

BIRDING ACROSS AMERICA BY TRAIN

MAY 16-29, 2011

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with:

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By Barry Lyon

With another Birding Across America by Train tour in the books, I am inclined to declare an overriding rule for this trip: “expect the unexpected.” While simple and timeworn, the phrase is appropriate for this trip because, after four tours now, a picture has emerged of an adventure in which no two tours are ever the same. A significant reason for this is that vastly different weather conditions prevail in the northern tier of the United States from one year to the next.

Through the years, we have experienced plenty of glorious weather to be sure, but we’ve also run a weather gamut that has dealt us snow, record heat, saturating rain, wind, and fog. So in keeping with the theme of expecting the unexpected, the 2011 edition of Birding Across America by Train will be remembered, in part, for the vast amount of rain-produced flooding on the High Plains. Add to this scenario the above average rainfall in the Northeast and it is easy to see how rain played a key role in the setting of our agenda.

In a way, none of that seemed to matter since we had yet another extraordinary tour. For the third consecutive year we set new records for the most numbers of birds and mammals we’ve ever recorded on the trip. Our total of 227 birds upped the old record by one, while our 23 species of mammals easily surpassed the old record of 19. Among our sightings were a host of birds and mammals that we have never previously seen on the tour, including moose, Cape May Warbler, and Harris’s Sparrow.

Natural history, however, is but one half of this magnificent trip. In combining two traditionally great pastimes, birding and train travel, this tour presents an unmatched opportunity to see a huge swath of the country while experiencing the charm of a cross-country train trip. Speaking to this point, the abundance of water this year resulted in several lengthy delays, which actually allowed us to spend more time on the train than ever before, and to witness the countryside in greater detail.

As always, the highlights were numerous, and it is impossible to list here all the moments that filled us with joy over the duration of the trip, but I wanted to offer a look at each of the regions we visited.

In New York, a rainy first day did not wreck the resolve of gorgeous Hooded and Blue-winged warblers on territory southwest of Albany, while our stay in the Adirondacks produced such dazzling birds as displaying American Woodcock, Black-backed Woodpecker, and a host of beautiful warblers in high plumage, including Black-throated Blue, Blackburnian, and Magnolia.

In North Dakota, we entered Big Sky Country at that wonderful time when birds are still migrating through the region while most of the breeders have arrived on territory. Pothole marshes, lakes, ponds, and reservoirs contained far more water than usual, but still produced a pageant of pelicans, cormorants, waterfowl, shorebirds, gulls, and terns. Meanwhile, the native

grasslands once again held a mix of emblematic prairie birds. This part of the trip included visits to many excellent birding areas. Memorable experiences included a remarkable migrant-filled morning at Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge, and defying lousy weather in McHenry County on May 24 to successfully find Sharp-tailed Grouse, Marbled Godwit, Upland Sandpiper, Ferruginous Hawk, Sprague's Pipit, Baird's Sparrow, Chestnut-collared Longspur, and Bobolink.

The final leg of our journey included two days on Washington's Olympic Peninsula where we savored the coolness of the Pacific Northwest, finding such wonderful birds as Harlequin Duck, Black Oystercatcher, Marbled Murrelet, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, and Varied Thrush, to name only a few.

One of the joys of this trip is experiencing the country from the charm of a train. Special memories from our time aboard Amtrak include:

- Boarding the "Lakeshore Limited" in Albany, and waking up the following morning in Ohio along the south shore of Lake Erie.
- Riding the "Empire Builder" alongside the mighty Mississippi River near the Wisconsin-Minnesota state lines.
- Witnessing the gentle beauty of the undulating prairie of western North Dakota and Montana at a reduced speed because of flooding of the Missouri River.
- Spotting moose, prairie dogs, and mule deer through the large windows of the observation car.
- Crossing the width of Washington in a single morning, from Spokane in the east to Puget Sound in the west.

Birding Across America by Train is a journey across America, an unforgettable demonstration of how two great American pastimes can be combined for a singular travel experience. The variety we observe from one state to the next, the sense of adventure that fills us daily, and the uniqueness of purpose that lends this program its true meaning, effectively combine to deliver an extraordinary look at what is one of the world's most diverse, beautiful, and fascinating countries.

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May 16, 2011 – Participants for our fourth **Birding Across America by Train** tour arrived in Albany, New York today. The weather conditions were dicey, to say the least, as a slow moving storm system pelted the region with intermittent rain throughout the day. This evening, we gathered for the first time as a group in the lobby of the Marriott Hotel for a trip welcome and orientation, followed immediately by dinner.

May 17 – This tour typically begins with a morning of birding in the area of Voorheesville, a small community situated about half an hour southwest of Albany. Other than being a quaint semi-rural town, the importance of Voorheesville lies in its byway location as a gateway to the dramatic geologic feature known as the Helderberg Escarpment. The escarpment, an ancient uplifted limestone plateau, harbors tracts and patches of deciduous broadleaf, or Carolinian, forest not found in the Adirondack Mountains to the north. Wetter forests and freshwater wetlands occur at the base of the plateau and form a mosaic of habitats that supports a wonderful diversity of birds. The entire region is lower in elevation than the Adirondack Mountains, and therefore vitally important for holding a variety of species not found elsewhere on the tour route. Birds such as Pileated and Red-bellied woodpeckers, Veery, Blue-winged Warbler, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, and several others are among the species not found in the mountains.

As in previous years, the plan for the morning was birding the forests and wetlands above and below the Helderberg Escarpment. The challenge we were faced with initially was the ominous weather and threat of impending rain. Emerging from the hotel, we were greeted by low overcast, cool temperatures, and the smell of rain in the air. With more rain predicted, but none yet falling, we knew we would have only a limited amount of birding time before conditions deteriorated. We departed the hotel shortly after breakfast and reached Voorheesville in 30 minutes. On the other side of town, we stopped along Tygert Road, a lightly traveled side road that bisects an extensive freshwater marsh containing willows, cattails, and scattered coniferous trees. Despite the overcast, birds were everywhere! Calling out the various species as they appeared in succession, we logged an exciting mix of resident birds and Neotropical migrants. Highlights included fantastic views of Pileated Woodpecker, Yellow Warbler, Summer Tanager, Baltimore Oriole, and others. After 30 minutes, we were joined by local birders Chris and David Keefer, who have proven important area contacts for us in recent years. Chris has access to a private facility called the Helderberg Workshop, which is a basic facility camp at the base of the escarpment, only a mile or so from our current position.

Next, we traveled the short distance to the Workshop, where Chris escorted us in. As finding as many warblers as possible has become an important part of this tour, the Workshop gives us our only chance of seeing Hooded Warbler. Our arrival seemed to coincide with the anticipated resumption of rain, which commenced almost immediately after we departed the vehicles. After a somewhat frustrating encounter with a singing Hooded Warbler, we retreated to a picnic shelter to wait out the rain. About 10-15 minutes later, Michael called out a Louisiana Waterthrush, which sang once or twice before moving off. The rain finally tapering off, we moved into a different section of forest in the direction of another singing Hooded Warbler. We didn't have to go far before the group, after some maneuvering, was enjoying fabulous studies of a territorial male Hooded Warbler. Despite getting doused by a fresh round of rain, we enjoyed views of

Great-crested Flycatcher, Scarlet Tanager, our first Magnolia Warbler, and a treetop Red-eyed Vireo.

By mid-morning we found ourselves in a cycle of on-again, off-again rain, which actually wasn't as big of a problem as one might have guessed. We departed the Workshop after about 90 minutes, returned to the main highway, and circled up to the top of the escarpment. Gaining close to a thousand feet of elevation, we rose high enough from the valley to reach the cloud cover which before had been low overhead. The short trip across the escarpment was uneventful in that the fog around us reduced viewing conditions to nil. Toward the escarpment's western end, we dropped enough in elevation so as to regain better visibility.

