

# **MINNESOTA & NORTH DAKOTA**

**JUNE 1 – 9, 2009**

**LEADERS: KIM ECKERT**

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**Leader: Kim Eckert**

### **Tour Summary:**

I couldn't be entirely sure, but as we drove the back roads of North Dakota on Day 6, it certainly looked like some of those raindrops hitting the windshield had the characteristics of wet snowflakes! After all, the official "high" where we were that day was a mere 44 degrees, some 30 degrees colder than what it should have been—and an inch or two of snow was confirmed less than 100 miles west of us.

So, while I'm hesitant to claim we officially had snow for the first time ever on this tour, we can confirm we had more than our share of rain, cold (e.g., below freezing at dawn on Day 3), and high winds. (It was almost as if the paragraph on recommended clothing in the tour's itinerary should have come from our January Minnesota tour.) Still, all that weather impacted us more than the birds, since we ended up with an amazing total of 213 species—eight more than ever before!

Much of our success was clearly due to a delayed spring migration, since May's weather had also been cold and wet, and several migrants which are normally gone after mid-May were still around. Most of these involved shorebirds: while normally this tour can expect no more than 10 species, this time we had 20. The best of these were the Black-bellied and American Golden-Plovers, Red Knots, and Whimbrels in Duluth, all species rare and easy to miss here even in May.

But it takes a lot more than just migrants to surpass 200 on this tour. There was a long list of relatively difficult species which are easily missed without special effort and some luck. Among these, the Great Gray Owl we saw certainly topped this list. Not only is it the most highly sought of all Minnesota's specialties, but this owl was still out hunting along that Sax-Zim Bog back road in mid-morning, and it also paused to look skyward for several seconds for no apparent reason. That reason became apparent, however, when we also looked up to see a Northern Goshawk (missed on most tours) circling overhead!

The Connecticut Warbler is probably second only to the Great Gray on that list of sought-after specialties, and the first one we saw was out the van windows just up the road from the owl. But we later had an even better one, as it uncharacteristically remained silent, below eye level, out in the open, and on the edge of the road for all to watch at leisure. Our other pleasant surprises of the boreal forest were in Lake County northeast of Duluth: a drumming Black-backed Woodpecker, Olive-sided Flycatchers and a handsome Cape May Warbler (still migrating?), and a silent and motionless Philadelphia Vireo hidden behind birch leaves.

Despite that "raging blizzard" out in North Dakota, we managed to turn up several difficult species there. Certainly, turning up both a singing Baird's Sparrow at Chase Lake National Wildlife Refuge and skylarking Sprague's Pipits near Tuttle on the same morning was a relief,

since both have declined and become uncertain propositions in recent years. We also turned up such easily missed sparrows as the Nelson's Sharp-tailed (which posed quietly on a fence wire next to the van) and Le Conte's (one of these actually ran under the van). And on the way back from Dakota on Day 8, there were these unexpected bonuses: 3 Least Bitterns (seldom seen on this tour), both species of cuckoos, and a vocal pair of Barred Owls emerging into view at midday.

Memorable as well were our experiences with species often taken for granted on this tour. Within a short stretch of the same road in Maplewood State Park were a Ruffed Grouse visibly drumming on a log (a lifer for me!?), a family of baby Hooded Mergansers (dare I say cute?), our only Yellow-billed Cuckoos, and our first Golden-winged Warbler (one of 22 warblers on the list) in a week. Within a mile or two in North Dakota we found a Horned Grebe nest and both Western and Clark's grebes dancing in mad dashes across the water. And, not to be outdone by that running-under-the-van Le Conte's, a Sedge Wren nearly perched on the hood of the van.

Even some mammals were every bit as eye-opening as the birds. A gray wolf stood out in the open at dawn along Highway 61 not far from Duluth. Several red foxes were spotted, including a mother and two pups by their den. Those pronghorn along I-94 in North Dakota were much farther east than normal and a first for this tour. Finally, and just about as entertaining as any bird we saw, a badger posed at his burrow next to a North Dakota highway.

### **Itinerary:**

June 1 – Post-dinner option for part of group to Canal Park and Park Point in Duluth.

