

MINNESOTA & NORTH DAKOTA

JUNE 21 - 29, 2010

LEADERS: KIM ECKERT & BRIAN GIBBONS

COMPILED BY: KIM ECKERT

**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, INC.
2525 WALLINGWOOD DRIVE, SUITE 1003
AUSTIN, TX 78746
WWW.VENTBIRD.COM**

Minnesota & North Dakota

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Of the 20 or so species of warblers we see during this tour, the Connecticut is easily the most highly sought. Though this tour has never missed it (dating back to 1982!), I was mildly concerned this time around since several birders recently reported difficulty finding any in the Sax-Zim Bog. (Sax and Zim may be little more than uninhabited railroad sidings near Duluth, but the surrounding bogs and other habitats have become well-known to birders over the years.) But, undeterred by recent reports, off we went to the Bog on our first morning and found there was no need for concern. At the second place we stopped to listen for it, a singing male Connecticut (with its beak full of food) came in to the roadside and offered repeated close views.

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Our second morning took us up into the more closed-canopy Superior National Forest northeast of Duluth in Lake County. Our first stop was quite unexpected, as a family of "Wild" Turkeys appeared along the road, some 100 miles beyond their normal range. (Their origins at some game farm would be suspected, but there were virtually no habitations in the vicinity.) Our second stop was a bit more predictable as we spotted a Northern Hawk Owl a mile from where one was sighted in early June. This Minnesota specialty is normally present just in winter and not to be expected on this tour, but a handful had remained into the breeding season.

Elsewhere in the forest later that morning, we were unable to relocate a hawk owl family seen the previous week, and we looked hard without success for a Great Gray reported the week before that. But some nice consolation prizes were two well-seen pairs of Boreal Chickadees (typically hard to track down in summer) and two Wilson's Warblers (at the southern edge of its breeding range and missed on most tours). The day was also highlighted by our lunch stop and some unexpectedly productive birding at White Pines Wayside along County Road 2. We almost chose not to stop here, as noisy lawn mowing and other maintenance work greeted our arrival. But we stayed until the crew left and were rewarded by a responsive Pileated Woodpecker, a male Ruby-throated Hummingbird, and our first looks at such warblers as Blackburnian, Northern Parula, Black-throated Green, Pine, and Ovenbird.

After our return to Sax-Zim the next morning, co-leader Brian Gibbons (who will inherit this tour in 2011) was pressed into service to lead the group on his own into western Minnesota and North Dakota for the next four days. I had to reluctantly stay behind to check on a potentially serious medical problem, but, as you can see by Brian's italicized comments below, the group did just fine. They saw such prairie specialties as myriads of pothole-nesting ducks, grebes, waders, and shorebirds; a Sharp-tailed Grouse family; Ferruginous Hawks at nests; Short-eared Owls; sky-high Sprague's Pipits; Baird's (now uncommon and highly local) and Nelson's (teed up on a fence wire) sparrows; handsome Chestnut-collared Longspurs; Dickcissels; and more.

Fortunately, the medical “problem” was a false alarm, and I was able to rejoin the group for the final evening and morning in Aitkin County west of Duluth. At dusk, we finally tracked down a Great Gray Owl, as a big female ponderously flew from one tamarack to another, oblivious to our pishing-and-squeaking presence as it hunted for small mammals. And the evening ended with a Yellow Rail clearly heard by all as we stood high and dry on the road—a deep water-filled ditch between us and the rail.

Itinerary (including Brian Gibbons' narratives for June 25-28) –

June 21 – Meet in Duluth for get-acquainted/orientation dinner.

June 22 – All morning and early afternoon in the Sax-Zim Bog: including Co. Rd. 133, Blue Spruce Rd., Co. Rd. 29, Owl Ave., Arkola Rd., Co. Rd. 7, McDavitt Rd., and Stone Lake Rd.; post-dinner option to downtown Duluth & Interstate Island.