Arriving at our next stop, Thompsons Lake State Park, we reached a sanctuary of sorts where the Thatcher Nature Center offered restrooms, an attractive exhibit area, and a bird feeding station. The activity at the feeders is always good, and this time was no different, with species such as Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Hairy Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, Blue Jay, White-crowned Sparrow, and Common Grackles providing excellent views. Outside, a short walk to the east produced dynamite views of a Blue-winged Warbler.

Our plans for a picnic lunch were aborted due to the weather conditions, but we scored well with a visit to the Chuck Wagon Diner, a place previously unknown to us. The restaurant, located near the main highway, was a restored '50s diner brought in from Detroit, Michigan that oozed charm.

We loaded up after lunch and embarked on the lengthy drive to the Adirondack League Club. Our route took us northwest through the Mohawk River Valley toward Utica. The scenery was superb. Along the length of the route we enjoyed fine views of the Mohawk River in a variety of locations, including a brief segment of the old Erie Canal, as well as extensive tracts of forests and fields. For those who have never been to New York, the closest association that comes to mind is that of Manhattan. Outside Manhattan, however, the visitor finds an exceptionally beautiful state, where forests, rivers, and small towns abound.

We entered the Adirondack Mountains with anticipation. Though cloudy, the weather had actually improved a bit, and we made the drive to Old Forge in good time and without rain.

We arrived at the League Club in the late afternoon, where we settled into our cabins before reconvening for happy hour and dinner.

May 18 – The Adirondack Park is a massive area that occupies most of central and northern New York State. It is three times larger than Yellowstone and encompasses vast tracts of boreal forest, rivers, ponds, bogs, marshes, bare granite peaks, and small mountain towns. Within the park's 6.1 million acres, the Adirondack League Club is an expansive 50,000 acre private inholding whose central feature is a beautiful old hunting lodge on the north shore of scenic Little Moose Lake.

We like to kick off our exploration of this area with a day around the lodge, but our local guide, Gary Lee, was available only on this day, which meant visiting some off-property sites for boreal birding.

We departed the League Club fairly early and headed east along the Adirondack Highway through the town of Inlet, where we met Gary, before continuing on to a roadside location known as the Brown's Tract Boardwalk. Here an easy forest trail provided exposure to a suite of lovely plants including painted and red trilliums and witchhobble, as well as a fine variety of breeding birds. The warbler viewing was superior here, where we recorded our first Blackburnian, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, and Nashville warblers, Northern Waterthrush, and a variety of woodpeckers, flycatchers, and other birds.

We then traveled further east for some birding along the forested entrance road to Sagamore Lodge. The results of this activity were not disappointing. The highlight was a vocal Canada Warbler on territory by a stream crossing, which was later joined by a Black-and-white Warbler. We walked around the lodge grounds for a short while, taking time to record a few other birds, before returning to Arrowhead Park in Inlet for a picnic lunch.

The weather on this day was better, and though still overcast, we largely avoided the rain of the previous morning. After lunch we spotted the only Pine Warbler we would record on this trip, high in the white pines that surrounded the parking area.

In the afternoon we ventured to Ferd's Bog, one of New York's most famous natural areas. With Gary Lee leading the way, we spent a couple of hours at this location watching for birds and receiving botanical and ecological interpretation from Gary. Although we did not see a Black-backed Woodpecker, we did enjoy a rewarding time in the field, with lots of plants and birds noted.

Late in the day, a final stop at Moss Lake was notable for its beautiful mountain lake scenery and a pair of nesting Ospreys. That night at the lodge, Gary discussed his research on Common Loons via an informative Power-Point presentation.

May 19 – Today we spent almost the entire day birding the Adirondack League Club property. An after-breakfast outing to East Lake turned up a slew of exciting birds including Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, and Blackburnian warblers, Scarlet Tanager, and a gorgeous pair of Common Loons. The loons, in particular, garnered a lot of attention. Striking in their breeding dress, they elegantly captured the spirit of the North Country.

In the afternoon we drove out the Bisbee Lake Road to where it crosses the Little Moose River. A Ruffed Grouse crossing the road was the highlight for half the group while a northeastern garter snake was discovered by Lorna at the River Crossing.

Late in the day we drove through the community of Old Forge en route to a wetland and alder woodland along the shores of the Moose River. Here we enjoyed satisfying views of Chestnut-sided and Yellow warblers, a gorgeous male American Redstart, and even a Common Raven.

May 20 – Although we had already been to Ferd’s Bog, we were also well aware that our trip had not occurred at the peak time of day—during the morning when bird activity is higher. On this day we would be departing the Adirondacks for the return trip to Albany, but we decided to first offer an optional early morning return to Ferd’s Bog to search for a few species that had eluded us to this point, principally Black-backed Woodpecker.

About two-thirds of the group chose to participate in the outing, and the results were spectacular! We arrived at the parking area by 7 a.m. and made the half-mile hike into the bog. After a period of watching and waiting, we spotted a male Black-backed high in a dead tree on the western side of the bog. The bird kept its distance, but stayed visible long enough for us to train our scopes on it until everyone had obtained excellent views. At one point, the woodpecker flew clear across the bog and worked a couple of trees that bordered its eastern periphery.

Following our successful woodpecker expedition at Ferd’s, we returned to the League Club via South Shore Road out of Inlet. We had never driven this route before, but the byway through the forest was clearly preferable to driving on the main highway. A stop at a scenic roadside lake for river otters was unsuccessful, but hardly mattered.

Upon reaching the League Club, we spent the next hour or so packing our bags and loading the vehicles for the return trip to Albany. Departing by mid-morning, we made the short trip into the town of Old Forge for a visit to the remarkable Old Forge Hardware: a hardware store that also sells books, outdoor clothing, gifts and souvenirs, fabrics, and even maternity clothing!

By mid-day we were heading east through the mountains on the Adirondack Highway. The weather had improved with each passing day and we had our eyes set on a picnic lunch at a small lake west of Blue Mountain Lake. Of course, by the time we reached the lake we had apparently caught up to the backside of a passing storm. Rain was battering the area and quickly washed out our planned picnic. Continuing on, we succeeded in outrunning the storm until we arrived in the tiny community of Indian Lake. A park on the town’s west side served as a convenient and rain-free location for a road trip respite.

We spent the remainder of the afternoon completing the return to Albany. En route, we were exposed to more of the landscapes of Upstate New York. The highlight for many may have been the fine views we enjoyed of the Hudson River on the east side of the Adirondacks.

We arrived at the train station in the late afternoon, but only to find that the train was running late. The northern tier of the country had received so much rain this spring that flooding was an issue in parts of the Northeast and Midwest. Consequently, Amtrak trains that service the Boston-New York corridor were delayed due to water on the tracks. By the time the train eventually arrived, about two hours late, our group was more than ready to hop aboard the Lakeside Limited for what would be the first of three long train rides!

May 21 – After rolling across the width of New York and eastern Ohio during the night, we awoke along the south shore of Lake Erie in central Ohio. The delay from the previous evening meant that we were still farther east than we have been on previous trips. The bright side is that we also had more time than ever before to watch for birds along the lakeshore, which paid off

with sightings of Great Egret and Mute Swan; while the not-so-good news is that our late arrival in Chicago signaled a possible tight connection to the afternoon train!

Over the ensuing six hours, we continued through western Ohio and Indiana before reaching the south shore of Lake Michigan and the outskirts of Chicago. We finally arrived at Union Station around 1 p.m., a time that was much later than we would have preferred, but a time that nonetheless still allowed for a reasonably comfortable connection.

Our next train, the Empire Builder, was also delayed in arriving in Union Station, which allowed us to rest before boarding the famous train that traverses the country between Chicago and Seattle. Once aboard, our comfy confines allowed us to relax in privacy in our rooms or together in the observation car.

This first afternoon aboard the Empire Builder offers plenty of pleasing scenery. The bulk of our time is spent traveling across southern Wisconsin, where woodlands, farms, the famous Dells, and a series of rivers are testament to the region's varied landscapes. The birding from the train is often remarkably good as the large windows allow for seeing birds despite the speed of the train. The birding highlight is always the Sandhill Cranes that we see in the marshes and dry fields along the way. This year, we probably saw a dozen or so individuals.