June 2 – All morning and early afternoon in the Sax-Zim Bog (especially Arkola Rd., McDavitt Rd., Owl Ave., Blue Spruce Rd., and Lake Nichols Rd.); optional post-dinner return to Park Point. [cold, overcast, with high winds by late morning]

June 3 – All day in and near the Superior National Forest in Lake Co., including Lake Co. Rd. 2, Hwy. 1, Trappers Lake Rd., and Lake Co. Rd. 7 from Finland to Crosby-Manitou State Park. [clear, cold in morning (below freezing), not as cold by afternoon, light winds]

June 4 – Morning return to Sax-Zim Bog (especially Co. Rd. 133, Blue Spruce Rd., Owl Ave., Arkola Rd., and McDavitt Rd.); afternoon drive to Detroit Lakes via brief stops at Rabey Tree Farm and Walker sewage ponds. [not as cold, but high winds]

June 5 – Morning around Hamden Slough NWR (briefly) and Felton Prairie; afternoon drive to Jamestown via some Barnes Co. side roads along I-94. [cold again and still very windy]

June 6 – All day in Stutsman and Kidder Co's, especially Chase Lake NWR and vicinity, Pearl L., Chicago L., Tuttle State School Land, DeWald Slough and vicinity; post-dinner option along side roads E and N of Jamestown. [lighter winds, but steady light rain (and some snowflakes?) by mid-morning, and cold (highs in mid-40s = 30 degrees below normal!)]

June 7 – All day return to Stutsman and Kidder Co's: Pearl L., Chicago L., Pettibone, a Tappen-to-Dawson side road along I-94, L. Isabel, Dewald Slough, and Dawson WMA. [moderate winds, not as cold (highs in the 50s), not as rainy]

June 8 – Morning return to Otter Tail - Clay Co. line and Maplewood State Park in Minnesota; afternoon drive to McGregor, and evening birding/listening in the McGregor Marsh. [steady rain on drive to Minn., then no rain and light winds, but still cool in the 50s]

June 9 – Morning return to Duluth via sides roads along Hwy. 65 and Rabey Tree Farm.

### **Bird List:**

MB = Minnesota boreal forest zone, mostly St. Louis and Lake counties (June 1-4) and Aitkin County (June 8-9)

MP = prairie landscape of western Becker and Clay counties, Minnesota (June 5)

ND = North Dakota (June 5-7)

Mo = Otter Tail County and vicinity, Minnesota (June 8)

Canada Goose MB MP ND Mo (a.k.a. Honkers)

Trumpeter Swan MB (pair along Hwy. 200)

Wood Duck MB MP Mo

Gadwall MP ND

American Wigeon ND

American Black Duck MB (Greenwood Lake)

Mallard MB MP ND Mo

Blue-winged Teal MB MP ND Mo

Northern Shoveler MP ND

Northern Pintail ND

Green-winged Teal MB ND

Canvasback ND

Redhead ND

Ring-necked Duck MB ND

**Greater Scaup** MB (Duluth harbor; normally gone north by mid-May)

Lesser Scaup ND

Bufflehead ND

Common Goldeneye MB (w/young at Walker sewage ponds)

Hooded Merganser MB ND Mo (mother w/young within a few feet of the road)

Common Merganser MB

Red-breasted Merganser MB

Ruddy Duck MP ND

Ring-necked Pheasant ND Mo (almost abundant)

**Ruffed Grouse** MB Mo (one actually drummed as we watched from the van; also others heard)

Sharp-tailed Grouse MB ND (not displaying, but seen pretty well)

Greater Prairie-Chicken MP (ditto, at Felton)