June 23 – Most of day in the Superior National Forest in Lake Co.: including Co. Rd. 2, Stony River Forest Rd., Whyte Rd., and Hwy. 1; post-dinner return to Duluth from Two Harbors, through Knife River, along Lake Superior shoreline.

June 24 – Morning return to Sax-Zim Bog, including Co. Rd. 7, Sax Rd., McDavitt Rd., Admiral Rd., and Stone Lake Rd.; afternoon drive (by Brian Gibbons) to Detroit Lakes via stops at Rabey Tree Farm, Walker sewage ponds, and lakes along Hwys. 200 and 34.

June 25 – Morning in & around Felton Prairie, Clay Co.; afternoon drive to Jamestown, ND via some Barnes Co. side roads along I-94 and the state hospital sewage ponds in Jamestown: *Strong thunderstorms delayed our departure from Detroit Lakes. They passed, and we had a beautiful morning, our first in the wide open prairie. Marbled Godwits with young and Upland Sandpipers were right along the road. In Felton Prairie, we saw fledged juvenile Chestnut-collared Longspurs and a nice adult male; Grasshopper Sparrows were singing their buzzy songs. In a little wooded creek we flushed an American Woodcock; also nearby was a Lark Sparrow and a Baltimore Oriole. We took a group picture with a giant Paul Bunyan statue. After we passed through the amazing little burg of Fargo, ND, we headed west from Valley City, birding marshes and ponds. Two Snow Geese, one white and one blue: the white one was at the State Hospital wastewater ponds in Jamestown, ND. A clean sweep of all six expected grebe species. The crazy blue bill of the Ruddy Duck male was a crowd-pleaser. A male Belted Kingfisher caught a large fish, much bigger than its bill. The bird proceeded to whack it on a rock for several minutes, then flew off with it, presumably to feed young or the female. It seemed impossible that an adult bird, much less a youngster, could eat that fish. – BG*

June 26 – All day in Kidder Co., ND, especially Tuttle State School Land, DeWald Slough, and vicinity: *Again thunderstorms delayed our birding. This time we were at the Tuttle School Section: this patch of prairie was full of wonderful birds. Chestnut-collared Longspurs in song flight; Upland Sandpipers and a distant Sprague's Pipit were in flight displays, too. Short-eared Owls patrolled the prairie, as Black Terns commuted across it with their bills full of bugs heading back to their nests. Grasshopper and Savannah sparrows were watched. Baird's Sparrows with at least 4 singing males seen were the headliner at the Tuttle School Section. Earlier we saw a Ferruginous Hawk feeding the half-grown young in the nest, while the lightning was flashing all over the prairie. In a marshy*

field nearby we had point-blank views at Nelson's Sparrow. A Sora ran across the road in front of us but wouldn't come back for an encore. Like all our other days out here, we saw a great variety of waterfowl many with young in tow. Many wetlands had winnowing Wilson's Snipe. After a charming lunch in Carol's Café in Robinson, we headed south. We found singing Dickcissels near DeWald Slough. Also in the slough was a pile of Eared Grebes setting up nests, and lots of waterfowl and shorebirds. –BG

June 27 – All day return to Kidder Co, especially the vicinity of Tappen, Dawson, and DeWald Slough: *Our last day birding the ND prairie. Our hunt for better looks at the pipit was hampered by the rising winds. We saw a couple Sharp-tailed Grouse, the second with at least four pint-sized babies following along. Again we enjoyed the prairie birds with Chestnut-collared Longspur, 3 Ferruginous Hawks, Upland Sandpiper, and Grasshopper Sparrow. Good looks at an American Bittern at DeWald Slough.* –BG