Evening found us coursing along the mighty Mississippi River with the sun low in the western sky. Always a spectacular sight, the Mississippi and its wide backups were swollen with the runoff of heavy spring rains that had soaked the Upper Midwest.

May 22 – Empire Builder arrived in Minot about an hour behind schedule this morning, which was not a big deal. Waiting for us was our friend and local contact Ron Martin, an excellent birder who assists us for the duration of our time in North Dakota.

Departing the train, we wasted little time getting going. After picking up our vehicles we headed for Oak Park in the center of town. Oak Park is a public facility that also happens to be one of Minot's top birding sites. Besides the usual lawns and picnic areas common to most municipal parks, Oak Park features a relatively extensive woodland of native trees and bushes. Amid urban surroundings, the park serves as an oasis for migrating birds.

We found the birding excellent from the time we arrived to when we left, on account of lunch. Warblers of several species were readily seen, including our first Blackpoll Warblers. Wandering through the grounds in the vicinity of the parking area and along the river provided several species that were new for the trip.

Following lunch at a nearby restaurant, we headed to another equally important Minot-area site: the Minot Sewage Lagoons. Because so much rain had fallen in North Dakota before our arrival, we found the lagoons' large impoundments at maximum volume and bearing a remarkable paucity of birds. The good news is that we did find a flock of handsome Red-necked Phalaropes. Even better news is that we did not come to this site specifically to tour the impoundments, but rather, we came to view the shorebirds spread across the mudflats to the northwest of the main facility. Passing over a lengthy, and occasionally dicey, road we eventually worked our way

down the western length of the facility to an area where a flooded field contained dozens of shorebirds of remarkable variety. In a period of about two hours, we recorded an amazing 20 species of shorebirds consisting of avocets, plovers, sandpipers, phalaropes, and dowitchers.

The variety was clearly overwhelming to some of us, but patience and repeated study of all species made the exercise perhaps a little less daunting. Other birds of the area included impeccably plumaged waterfowl and striking Yellow-headed Blackbirds.

By late afternoon we knew it was time to head for the barn, as the saying goes. We returned to the hotel in time for check-in and some down time, followed by dinner.

May 23 – Our initial trip to Oak Park on the previous day was so enjoyable that we offered an optional return trip this morning. Several of us chose to stay at the hotel and take advantage of the extra downtime while the rest convened for the early departure. The day began under partly cloudy and cool conditions, but the birding was excellent again, with sightings of a variety of warblers, including Blackpoll Warbler and our first-ever-for-the-tour Cape May Warbler; six species of vireos; and male Wood Ducks and Hooded Mergansers to name a few. We spent about an hour-and-a-half at the park before returning to the hotel to pick up the other participants.

With a full day ahead, we started with a trip to Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge. Like many of the refuges of North Dakota, Upper Souris plays a vitally important role as a propagation area for a wide range of waterfowl, pelicans, cormorants, gulls, and terns. Moreover, the surrounding grasslands and woodlands harbor a remarkable diversity of landbirds.

We parked at the dam, which gave opportunities to scope the large lake on one side of the road and the marsh and outfall on the other side. The birding was superb, featuring good views of White Pelicans, Double-crested Cormorants, Common Terns, and many other species. We then drove the short distance to the refuge headquarters. It was here where we had some excellent birding fortune. We had not been out of the cars long when we discovered that the trees and bushes around the visitor center were full of migrating birds! In short order, what began as a simple check of the vegetation around the headquarters turned into a methodical survey of the surrounding tree lines. Birds were always in view, but it was the discovery of several unexpected species in particular that will remain freshest in our memories. We had superb views of Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, another Cape May Warbler, and Harris's Sparrow (first time ever for this tour) in addition to Brown Thrasher, Magnolia Warbler, Clay-colored Sparrow, Orchard Oriole and more!

After satiating ourselves with two hours of birding at this location, we found it hard to pull ourselves away from the quest to find more! Lunch beckoned, however, and we enjoyed an outdoor picnic on what was turning into a glorious day to be outside.

Following lunch, we drove a short segment of the refuge auto tour route where we caught up with a beautiful Red-necked Grebe that Ron had found on a scouting trip.

By mid-afternoon we were headed to another birding area called Tasker's Coulee, a draw originally cut by the Des Lacs River, but now blanketed in riparian woodland. This area lies

northwest of Minot and represents the westernmost extent of our birding excursions in North Dakota. This is a moderately scenic area, but contains several western-type species that are often otherwise difficult to find farther east in North Dakota. As it turned out, our “best” bird on this day was Spotted Towhee, although we also nabbed Vesper and Lark sparrows.

After departing the coulee, we had a plan to drive the auto tour route of nearby Des Lacs National Wildlife Refuge as part of the return trip to Minot. We found some ponds along the roadside that offered great looks at Eared Grebes, Ruddy Ducks, Wilson’s Phalaropes, and Yellow-headed Blackbirds; however, our expectations were soon dashed when we found that the auto tour was closed due to flooding of the Des Lacs River.

The effects of flooding in the High Plains this spring was a recurring theme of our tour. While our itinerary was never severely impacted by this remarkable event, we did have to make adjustments to our local plans on several occasions.

The return to Minot was memorable for our lucky encounter with a pair of Gray Partridge.

May 24 – As a striking departure from the conditions of the previous day, today dawned cold, gray, and windy as a late cold front descended on the Dakotas. Watching the weather report on the television the previous night, we knew we were in store for some major changes, but the reality of actually getting out in such inhospitable conditions didn’t fully hit home until we left the hotel for the birding areas. In times such as these, we tend to comfort ourselves with optimistic observations of “it could be worse.” Indeed, it could have been worse. This same system that gave us overcast and cold was in the process of dumping snow in parts of South Dakota. That we didn’t have to cope with such harsh conditions was a small victory. So it was, then, that we resigned ourselves to knowing a cold day in the field lay in store.

Today was a day dedicated largely to finding the highly sought birds of the prairie. As with most of our native grasslands, those of North Dakota have been pushed to the brink of extinction. A century and a half of settlement, conversion for agriculture, and grazing have reduced the native prairie to less than 2% of its original extent. The remnant tracts, usually widely dispersed, are the best places to search for a range of birds who depend on these grasslands for survival. With Lostwood National Wildlife Refuge closed again this year due to flooding, we visited a backup site in McHenry County east of Minot, where several large pastures containing big expanses of native grassland still occur.

No question, the morning was cold. Emerging from the vehicles after a 45-minute drive from Minot, we felt the full brunt of the weather front as we stared out toward a distant pasture. The pasture in question was home to a group of Sharp-tailed Grouse, which could be seen as distant specks on a grassy hill. We gathered together and walked a quarter of a mile toward the birds until we were able to see them well through our spotting scopes. Retreating to the vans, we bumped along several other roads that gave access to other nearby pastures. Despite the difficult conditions, the birding was very good. Over the course of the morning we had superb views of Marbled Godwit, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Bobolink, and, best of all, Baird’s Sparrow, of which we had views that could not have been better. Subsequent stops in other locations turned

up Ferruginous Hawk, Upland Sandpiper, and a displaying Sprague's Pipit to complete the sweep of desired grassland birds.

At this point we needed some sanctuary, a place where we could get out of the wind. Ron suggested a stop at the Denbigh (pronounced Den-by) Experimental Forest, where a very large tract of pines and other trees rises in stark contrast to the surrounding flatlands. This proved a great place to host a drink and snack break. It also turned out to be a good birding area. The highlights of our time here were a couple more Cape May Warblers and a flock of Red Crossbills. The crossbill sighting represented the first time we have ever recorded that species in North Dakota on this tour.