Wild Turkey MB Mo

Common Loon MB

Pied-billed Grebe MB ND

Horned Grebe ND (on a nest near DeWald Slough)  
 Red-necked Grebe MP ND  
 Eared Grebe ND  
 Western Grebe ND (including dancing pairs)  
**Clark's Grebe** ND (3 individuals, including one dancing with a Western)  
 American White Pelican ND Mo  
 Double-crested Cormorant MB MP ND Mo  
 American Bittern MB ND  
**Least Bittern** Mo (3 heard & 2 seen; may be a first for this tour?)  
 Great Blue Heron MB ND Mo  
 Great Egret MP ND Mo  
 Snowy Egret ND  
 Cattle Egret ND  
 Green Heron MB Mo  
 Black-crowned Night-Heron ND  
 White-faced Ibis ND (one near DeWald Slough)  
 Turkey Vulture MB Mo  
 Osprey MB Mo  
 Bald Eagle MB MP Mo  
 Northern Harrier MB MP ND Mo  
 Sharp-shinned Hawk ND (unusual in summer on the prairie)  
 Cooper's Hawk MP ND  
**Northern Goshawk** MB (a fly-over spotted by the Great Gray Owl)  
 Broad-winged Hawk MB  
 Swainson's Hawk ND  
 Red-tailed Hawk MB MP ND Mo  
 Ferruginous Hawk ND (an impressive but declining raptor)  
 American Kestrel MB MP Mo  
 Merlin MB  
 Peregrine Falcon MB (pair in downtown Duluth)  
 Yellow Rail MB (heard-only, alas, in the distance at McGregor)  
 Virginia Rail ND Mo  
 Sora MB ND Mo  
 American Coot MP ND  
 Sandhill Crane MB  
 Black-bellied Plover MB ND (late migrants in breeding plumage)  
**American Golden-Plover** MB (even more handsome than the Black-bellieds)  
 Semipalmated Plover MB (late migrant)  
 Killdeer MB MP ND Mo  
 American Avocet ND  
 Spotted Sandpiper MB MP ND  
 Willet ND  
 Upland Sandpiper MB ND  
**Whimbrel** MB (not only late Duluth migrants, but also rare in Minnesota)  
 Marbled Godwit MP ND  
 Ruddy Turnstone ND (another late migrant)  
**Red Knot** MB (3 late individuals at Park Point; only a rare/casual migrant in Minnesota)  
 Sanderling MB ND (this and the next 5 species all late migrants)

Semipalmated Sandpiper ND  
 Least Sandpiper ND  
 White-rumped Sandpiper ND  
 Pectoral Sandpiper ND  
 Dunlin MB  
 Wilson's Snipe MB ND  
 Wilson's Phalarope ND (= 20 shorebird species)  
 Franklin's Gull ND  
 Bonaparte's Gull MB (Walker sewage ponds)  
 Ring-billed Gull MB ND Mo  
 California Gull ND  
 Herring Gull MB  
 Caspian Tern MB (late migrants or summering non-breeders)  
 Black Tern MP ND Mo  
 Common Tern MB  
 Forster's Tern ND  
 Rock Pigeon MB MP ND Mo  
 Mourning Dove MB MP ND Mo  
**Yellow-billed Cuckoo** Mo (at the northern edge of its range)  
 Black-billed Cuckoo Mo (unpredictable and uncommon, but several seen/heard)  
 Great Horned Owl MP ND  
**Barred Owl** Mo (an exciting/excited vocal pair at Maplewood State Park)  
**Great Gray Owl** MB (still hunting – and spotting goshawks! – in mid-morning)  
 Chimney Swift MB ND Mo  
 Ruby-throated Hummingbird MB  
 Belted Kingfisher MB MP Mo  
 Red-bellied Woodpecker MB Mo (near its northern range limit)  
 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker MB Mo  
 Downy Woodpecker MB Mo  
 Hairy Woodpecker MB MP ND  
**Black-backed Woodpecker** MB (a cooperative drumming female along Lake Co. Rd. 2)  
 Northern Flicker MB MP ND Mo  
 Pileated Woodpecker Mo (heard-only)  
 Olive-sided Flycatcher MB Mo (some still migrating)  
 Eastern Wood-Pewee MB MP Mo  
 Yellow-bellied Flycatcher MB (especially at Sax-Zim)  
 Alder Flycatcher MB ND (also some still migrating)  
 Willow Flycatcher ND  
 Least Flycatcher MB MP ND Mo  
 Eastern Phoebe MB Mo  
 Great Crested Flycatcher MB Mo  
 Western Kingbird MP ND  
 Eastern Kingbird MB MP ND Mo  
 Yellow-throated Vireo MB Mo (including an unusual singing male at Sax-Zim)  
 Blue-headed Vireo MB  
 Warbling Vireo MB MP Mo  
**Philadelphia Vireo** MB (motionless behind the leaves at Crosby-Manitou State Park)  
 Red-eyed Vireo MB MP Mo