June 28 – Return to Minnesota: morning birding primarily at Maplewood State Park, and afternoon drive to McGregor: *Morning transit from ND to Maplewood State Park. Great birding for a couple of hours, then a picnic, and a little more cruising before heading east to McGregor. Our very first stop in Maplewood for a singing Yellow-throated Vireo was interrupted by a singing Golden-winged Warbler that was very cooperative. A beautiful singing male Scarlet Tanager sat up for scope views; a female appeared right next to us briefly. We saw more American Redstarts than you could shake a stick at. Finally added some woodpeckers, too, with Downy and Red-bellied as well as a few Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers. A brief stop at a former Red Crossbill spot produced a cooperative male Indigo Bunting, with scope views.* –BG

June 28 (continued) – Evening birding/owling/listening along Aitkin Co. Rds. 18 and 10, and the McGregor Marsh.

June 29 – Morning return to Duluth via back roads in NE Aitkin Co., including Co. Rds. 14 and 36, and Hedbom Forest Road.

Bird List –

- MN = seen/heard only in Minnesota: June 21 to 25 (a.m.) & June 28 - 29
- ND = seen/heard only in North Dakota: June 25 (p.m.) - 26 - 27
- species not annotated = found in both states
- **boldfaced** species = tour highlights: i.e., unexpected rarities & harder-to-find specialties
- [species in brackets only seen/heard by leader]

Snow Goose	ND	not normally present in summer
Canada Goose		
Trumpeter Swan	MN	re-introduced birds well established locally
Wood Duck		
Gadwall		
American Wigeon		
Mallard		
Blue-winged Teal		
Northern Shoveler		

Northern Pintail	ND	
Green-winged Teal	ND	
Canvasback	ND	
Redhead	ND	
Ring-necked Duck	MN	incl. young
Lesser Scaup	ND	
Common Goldeneye	MN	
[Hooded Merganser	MN	(leader-only)]
Common Merganser	MN	incl. young
Red-breasted Merganser	MN	
Ruddy Duck	ND	
Ring-necked Pheasant	ND	heard-only
[Ruffed Grouse	MN	(leader-only)]
Sharp-tailed Grouse	ND	pair with young; difficult to find in summer
Wild Turkey	MN	unexpected female with young in Lake Co.
Common Loon	MN	
Pied-billed Grebe	ND	
Horned Grebe	ND	
Red-necked Grebe		
Eared Grebe	ND	
Western Grebe	ND	
Clark's Grebe	ND	uncommon & local at the edge of its range
American White Pelican	ND	
Double-crested Cormorant		nesting colony at Knife River
American Bittern		
Great Blue Heron		
Great Egret		
Snowy Egret	ND	DeWald Slough
Cattle Egret	ND	ditto
Black-crowned Night-Heron	ND	
White-faced Ibis	ND	also DeWald Slough; regular nowhere else in ND
Turkey Vulture	MN	
Osprey	MN	
Bald Eagle		
Northern Harrier		
Broad-winged Hawk	MN	
Swainson's Hawk	ND	
Red-tailed Hawk		
Ferruginous Hawk	ND	incl. nest with young

American Kestrel		
Peregrine Falcon	MN	3 young on a ledge in downtown Duluth
Yellow Rail	MN	heard-only, alas: on the other side of the deep ditch
Sora	ND	
American Coot		
[Sandhill Crane	MN	(leader-only)]
Killdeer		
American Avocet	ND	
Spotted Sandpiper	MN	
Greater Yellowlegs	ND	
Willet	ND	
Lesser Yellowlegs	ND	
Upland Sandpiper		
Marbled Godwit		
Wilson's Snipe		
American Woodcock	MN	hard to find in summer
Wilson's Phalarope	ND	
Franklin's Gull	ND	
Ring-billed Gull		
California Gull	ND	
Herring Gull	MN	nesting colony at Knife River
Black Tern	ND	
Common Tern	MN	nesting at Interstate I. among too many Ring-billeds
Forster's Tern	ND	
Rock Pigeon		
Mourning Dove		
Black-billed Cuckoo	MN	only once, but seen well at Sax-Zim
Northern Hawk Owl	MN	Lake Co. Rd. 2; not normally present in summer
Great Gray Owl	MN	female hunting in Aitkin Co. on our last evening
Short-eared Owl	ND	not seen on most trips
Chimney Swift	ND	
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	MN	
Belted Kingfisher	MN	
Red-bellied Woodpecker	MN	