We returned to the hotel for lunch and an opportunity to warm up. Because Oak Park had been so good to us on the previous days, we offered yet another optional trip there to see what else might have dropped in. The birding was good, as always, but did not result in any new finds, except for a colony of Richardson's Ground-Squirrels that had taken up residence in a city cemetery below the hotel!

In the middle and late afternoon we drove north of Minot on County Road 19, birding some roadside marshes and ponds. By this time, conditions had clearly improved as the overcast skies were breaking, the wind was subsiding, and air temperatures were warming. We ended up having a wonderful couple of hours studying birds such as Yellow-headed Blackbird, Black Tern, Franklin's Gull, a variety of waterfowl, and shorebirds.

We returned to the hotel late in the afternoon.

May 25 – With the Empire Builder due to arrive in Minot this morning, we departed our hotel ready to say goodbye to North Dakota and continue our westward journey. Upon arrival at the train station, we were informed the train was running about three hours behind schedule because of flooding in Minnesota and North Dakota. Rather than sit on our hands for the next three hours, we used the extra time to make another run out to the Minot sewage lagoons.

We spent the majority of our time around a back set of ponds we had not previously visited. The birding proved very productive, but was further enhanced by Victor's 11th hour discovery of a breeding plumaged Horned Grebe. Horned Grebe is a declining species in the northern tier of the United States, and a species whose presence is impossible to predict. There are several around in some years, while in others there are none.

We returned to the station around 10:30 a.m., but the train did not ultimately arrive until about noon. We boarded Empire Builder, settled into our rooms, had lunch, and then used the remainder of the day to simply relax in privacy or enjoy the succession of passing landscapes through the big windows of the observation car.

The trip across western North Dakota was very scenic, for this is a land characterized by vast open spaces, a sprinkling of badlands, wooded drainages, prairie potholes, and rolling grasslands. We passed through the oil "fracking" boomtown of Williston before paralleling the Missouri River. Sightings of prairie-dogs and a variety of birds were highlights.

Entering Montana, we were treated to classic high plains scenery, with even bigger expanses of land visible on both sides of the train and the rain-swollen Missouri River running parallel to the south. The “action” increased, however, as we worked our way farther west. The normally wide Missouri River had long since eclipsed its banks and had formed enormous sheets of water that covered the grasslands and agricultural fields for miles. The main river channel was not visible for much of the afternoon and the river itself appeared as a murky sheet of water covering the plains. At one point, the train slowed to a crawl as the water lapped to within feet of the tracks.

The train continued making way, despite the slowdown, and the reduced pace allowed for extended birding and wildlife viewing opportunities. Among the rewards of our observation car vigil was sightings of Ring-necked Pheasant, our first Mule Deer, and even several moose—animals probably displaced because of the flooding.

We normally reach the foot of the Rocky Mountains late in the afternoon of this day, but the delay in getting across the prairie, on top of the delays from the previous day, meant that we were only two-thirds of the way across Montana when darkness began to fall. In certain ways, we felt a little disappointed, but in other ways, we spotted more wildlife than ever before on this particular stretch of the route. We had many sightings of deer (white-tailed and mule), more moose, and a nice variety of birds. Additionally, being on the plains, in the heart of the Blackfoot Indian Reservation, was actually beautiful in its own right.

May 26 – We awoke this morning in the vicinity of the Idaho/Washington state line. This was an interesting experience because we normally pass through this stretch of track during the night.

What should be understood, and really resonated with this author, is that a delay on one end means seeing more on the other. If the train is on time, we typically go through the northern Rockies late the previous day and awake the following morning on the Columbia Plateau in east-central Washington. Thanks to the delays we had experienced to this point, we were much further east than is typical when the day breaks.

Spokane was cold, overcast, and rainy, but conditions improved as we rolled west. The volcanic landmarks that characterize the huge Columbia Plateau became increasingly visible until we found ourselves peering down on the mighty namesake river. This was bold country, with many volcanic hills, cliffs, and buttes visible in close proximity to the train.

Washington is one of our most beautiful and varied states, and this trip across its width was revealing for the exposure it provided to its diversity. From east to west we crossed a desert (Columbia Plateau) and several rivers (the Columbia, the Wenatchee, and the Skykomish) before we finished traversing the Cascade Mountains en route to the Puget Sound. Although the sky was partially overcast, we were able to see the darkened forests that closed in around the train as it made its way through the mountains.

We made up some time coming across Washington, but our arrival in Edmonds was about two hours later than is typical. Not to worry though. After picking up our vehicles, we enjoyed a very nice lunch at a restaurant near the ferry terminal right on Puget Sound. Afterward we boarded the ferry for the short trip to Kingston on the opposite side of the sound.

We then made our way across what is known as the Kitsap Peninsula, and from there crossed the Hood Canal Bridge onto the Olympic Peninsula.

We stopped at the head of Discovery Bay to scan the mudflats for resting shorebirds, gulls, and terns, of which there were few, before heading out to Diamond Point to scan the nearshore waters for alcids and marine mammals. The birding was good with our first sightings of Harlequin Duck and Rhinoceros Auklet complementing sightings of harbor seals and harbor porpoises.

Departing Diamond Point we continued west toward Port Angeles, arriving in the late afternoon.

May 27 – One of the “target” birds for this leg of the tour is Varied Thrush, a specialty of the deep forests of the Pacific Northwest. One of the best ways to see this retiring bird is to drive into Olympic National Park early in the morning and watch for them along the roadside. This is the only time of the day when the birds leave the sanctuary of the forest, and a time when applying this strategy typically results in success.

With this in mind, we began the day with an optional 6:30 a.m. departure for a trip into the national park to search for thrushes. Around 7:00 we encountered a female thrush in the road that was seen well by most of the group, but not all. Nor did we get to see a male bird.

We went back to the hotel for breakfast and to meet up with the rest of the group. We then returned to the national park for an excursion to the Heart o’ the Hills campground. This event is always pleasing because of the opportunity to walk in an old-growth forest. Here is a living cathedral of ancient Douglas fir, western red cedar, and western hemlock towering over an understory of ferns, rhododendrons, and other shade-loving plants.

The weather dipped again today and we spent the morning under partial overcast and intermittent rain. Despite the weather, we enjoyed nice looks at Pacific Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and a snowshoe hare. Departing the campground, we decided against going further up the mountain toward Hurricane Ridge as the weather looked far worse above. Instead, we drove back down to the coast and the magical breakwater known as Ediz Hook.

Built by the Coast Guard, Ediz Hook is a curve-shaped artificial barrier that protects the Port Angeles waterfront. The combination of log booms, sheltered water, sandy shoreline, and rocky beaches replicates a coastal environment and is a good place to search for Harlequin Duck, Black Oystercatcher, shorebirds, alcids, and seals.

The rain we tried to dodge on the mountain eventually caught up with us down below as well, but the birding was fantastic anyway. We had great studies of Harlequin Duck, Black Oystercatcher, Whimbrel, Marbled Murrelet, and Rhinoceros Auklet.

We returned to Port Angeles for lunch followed by a trip west to the Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge. This is another lovely Washington location marked by lush forest, sea cliffs, and views of the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Puget Sound. A walk in the forest yielded more

outstanding birding as we obtained good views of Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Hutton's Vireo, Black-throated Gray-warbler, and Spotted Towhee. Louise's discovery of a Pacific Wren at a nest site in the parking lot was an added bonus.

We returned to Port Angeles in the late afternoon.

May 28 – On the preceding day, not everyone in the group had seen the Varied Thrush as well as they wanted. In response, we decided to offer another optional early morning thrush search, but this time we would leave at 6:00 a.m., thirty minutes earlier than on the previous day. We departed the hotel on time and soon found ourselves creeping slowly up the road through the national park. We found American Robins plentiful in abundance, and, after checking each bird, we finally found a male Varied Thrush in the center of the road. Using the vehicles as blinds, we crept closer and closer to the bird until we were practically on top of it, and watched it for several minutes before it retreated into the forest.

