with physical disabilities that affect mobility and balance, heart or immune deficiencies, or other conditions associated with poor health, are advised not to join the trip. Comprehensive travel insurance is available and recommended. Please consult your insurance agent or existing policy, if in effect, for the terms and limitations of your existing coverage, and refer to the section on Trip Cancellation Insurance, above.

Sun Exposure – The sun's ultraviolet rays are damaging to the eyes and skin with prolonged exposure. Any time you are outdoors, you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. Severe, potentially very painful sunburn is possible whatever the temperature or cloud cover, and it will affect your level of enjoyment. Always protect yourself when outdoors and be sure to bring an ample supply of high-SPF sunscreen and lip balm. We strongly recommend the use of ultraviolet-blocking, polarized sunglasses.

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>.

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 which has a wide selection; www.buteobooks.com and www.nhbs.com which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and www.abebooks.com for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

Field Guides

Sibley, D. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. 2nd Ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014. Either of the smaller regional volumes published in 2016 is also usable in Nebraska, though those books gain portability at the expense of the ingenious and informative layout of the large single-volume edition.

Dunn, J., and J. Alderfer. *National Geographic Field Guide to North American Birds*. 7th Ed. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2017.

Birds

Farrar, J. *Birding Nebraska*. Lincoln, NE: Nebraskaland, 2004.

Forsberg, M. *On Ancient Wings: The Sandhill Cranes of North America*. Lincoln, NE: Michael Forsberg Photography, 2004.

Hoch, G. *Booming from the Mists of Nowhere: The Story of the Greater Prairie-Chicken*. Iowa City, IA: University Iowa Press, 2015.

Sharpe, R., et al. *Birds of Nebraska: Their Distribution and Temporal Occurrence*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2001.

Vance, J., and N. Paothong. *Save the Last Dance: A Story of North American Grassland Grouse*. Jefferson City, MO: Paothong Photography, 2012.

Others

Janovy, J. *Keith County Journal*. Lincoln, NE: Bison Boks, 1979.

Johnsgard, P. *The Platte: Channels in Time*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1984.

Johnsgard, P. *This Fragile Land: A Natural History of the Nebraska Sandhills*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.

Johnsgard, P. *The Nature of Nebraska*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2001.

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 at the time of publication 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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