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	MN	
Downy Woodpecker	MN	
Hairy Woodpecker	MN	
Black-backed Woodpecker	MN	2 pairs at Sax-Zim on our 2nd visit
Northern Flicker		
Pileated Woodpecker	MN	especially at White Pines Wayside
Olive-sided Flycatcher	MN	2 singing males; not seen on most trips
Eastern Wood-Pewee	MN	
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	MN	nice views at Sax-Zim Bog & in Lake Co.
Willow Flycatcher	ND	heard-only
Alder Flycatcher	MN	lots of them
Least Flycatcher		
Eastern Phoebe	MN	
Great Crested Flycatcher	MN	
Western Kingbird	ND	
Eastern Kingbird		incl. adult on nest
Loggerhead Shrike	ND	uncommon & local here
Yellow-throated Vireo	MN	
Blue-headed Vireo	MN	
Warbling Vireo		
Red-eyed Vireo	MN	
Gray Jay	MN	
Blue Jay	MN	
Black-billed Magpie	MN	pair at Sax-Zim
American Crow		
Common Raven	MN	
Horned Lark	ND	
Purple Martin		
Tree Swallow		
Northern Rough-winged Swallow	MN	
Bank Swallow		
Cliff Swallow		
Barn Swallow		
Black-capped Chickadee	MN	
Boreal Chickadee	MN	typically elusive, but 2 pairs seen well in Lake Co.
Red-breasted Nuthatch	MN	
White-breasted Nuthatch	MN	
Brown Creeper	MN	

House Wren		
Winter Wren	MN	several heard, one even seen
Sedge Wren		several close views
Marsh Wren	ND	heard-only
Golden-crowned Kinglet	MN	
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	MN	
Eastern Bluebird		
Veery	MN	
Hermit Thrush	MN	heard-only
American Robin		
Gray Catbird	MN	
Brown Thrasher		
European Starling		
Sprague's Pipit	ND	high-flying birds in aerial display
Cedar Waxwing	MN	
Golden-winged Warbler	MN	Maplewood State Park; the 19th warbler of the tour
Nashville Warbler	MN	
Northern Parula	MN	first found at White Pines Wayside
Yellow Warbler		
Chestnut-sided Warbler	MN	
Magnolia Warbler	MN	
Yellow-rumped Warbler	MN	
Black-throated Green Warbler	MN	also seen first at White Pines
Blackburnian Warbler	MN	ditto
Pine Warbler	MN	ditto
Palm Warbler	MN	
Black-and-white Warbler	MN	
American Redstart	MN	
Ovenbird	MN	another warbler seen well at White Pines
Northern Waterthrush	MN	
Connecticut Warbler	MN	1 seen well at Sax-Zim, plus 2-3 others heard
Mourning Warbler	MN	close & cooperative, especially at Sax-Zim
Common Yellowthroat		
Wilson's Warbler	MN	2 in Lake Co.; not seen most summers
Chipping Sparrow		
Clay-colored Sparrow		
Vesper Sparrow		
Lark Sparrow	MN	
Savannah Sparrow		
Grasshopper Sparrow		

Baird's Sparrow	ND	still reliable near Tuttle; plus 1 heard near L. Henry
Le Conte's Sparrow	MN	3 seen at Sax-Zim Bog
Nelson's Sparrow	ND	another specialty near Tuttle, posing on a fence wire
Song Sparrow		
Lincoln's Sparrow	MN	
Swamp Sparrow	MN	
White-throated Sparrow	MN	
Chestnut-collared Longspur		handsome prairie specialty first seen at Felton