Back at the hotel, we spent some time checking out and loading all the bags in preparation for the return trip to Seattle. Heading east, we made a return trip to Diamond Point to scan the water for Tufted Puffins, but none were visible. On the return to the main highway we stopped at a stand of wet forest where we had decent looks at a male Red-breasted Sapsucker, Bushtits, and a Wilson's Warbler.

We continued on to a Wild Birds Unlimited store to use a restroom, but noticed the store had a well-attended birdfeeder in back. Among the sightings from the ensuing feeder watch were Hairy and Downy woodpeckers, Steller's Jay, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Purple Finch.

East of the town of Sequim we encountered a herd of Roosevelt Elk resting in a pasture on the side of the highway.

Continuing south, we drove to Quilcene, a quiet forested community on the east side of the Olympic Peninsula. The year before, we had serendipitously met a couple, Linda and Arnie Finley, who maintained bird feeders in their front yard. After enjoying a superb feeder show, we befriended the couple, who invited us back again this year.

Sure enough, the feeders did not disappoint. Exiting the vehicles we were quickly treated to a procession of birds coming and going from the hanging seed feeders. Finches were the order of the day, and we noted Black-headed Grosbeak, Pine Siskin, Purple Finch, and Evening Grosbeak. Away from the feeders, a partially cloudy but sun splashed afternoon had illuminated the surrounding forest. Scanning the sky and trees around us revealed Vaux's Swifts overhead and Band-tailed Pigeons loafing in the boughs of nearby conifers.

A quick check of the Quilcene National Fish Hatchery failed to turn up an American Dipper. From there we continued south to Mt. Walker for a grand finale trip to the summit. Atop the mountain in mid-afternoon, we managed to dodge a rainstorm while walking out to the overlook that provides a scenic view of Seattle and Puget Sound far below.

By about 3:30 p.m. we turned around and headed north, back toward the Hood Canal Bridge that would take us off the Olympic Peninsula and back toward the mainland. We diverted to the southeast on the return route and drove the length of Bainbridge Island to the ferry that would take us directly into Seattle.

The crossing from Bainbridge to Seattle was remarkable for its scenic highlights. Departing the island, the ferry plied the waters of Puget Sound while Seattle, radiant in the afternoon sun, dominated the skyline in front of us. In back of the city, the vague outline of the Cascades could barely be discerned on the eastern horizon.

From Seattle we lost time due to a soccer match letting out, before arriving in Sea-Tac around 6:00 p.m.

Our final dinner was held in the hotel restaurant, after which we all offered a share of hugs, handshakes, and fond farewells.

May 29 – With the tour now over, participants were free to depart Seattle today.

BIRDLIST

The checklist order and common and scientific names of the birds that appear in this list are those given by the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU). The AOU is a scientifically based organization that serves as the official source on the taxonomy of birds found in North and Middle America, including adjacent islands. This compilation is based on the seventh edition of the **Check-list of North American Birds** through the 51st supplement.

Ducks, Geese & Swans (*Anatidae*)

Canada Goose (*Branta Canadensis*) – This is a common and widespread species across North America, as demonstrated by the fact that it was recorded every day but one. Seen in New York, North Dakota, Washington, and from the train.

Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*) – Introduced from the Old World starting in the late 19th-century, the Mute Swan has established itself as a non-native resident in parts of the Midwest and Atlantic coast regions. While stately in appearance, they are actually a spreading pest whose life cycle and aggressive nature negatively effects other waterfowl species. Seen from the train on Lake Erie on the morning of May 21.

Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*) – We had exceptionally good luck with this bird again this year. A couple of fly-over individuals were recorded in North Dakota, but the best looks were of a couple pair on the small waterway in Oak Park, Minot, North Dakota. We visited the park on three consecutive days from May 22-24 and had excellent studies of male and female birds on each visit.

Gadwall (*Anas strepera*) – Gadwall is a common breeding species of the High Plains and a regular but uncommon breeder in the Pacific Northwest. We saw it every day in North Dakota and Washington, from May 22-26, as well as from the train.

American Wigeon (*Anas americana*) – This is a regular but uncommon breeding species of pothole lakes and reservoirs of the High Plains and Great Basin regions. We saw it in North Dakota on May 23 and from the train in Montana on May 25.

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Widespread and abundant, we recorded this species every day of the trip.

Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*) – This species is among the more common breeding waterfowl species of the Great Plains and Great Basin regions. We saw it every day from May 22-25.

Cinnamon Teal (*Anas cyanoptera*) – Cinnamon Teal is more of “true” western species, which explains why we seldom see it as far east as the Minot area; rather, the time to look for this bird is the day we travel through western North Dakota and Montana, at which point we enter the range of the species. A couple were seen from the train in Montana on May 25.

Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) – This is among the most common of waterfowl on pothole lakes and reservoirs of the Great Plains. We saw this bird with ease from May 22-26.

Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*) – Another fairly common breeder of the Great Plains region, we saw this species in small numbers every day in North Dakota from May 22-25.

Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca*) – We never see more than a few individuals of this species on this tour and this year was no different. One or two in North Dakota on May 24.

Canvasback (*Aythya valisineria*) – Canvasback is a fairly common breeding species of pothole

lakes and reservoirs of the High Plains. In our opinion, it is also one of the most elegant of North American birds. We enjoyed scope studies of male and female birds every day in North Dakota from May 22-25.

Redhead (*Aythya americana*) – This species is about as common as Canvasback and occupies the same habitat. We had good views of this bird from May 23-25, and occasionally side-by-side with the previous species.

Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*) – This species was actually fairly scarce this year. One bird was seen from the train in Montana on May 25 while a few others were seen from the train on the following morning while passing through eastern Washington.

Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) – Spectacularly marked and decked in plumage resembling an oil painting, the Harlequin Duck is unquestionably one of the premiere birds of the Pacific Northwest. The species nest along fast flowing mountain rivers at low-to-mid elevation and then migrate to the coast after the breeding season. We saw a flock of about 10 birds that appeared to be non-breeding males at Diamond Point on the afternoon of May 26. The next day we had dazzling studies of several pair at close range at Ediz Hook outside Port Angeles.

Bufflehead (*Bucephala albeola*) – One seen at the little pond at Diamond Point, Washington on May 26 was the only one seen.

Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) – With its immaculate black, white, and canvas plumage, the Hooded Merganser is another of our most attractive waterfowl species. This year we had good studies of a female bird on Little Moose Lake in the Adirondacks on May 17, but the trip highlight for this species was superb studies of a male bird on the waterway in Oak Park, North Dakota on May 23.

Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*) – As is typical of this tour, our Common Merganser sightings typically occur in the Adirondack Mountains at the beginning of the trip. This year was no different as we recorded male and female birds on Little Moose Lake on May 18 and 19.

Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – This is a common breeding species of pothole and lakes and reservoirs of the Great Plains. We saw Ruddy Ducks daily from May 23-25, and another individual on the Olympic Peninsula on May 27.

New World Quails (*Odontophoridae*)

California Quail (*Callipepla californica*) – This bird was introduced to Washington from its native California, perhaps as early as the 1960s, and has become an established breeding species here. We usually find them in the rural area north of the two of Sequim and this year was no different. A drive north of town on May 27 produced outstanding close views of a male and female.

Pheasant, Grouse & Allies (*Phasianidae*)

Gray Partridge (*Perdix perdix*) – While returning to Minot from Des Lacs National Wildlife Refuge on the afternoon of May 23, a lovely pair of partridge was sighted crossing into a field about 45 minutes northeast of the city. The birds were initially spotted by those in Barry's van, but Victor was able to turn around quickly enough so that everyone in his vehicle saw them equally well. Following the initial sighting, Victor parked his vehicle and attempted to circle around behind the birds by walking into a back pasture. As he cautiously made his way closer to the birds, they eventually detected his approach and

stood up at attention, providing wonderful views for the rest of us, before flying to a more distant field. Unlike a number of our other game birds, Gray Partridge is an inconspicuous and often elusive and difficult to detect to species. A birder doesn't necessarily go searching for them as much as he happens to cross paths with them. Introduced from Europe, Gray Partridge favors agricultural lands throughout the Great Plains and parts of the Pacific Northwest.

Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchius*) – Another introduced European game bird, Ring-necked Pheasant is established as a common resident of agricultural areas across North America. We saw the bird everyday in North Dakota from May 22-25.

Ruffed Grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*) – The Ruffed Grouse is a fairly common but furtive inhabitant of the northern woods. In the springtime, its presence may be detected by the rapid low hooting sounds emitted by male birds as they “drum” from some low perch. At other times one may be treated to the sight of an unwary grouse walking across a dirt road or scuttling over the forest floor. After missing this bird last year, it was a treat for all of us to at least hear the bird drumming in the forest on the morning of May 19 at the Adirondack League Club while en route to East Lake. Later in the day, while driving on the property west of the lodge, half the group was very fortunate to see a grouse standing in the road before it disappeared into the forest.

Sharp-tailed Grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*) – Every segment of this trip possesses its share of special birds, and the Sharp-tailed Grouse is one of the very special birds we seek during our time in North Dakota. Through a dramatic courtship display and predilection for native grassland, few species capture the essence of spring on the prairie like this one. Through the years, we have learned that Lostwood National Wildlife Refuge is the best place to search for this species; however, we have also learned that access to Lostwood is also impossible in years of heavy rain, which this one was. With the refuge closed, we needed an alternative site to visit if we were to have any chance of seeing this bird. Thanks to our local guide and friend, Ron Martin, we did indeed have that second site lined up. On the cold, windy, and overcast morning of May 24, we traveled east of Minot to McHenry County where Ron knew of a large native grass pasture where a group of grouse was known to occur. As we exited the vehicles we were greeted to raw conditions. The air temperature was in the 40s, but the attendant steady wind made it seem a lot colder. Ron let us know that the grouse displayed on a knoll in the pasture about a half mile to the north of the road where we were parked. Although none of us savored the idea of walking closer to the birds in those conditions, we also knew it was necessary if we were to see them better than as mere specks on the horizon. As it worked out, we were able to approach to within about a quarter-mile of the birds, and through the spotting scopes were able to see several males and a few females very well before the activity began to die down.

Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) – More Wild Turkeys were seen this year than on any previous tour. We had individuals along the roadside in New York on May 17-18; from the train on May 20; and every day while we were in North Dakota.

Loons (*Gaviidae*)

Common Loon (*Gavia immer*) – One of the chief attractions of a visit to the Adirondacks is the opportunity to see and hear Common Loons on their nesting grounds. Whereas many of us know the loon only as a steel-gray and white bird that frequents coastal locations and

lakes during the winter months; the summertime is when the birds return to their tree-ringed mountain lake abodes, resplendent in breeding dress. This is also the time when the birds may be heard issuing their famously haunting calls in the middle of the night under a full moon.

This trip places more emphasis on studying Common Loons than perhaps any other VENT tour. The reasons for this are that a significant number of the loons that occur in the Lower 48 during the summer months breed in the Northeast; late May is a great time to see them in high plumage; the lakes of the Adirondack League Club are excellent places to hear the loons offering their signature yodels, bugles, and wails on warm spring nights; and last, our local guide, Gary Lee, bands loons as a part of an ongoing loon study program.

In most years, Little Moose Lake is generally the best place to see and study the birds, but this year's "hot" location was East Lake, where we enjoyed stunning views of an adult pair on the morning of May 19. Additionally, some of us were fortunate enough to hear calling birds on at least two evenings on Little Moose Lake. Gary's slide show representing his loon research was a nice bonus on the evening of the 18th.

Grebes (*Podicipedidae*)

Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – Believe it or not, Pied-billed Grebe is not a guaranteed bird on this tour by any means. Although a widespread species across North America, we typically never see more than one or two on this tour, and, in fact, we missed it completely on last year's tour. The two individuals we located this year were both in North Dakota: one on May 22 at the Minot sewage lagoons, and another two days later at a marsh along County Road 19 north of Minot.

Horned Grebe (*Podiceps auritus*) – Horned Grebe has declined as a breeding species across the southern tier of its expansive breeding range. Once common from Montana to North Dakota, the bird is now found only sparingly in places from one year to the next. This year we saw only one bird, a last-minute find by Victor on our unanticipated return to the Minot sewage lagoon on May 25. With its brick-red neck, black head, and yellow head combs, this is among our most attractive grebes.

Red-necked Grebe (*Podiceps grisegena*) – The summertime distribution of Red-necked Grebe is similar to that of Horned Grebe in that the bulk of its range lies north of the U.S. border. We never see more than one or two of these handsome birds, and when we are so fortunate, our sightings have always occurred in North Dakota. This year was no exception to the rule as we found one bird at Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge on the morning of May 23.

Eared Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – This is a common breeding resident of prairie potholes, lakes, and ponds of the Great Plains and Great Basin. We found this bird with ease in North Dakota every day from May 22-25.

Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) – This is a common bird in North Dakota during the breeding season on select larger bodies of water. We saw Western Grebes on May 22 and 23, with scope views of a close group below the dam at Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge.

Cormorants (*Phalacrocoracidae*)

Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – A common breeding bird in North Dakota and seen daily from May 21-23.

Pelagic Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*) – Pelagic Cormorants occur fairly commonly in Washington's Puget Sound region during the spring and summer months. They are especially numerous around Protection Island National Wildlife Refuge, where they nest, but may be seen anywhere along the coast. We saw several individuals at Ediz Hook on the morning of May 27.

Pelicans (*Pelecanidae*)

American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) – White Pelicans were seen in North Dakota on May 22 and 23. A distant group soaring over the prairie was an interesting sight on the 22nd, while close studies of a feeding group below the dam at Upper Souris NWR the next day offered a far more satisfying experience.

Hérons, Egrets & Bitterns (*Ardeidae*)

American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*) – On a tour filled with memorable birding experiences, few were as remarkable as our encounter with an American Bittern in North Dakota on the morning of May 23. That morning we were traveling from Minot to Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge when we came across a bittern standing next to a flooded roadside ditch in full view! With little difficulty, we were able to position both vehicles so that the occupants of each obtained spectacular views of a normally retiring species.

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) – Great Blues were seen on the majority of days with individuals in New York, North Dakota, and Washington.

Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*) – An individual at a stream crossing outside the Adirondack League Club was the only one seen (as is typical for this tour).

Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – This is a common species across most of the U.S., but one that approaches the northern edge of its range way up here in North Dakota. We saw night-herons in small numbers every day from May 23-25.

Ibises & Spoonbills (*Threskiornithidae*)

White-faced Ibis (*Plegadis chihi*) – A few seen in flight from the train in western North Dakota on the afternoon of May 25.

New World Vultures (*Cathartidae*)

Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) – Seen on 8 different days of the trip, from New York, to North Dakota to Washington.

Osprey (*Pandionidae*)

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) – We never see many Ospreys on this trip and this year was no different. Scope views of a treetop-nesting pair at Moss Lake in the Adirondacks on May 18 represented the main sighting. Some of us saw another individual or two from the train in eastern Washington fishing along the Columbia River.

Hawks, Eagles & Kites (*Accipitridae*)

Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – Bald Eagle is virtually a guaranteed-to-see bird in coastal Washington, but rare elsewhere on our tour route. Our national bird was missed in both New York and North Dakota again this year, but a single bird seen from the train in southern Wisconsin definitely represented an “area first-ever” for the tour. Once we reached Washington we had no problem finding eagles along the Olympic Peninsula coast, with numbers of adults and immatures seen.

Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) – Males and females were seen daily from May 21-25 from the train and while in North Dakota, and another in Washington on May 27. Our best looks occurred in North Dakota where we had many fine views of birds hunting over the prairie.

Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) – A single bird flying over Ferd’s Bog in the Adirondacks in New York on the morning of May 20 was the only one seen. This is probably only the second time we’ve ever recorded this bird on this tour.