Gray Jay MB (including juveniles at Sax-Zim)  
 Blue Jay MB MP Mo  
 American Crow MB MP ND Mo  
 Common Raven MB  
 Horned Lark MP ND  
 Purple Martin MB MP ND Mo  
 Tree Swallow MB MP ND Mo  
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow MB  
 Bank Swallow MP ND  
 Cliff Swallow MB MP ND Mo  
 Barn Swallow MB MP ND Mo  
 Black-capped Chickadee MB Mo  
 Boreal Chickadee MB (heard-only, alas, at Sax-Zim)  
 Red-breasted Nuthatch MB  
 White-breasted Nuthatch MB  
 Brown Creeper MB  
 House Wren MB MP ND Mo  
 Winter Wren MB (heard-only)  
 Sedge Wren MB MP ND Mo (one almost perched on the van)  
 Marsh Wren ND Mo  
 Golden-crowned Kinglet MB  
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet MB  
 Eastern Bluebird MB MP ND Mo  
 Veery MB MP ND Mo  
 Hermit Thrush MB  
 American Robin MB MP ND Mo  
 Gray Catbird MB MP ND Mo  
 Brown Thrasher MB MP ND  
 European Starling MB MP ND Mo  
**Sprague's Pipit** ND (at least 3 in impressive aerial displays)  
 Cedar Waxwing MB ND Mo  
 Golden-winged Warbler MB Mo (best view near Finland)  
 Tennessee Warbler MB (probably a late migrant)  
 Nashville Warbler MB  
 Northern Parula MB  
 Yellow Warbler MB MP ND Mo  
 Chestnut-sided Warbler MB  
 Magnolia Warbler MB  
 Cape May Warbler MB (unexpected along Lake Co. Rd. 2; also heard the last morning)  
 Yellow-rumped Warbler MB  
 Black-throated Green Warbler MB  
 Blackburnian Warbler MB  
 Pine Warbler MB  
 Palm Warbler MB (Sax-Zim)  
 Bay-breasted Warbler MB (unexpected migrant female at Sax-Zim)  
 Black-and-white Warbler MB  
 American Redstart MB MP ND Mo  
 Ovenbird MB Mo

Northern Waterthrush MB  
**Connecticut Warbler** MB (especially close view along Co. Rd. 133 at Sax-Zim)  
 Mourning Warbler MB  
 Common Yellowthroat MB MP ND Mo  
 Canada Warbler MB (= 22 warbler species)  
 Scarlet Tanager MB (finally seen the last morning)  
 Chipping Sparrow MB MP ND Mo  
 Clay-colored Sparrow MP ND Mo  
 Field Sparrow Mo  
 Vesper Sparrow ND  
 Lark Sparrow ND (brief fly-by near Dawson)  
 Lark Bunting ND (Chase Lake NWR)  
 Savannah Sparrow MB MP ND  
**Baird's Sparrow** ND (this plain sparrow with a nice song continues to decline)  
 Grasshopper Sparrow MP ND  
**Le Conte's Sparrow** MB ND (including one running under the van)  
 Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow MB ND (posing on a Chicago Lake fence; also heard at McGregor)  
 Song Sparrow MB MP ND Mo  
 Lincoln's Sparrow MB  
 Swamp Sparrow MB MP ND Mo  
 White-throated Sparrow MB  
 Chestnut-collared Longspur MP ND (best views at Felton)  
 Northern Cardinal MB  
 Rose-breasted Grosbeak MB Mo  
 Indigo Bunting MB Mo  
 Bobolink MB MP ND Mo  
 Red-winged Blackbird MB MP ND Mo  
 Eastern Meadowlark MB (Sax-Zim only)  
 Western Meadowlark MP ND Mo  
 Yellow-headed Blackbird MP ND Mo  
 Brewer's Blackbird MP ND  
 Common Grackle MB MP ND Mo  
 Brown-headed Cowbird MB MP ND Mo  
 Orchard Oriole MP ND Mo  
 Baltimore Oriole MB MP Mo  
 Purple Finch MB  
 House Finch MB ND  
 Pine Siskin MB MP  
 American Goldfinch MB MP ND Mo  
 House Sparrow MB MP ND Mo

**Also seen/heard:**

Eastern Cottontail  
 Snowshoe Hare  
 White-tailed Jackrabbit  
 Woodchuck  
 Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel (a.k.a. Minnesota Gopher!)

Gray Squirrel

Red Squirrel

Muskrat

**Gray Wolf** (an amazingly extended view along Hwy. 61)

Red Fox (several sightings, incl. a den with pups – aw!)

Mink

**Badger** (unusually long look at its ND burrow)

Spotted Skunk

White-tailed Deer

**Pronghorn** (along I-94 E of Jamestown; probably a first for this tour)