Scarlet Tanager	MN	Maplewood State Park
[Northern Cardinal	MN	(leader-only)]
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	MN	not seen until the last day
Indigo Bunting	MN	
Dickcissel	ND	at the northern edge of its range

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

Purple Finch	MN	
House Finch	MN	
American Goldfinch		
[Evening Grosbeak	MN	(leader-only)]

House Sparrow

Also seen:

Eastern Cottontail
 Snowshoe Hare
 White-tailed Jackrabbit
 Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel
 Richardson's Ground Squirrel
 Gray Squirrel
 Red Squirrel
 Eastern Chipmunk
 Muskrat
 Red Fox
 Coyote
 White-tailed Deer

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Gadwall		
American Wigeon		
Mallard		
Blue-winged Teal		
Northern Shoveler		

Northern Pintail	ND	
Green-winged Teal	ND	
Canvasback	ND	
Redhead	ND	
Ring-necked Duck	MN	incl. young
Lesser Scaup	ND	
Common Goldeneye	MN	
[Hooded Merganser	MN	(leader-only)]
Common Merganser	MN	incl. young
Red-breasted Merganser	MN	
Ruddy Duck	ND	
Ring-necked Pheasant	ND	heard-only
[Ruffed Grouse	MN	(leader-only)]
Sharp-tailed Grouse	ND	pair with young; difficult to find in summer
Wild Turkey	MN	unexpected female with young in Lake Co.
Common Loon	MN	
Pied-billed Grebe	ND	
Horned Grebe	ND	
Red-necked Grebe		
Eared Grebe	ND	
Western Grebe	ND	
Clark's Grebe	ND	uncommon & local at the edge of its range
American White Pelican	ND	
Double-crested Cormorant		nesting colony at Knife River
American Bittern		
Great Blue Heron		
Great Egret		
Snowy Egret	ND	DeWald Slough
Cattle Egret	ND	ditto
Black-crowned Night-Heron	ND	
White-faced Ibis	ND	also DeWald Slough; regular nowhere else in ND
Turkey Vulture	MN	
Osprey	MN	
Bald Eagle		
Northern Harrier		
Broad-winged Hawk	MN	
Swainson's Hawk	ND	
Red-tailed Hawk		
Ferruginous Hawk	ND	incl. nest with young

American Kestrel		
Peregrine Falcon	MN	3 young on a ledge in downtown Duluth
Yellow Rail	MN	heard-only, alas: on the other side of the deep ditch
Sora	ND	
American Coot		
[Sandhill Crane	MN	(leader-only)]
Killdeer		
American Avocet	ND	
Spotted Sandpiper	MN	
Greater Yellowlegs	ND	
Willet	ND	
Lesser Yellowlegs	ND	
Upland Sandpiper		
Marbled Godwit		
Wilson's Snipe		
American Woodcock	MN	hard to find in summer
Wilson's Phalarope	ND	
Franklin's Gull	ND	
Ring-billed Gull		
California Gull	ND	
Herring Gull	MN	nesting colony at Knife River
Black Tern	ND	
Common Tern	MN	nesting at Interstate I. among too many Ring-billeds
Forster's Tern	ND	
Rock Pigeon		
Mourning Dove		
Black-billed Cuckoo	MN	only once, but seen well at Sax-Zim
Northern Hawk Owl	MN	Lake Co. Rd. 2; not normally present in summer
Great Gray Owl	MN	female hunting in Aitkin Co. on our last evening
Short-eared Owl	ND	not seen on most trips
Chimney Swift	ND	
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	MN	
Belted Kingfisher	MN	
Red-bellied Woodpecker	MN	