Cooper’s Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) – A female on a nest in Oak Park, Minot, North Dakota, was seen on May 22-23. Interestingly, this is the situation in which we usually see Cooper’s Hawk on this tour.

Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo platypterus*) – Broad-winged Hawk is a fairly common, but not always easy to see, breeding bird of the Adirondack Mountains. This year was a good one for seeing this species as we recorded about 5 or so individuals over the three-day period from May 18-20. Adult and immature birds were both noted.

Swainson’s Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) – A classic bird of the prairie, Swainson’s Hawk was seen daily in North Dakota from May 23-25. This species is also one of our most characteristically marked birds of prey, featuring a brown chest bib and striking black and white wings in flight.

Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – This, our most common raptor, was seen throughout the trip except for a three-day stretch from May 18-20. Otherwise Red-tailed Hawks were seen across the country from New York to Washington. Birds of the “Eastern” subspecies were noted from Washington to North Dakota; a single pale “Kriger’s” Red-Tail was seen at Tasker’s Coulee in North Dakota on May 23; and birds of the “Western” race were recorded in Washington.

Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*) – The Ferruginous Hawk is one of a number of highly-sought birds we target during our time in North Dakota. As with last year, we scored in McHenry County with scope views of a moderately distant adult bird on a nest on May 24. The problem we faced on that morning was coping with the wind and cold associated with a late cold front, which did not help the viewing conditions.

Falcons & Caracaras (*Falconidae*)

American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) – Always very uncommon on this tour, we managed a single bird outside Albany, New York on the morning of May 17 and a bird on a power line in North Dakota on May 24.

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) – In the Adirondacks, Merlins are known to nest in tall pines that ring many of the region’s mountain lakes. We saw a single individual fly over us at dusk on the evening of May 19 at the Adirondack League Club while we were searching for American Woodcock. This sighting was our first-ever for this tour on its New York segment.

Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) – A couple of immature Peregrines were seen in North Dakota on May 24-25. As is their method, birds were seen strafing flocks of shorebirds and waterfowl on the afternoon of May 24 along Country Road 19; while another individual flew over the train station in Minot the next morning.

Rails & Coots (*Rallidae*)

Sora (*Porzana carolina*) – A single bird was seen briefly, but mostly “heard only” in a freshwater marsh along County Road 19 north of Minot on the afternoon of May 24, while another bird was also mostly “heard only” the next day at the Minot sewage lagoons.

American Coot (*Fulica americana*) – Common and seen daily in North Dakota and from the train; another in Washington on the 27th.

Cranes (*Gruidae*)

Sandhill Crane (*Grus Canadensis*) – Aside from their natural grace and elegance, the thing that makes seeing Sandhill Cranes so special on this tour is that the only way to see them is from the train. In the previous years we have operated this tour, we have never recorded them in New York, North Dakota, or Washington; rather, the only place we get them is in the marshes and fields of southern Wisconsin and Minnesota on the afternoon the train departs Chicago for Minot. This year’s experiences were especially satisfying as we saw more cranes than ever before, including several young “colts.”

Plovers & Lapwings (*Charadriidae*)

Black-bellied Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – Several at the Minot sewage lagoons on May 22 were one of about 20 species of shorebird present that day. A couple of the birds were approaching spectacular high plumage as well.

Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – One or two at the Minot sewage lagoons on May 22 were among many shorebird species present.

Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*) – Piping Plover is an uncommon and declining breeder on the High Plains and we never see more than one or two per trip. In some ways, it’s actually kind of amazing that we’ve never missed the bird before. This year’s sighting of a single bird at the Minot sewage lagoons on May 22 was a most welcome surprise.

Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) – Seen daily in low numbers in North Dakota, and at least a couple others were noted in Washington.

Oystercatchers (*Haematopodidae*)

Black Oystercatcher (*Haematopus bachmani*) – As a specialty bird of the Pacific Coast, the Black Oystercatcher is always high on our list of Washington birds we most want to see. The only site on the tour route where we’ve ever recorded the species is Ediz Hook, outside Port Angeles, where a mix of artificial habitats replicates a rocky shore environment. Log booms associated with a nearby paper mill are the preferred resting sites for a variety of birds and harbor seals, while the harbor’s rocky inner shoreline attracts a variety of shorebirds. We were fortunate again this year in that we located a pair of oystercatchers on a log raft not far from shore. Despite a cool and steady rain, we obtained marvelous scope views of the birds as they stood still for over 15 minutes. Eventually they relocated to the shoreline in front of us where we had even better views.

Avocets & Stilts (*Recurvirostridae*)

American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*) – Avocets were seen on three of four days in North Dakota, with superb views of a couple of birds at the Minot sewage lagoons on May 22 and others on County Road 19 north of Minot on May 24.

Sandpipers (*Scolopacidae*)

Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularius*) – A couple along the edges of the impoundments of the Minot sewage lagoons on May 22 were essentially the only ones seen.

Willet (*Tringa semipalmata*) – A couple at the Minot sewage lagoons on May 22 were seen well; others were spotted from the train in western North Dakota on May 25. The “Western” race.

Upland Sandpiper (*Bartramia longicauda*) – A classic sign of spring is the sight of Upland Sandpipers displaying on the prairie. Freshly arrived from Argentine wintering grounds, this grass-loving species brings life to the plains through its dynamic flight displays and exalted vocalizations. We had a number of wonderful views of this bird throughout our time in North Dakota.

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) – A single bird discovered by Victor along the near shore at Ediz Hook on May 27 was the only one seen. As with other years, we never know when or where we will find this bird...if we find it at all.

Marbled Godwit (*Limosa fedoa*) – It’s a result of our experiences and our perceptions that we tend to think of sandpipers and other shorebirds as coast-loving species, when, in fact, many of our “shorebirds” are not shorebirds at all for part of the year. The Marbled Godwit offers a case in point. Here is a bird that spends the winter on the southern coasts of the U.S. but the spring and summer in the Great Basin and High Plains. We had marvelous views of a displaying and calling bird in McHenry County, North Dakota on May 26.

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*) – One or two at the Minot sewage lagoons on May 22 was a nice find.

Semipalmated Sandpiper (*Calidris pusilla*) – Several at the Minot sewage lagoons on May 22 were expected among all the shorebirds present.

Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*) – One or two at the Minot sewage lagoons on May 22 were the only ones seen.

White-rumped Sandpiper (*Calidris fuscicollis*) – About three at the Minot sewage lagoons on May 22 were discovered among the other shorebirds. This species is always on our thoughts during our time in North Dakota, but never expected.

Baird’s Sandpiper (*Calidris bairdii*) – Good views of about half a dozen individuals at the Minot sewage lagoon on May 22 were the only ones seen.

Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*) – One or two Pectorals among the other shorebirds at the Minot sewage lagoons on May 22 were also the only ones seen.

Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) – About three birds at the Minot sewage lagoons on May 22 were the only ones seen. A couple of the birds were sporting the dapper breeding dress that most of us normally never see.

Stilt Sandpiper (*Calidris himantopus*) – This species was recorded on three days in North Dakota from May 22-24. Our best experience was the scope views we enjoyed of several well-marked individuals at the Minot sewage lagoons on May 22.

Long-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – A couple of beautiful individuals in high

plumage were noted among the other shorebirds at the Minot sewage lagoons on May 22.

Wilson's Snipe (*Gallinago delicata*) – As with Marbled Godwits and Upland Sandpipers, the Wilson's Snipe brings vitality to the prairie during the spring. A skulking species in the non-breeding months, they perch conspicuously on fence poles, and even power poles, before performing improbable aerial displays that last for minutes including steep dives, winnowing, and stationary glides.

American Woodcock (*Scolopax minor*) – Michael O'Brien found at least one woodcock on the entrance road to the Adirondack League Club at dusk on May 18. Our attempt to relocate the bird on the following evening was remarkably successful as a male bird "peented" from the middle of the road. We were also fortunate to observe the bird's remarkable flight display high overhead.