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	MN	
Downy Woodpecker	MN	
Hairy Woodpecker	MN	
Black-backed Woodpecker	MN	2 pairs at Sax-Zim on our 2nd visit
Northern Flicker		
Pileated Woodpecker	MN	especially at White Pines Wayside
Olive-sided Flycatcher	MN	2 singing males; not seen on most trips
Eastern Wood-Pewee	MN	
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	MN	nice views at Sax-Zim Bog & in Lake Co.
Willow Flycatcher	ND	heard-only
Alder Flycatcher	MN	lots of them
Least Flycatcher		
Eastern Phoebe	MN	
Great Crested Flycatcher	MN	
Western Kingbird	ND	
Eastern Kingbird		incl. adult on nest
Loggerhead Shrike	ND	uncommon & local here
Yellow-throated Vireo	MN	
Blue-headed Vireo	MN	
Warbling Vireo		
Red-eyed Vireo	MN	
Gray Jay	MN	
Blue Jay	MN	
Black-billed Magpie	MN	pair at Sax-Zim
American Crow		
Common Raven	MN	
Horned Lark	ND	
Purple Martin		
Tree Swallow		
Northern Rough-winged Swallow	MN	
Bank Swallow		
Cliff Swallow		
Barn Swallow		
Black-capped Chickadee	MN	
Boreal Chickadee	MN	typically elusive, but 2 pairs seen well in Lake Co.
Red-breasted Nuthatch	MN	
White-breasted Nuthatch	MN	
Brown Creeper	MN	

House Wren		
Winter Wren	MN	several heard, one even seen
Sedge Wren		several close views
Marsh Wren	ND	heard-only
Golden-crowned Kinglet	MN	
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	MN	
Eastern Bluebird		
Veery	MN	
Hermit Thrush	MN	heard-only
American Robin		
Gray Catbird	MN	
Brown Thrasher		
European Starling		
Sprague's Pipit	ND	high-flying birds in aerial display
Cedar Waxwing	MN	
Golden-winged Warbler	MN	Maplewood State Park; the 19th warbler of the tour
Nashville Warbler	MN	
Northern Parula	MN	first found at White Pines Wayside
Yellow Warbler		
Chestnut-sided Warbler	MN	
Magnolia Warbler	MN	
Yellow-rumped Warbler	MN	
Black-throated Green Warbler	MN	also seen first at White Pines
Blackburnian Warbler	MN	ditto
Pine Warbler	MN	ditto
Palm Warbler	MN	
Black-and-white Warbler	MN	
American Redstart	MN	
Ovenbird	MN	another warbler seen well at White Pines
Northern Waterthrush	MN	
Connecticut Warbler	MN	1 seen well at Sax-Zim, plus 2-3 others heard
Mourning Warbler	MN	close & cooperative, especially at Sax-Zim
Common Yellowthroat		
Wilson's Warbler	MN	2 in Lake Co.; not seen most summers
Chipping Sparrow		
Clay-colored Sparrow		
Vesper Sparrow		
Lark Sparrow	MN	
Savannah Sparrow		
Grasshopper Sparrow		

Baird's Sparrow	ND	still reliable near Tuttle; plus 1 heard near L. Henry
Le Conte's Sparrow	MN	3 seen at Sax-Zim Bog
Nelson's Sparrow	ND	another specialty near Tuttle, posing on a fence wire
Song Sparrow		
Lincoln's Sparrow	MN	
Swamp Sparrow	MN	
White-throated Sparrow	MN	
Chestnut-collared Longspur		handsome prairie specialty first seen at Felton

Scarlet Tanager	MN	Maplewood State Park
[Northern Cardinal	MN	(leader-only)]
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	MN	not seen until the last day
Indigo Bunting	MN	
Dickcissel	ND	at the northern edge of its range

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

Purple Finch	MN	
House Finch	MN	
American Goldfinch		
[Evening Grosbeak	MN	(leader-only)]

House Sparrow

Also seen:

Eastern Cottontail
 Snowshoe Hare
 White-tailed Jackrabbit
 Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel
 Richardson's Ground Squirrel
 Gray Squirrel
 Red Squirrel
 Eastern Chipmunk
 Muskrat
 Red Fox
 Coyote
 White-tailed Deer