Wilson's Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*) – The phalaropes are among the world's most beautiful shorebirds, and of these, the pastel-colored Wilson's Phalarope may be the most beautiful of them all. We had a number of looks at high plumaged birds on their North Dakota breeding grounds on three of the four days we were there.

Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*) – The majority of Red-necked Phalaropes that migrate through the Great Plains pass through North Dakota. We were fortunate to see this beautiful bird on three of the four days we were there, including side-by-side comparisons with the previous species in McHenry County on May 25.

Gulls & Terns (*Laridae*)

Franklin's Gull (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*) – Franklin's Gull is one of the characteristic breeding species of the High Plains and Great Basin. They nest around larger prairie potholes and reservoirs and forage over surrounding grasslands and agricultural fields. North Dakota is typically home to some of the continent's largest nesting colonies, such as at Salyer National Wildlife Refuge, but this year was different in that extensive flooding prevented the colonies from forming; still, we had no problem finding this lovely bird on three out of the four days we were in North Dakota.

Bonaparte's Gull (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*) – A late-migrating subadult bird was seen at the Minot sewage lagoon in North Dakota on May 22; two subadult birds were seen unexpectedly from the Bainbridge Ferry in Puget Sound on the last afternoon of the trip.

Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*) – Many were seen in North Dakota from May 21-23, and others from the train on May 25-26.

California Gull (*Larus californicus*) – California Gulls breed around saline lakes and reservoirs throughout the Great Basin region and spend the non-breeding months along the Pacific Coast. Late May is a decent time to look for the species in Washington as we typically turn up a handful of immature birds that are not yet ready to join the inland breeding colonies. This year we found several individuals on the log booms at Ediz Hook, per the norm, on May 27.

Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) – Herring Gulls breed on the mountain lakes of the Adirondacks in small and decreasing numbers. As usual, we saw two or three birds on Little Moose Lake at the Adirondack League Club and perhaps a few others elsewhere during our birding forays. We also noted a number of birds from the train along the shore of Lake Erie on the morning of May 21.

Glaucous-winged Gull (*Larus glaucescens*) – This is THE common gull of the Puget Sound

region, where many thousands of pairs nest each year. From the time we got off the train on May 26 to the time we got off the Bainbridge Ferry in Seattle on the 28th, we saw many Glaucous-wingeds on a daily basis. It is always worth noting that Glaucous-winged Gull hybridizes extensively with Western Gull and that many of the birds we saw were the informally named “Puget Sound” Gull, in which individual birds showed characteristics of both species.

Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – A single bird flying over Ediz Hook in Washington on May 27 and another from the Bainbridge Ferry on May 28 were the only ones seen.

Black Tern (*Chidonias niger*) – Sporting a sleek black and gray plumage, the Black Tern is among the most handsome of all North American birds. They winter off the Pacific coast of South America and return each spring to the High Plains, where they nest around prairie potholes and reservoirs. We saw the bird on three of four days while in North Dakota, but our best experience by far was with the close, swirling flock over a marsh along County Road 19 north of Minot on May 24.

Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) – One or two birds were seen foraging over the spillway below the Dam at Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge on May 23.

Forster’s Tern (*Sterna forsteri*) – The above mentioned Common Terns were joined by one or two Forster’s Terns in the same area. Later the same day we saw a few more at Des Lacs National Wildlife Refuge.

Auks, Murres & Puffins (*Alcidae*)

Pigeon Guillemot (*Cepphus columba*) – This is the most commonly encountered alcid in the nearshore waters of Puget Sound. With black plumage, white wings, and bright orange feet, it is also among the most distinct looking of the birds we see in the Pacific Northwest. We had many wonderful views of guillemots again this year, starting with several individuals at Diamond Point on the afternoon of May 26 to the birds we saw at Ediz Hook on the 27th.

Marbled Murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*) – One of the premier birds of the Pacific Northwest, Marbled Murrelet is an uncommon to fairly common nearshore alcid that nests in old growth coniferous forest. We enjoyed scope views of murrelets at Ediz Hook on the afternoon of the 27th and again at Diamond Point on our return visit on the 28th. Marbled Murrelet is a species of concern as its decades-long decline has continued at a slow but steady pace.

Rhinoceros Auklet (*Cerohinca monocerata*) – Rhinoceros Auklets nest by the tens of thousands at Protection Island National Wildlife Refuge in Washington. It is no surprise then that we had little trouble finding them at favored coastal locations, including Ediz Hook on May 27 and Diamond Point on the 26th and 28th. Scope views for all.

Doves & Pigeons (*Columbidae*)

Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) – Seen every day of the trip except May 18 & 19.

Band-tailed Pigeon (*Patagioenas fasciata*) – We enjoyed wonderful scope views of several birds perched atop the trees in Quilcene, Washington on the afternoon of May 28.

Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – This Eurasian species, introduced to South Florida in the late 1960s has now spread across the country and may be found almost anywhere. We saw the bird in a rural community north of Minot on May 23 and others at Diamond Point, Washington on May 26.

Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*) – Seen every day of the trip except for the two full days we were in the Adirondacks on May 18 and 19.

Typical Owls (*Strigidae*)

Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*) – A distant bird on a nest in McHenry County, North Dakota accounted for this year's sighting of the species.

Barred Owl (*Strix varia*) – A concerted effort to see this bird at the Adirondack League Club on the evening of May 19 produced a close calling individual, but alas, no sightings.

Swifts (*Apodidae*)

Chimney Swift (*Chaetura pelagica*) – This bird was seen with ease this year. We saw the pair that typically nests in the main lodge of the Adirondack League Club in New York; others from the train; and one or two more in Minot. Believe it or not, we have actually struggled with this bird in some years.

Vaux's Swift (*Chaetura vauxi*) – We finally caught up with this bird in Quilcene, Washington on the last day of the tour. On the afternoon of May 28 we were watching the parade of birds around the seed feeders of Linda and Arney Finley's home when we spotted several swifts circling low overhead.

Hummingbirds (*Trochilidae*)

Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) – We had superb looks at a male bird attending a feeder at Thatcher Nature Center in New York on May 17. A few seen in North Dakota as well from May 23-25.

Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*) – A single female bird coming to a window feeder in Quilcene, Washington on May 28 was one of the last new birds of the trip (although the bird was seen by only a handful of the group).

Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*) – Several female-type birds were seen at the same feeders as the Anna's Hummingbird. We also had an individual or two the day before (May 27).

Kingfishers (*Alcedinidae*)

Belted Kingfisher (*Megaceryle alcyon*) – This was a good year for seeing this bird, with several individuals in North Dakota from May 23-25.

Woodpeckers & Allies (*Picidae*)

Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*) – The window for seeing this bird is always a narrow one on this tour. Red-bellied Woodpeckers prefer lower elevation deciduous forests, and the only time we are in that habitat-type is on our first morning around Albany. This year, our only sighting was barely a sighting at all, as Michael called out a high-flying bird over Tygert Road on the morning of May 17.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*) – We enjoyed superb looks at a number of birds in the Adirondacks on May 18 & 19. Especially memorable was male bird along the road to East Lake on the 18th, while others were seen away from the property at Ferd's Bog and along the road to Sagamore Lodge.

Red-breasted Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus ruber*) – This is another West Coast specialty bird we

target on the Washington segment of the tour. The interesting thing about Red-breasted Sapsucker is that they are not rare birds on the Olympic Peninsula, yet are often very difficult to find. They favor dense areas of willow, alder, and maple, but the abundance of such habitat here can seem overwhelming. We have managed to see the bird on two of the three previous tours, but have never found it in the same place twice. This year about three-fourths of the group was treated to a very unexpected but amazing look at an adult bird at a roadside pullout on the highway to Diamond Point on the morning of May 28. Whew!

Downy Woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*) – We had fine looks at a pair along the road to East Lake at the Adirondack League Club on the morning of May 18, as well as another bird on the other side of the country in Washington at Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge on May 27.

Hairy Woodpecker (*Picoides villosus*) – This bird ranges across the entire width of the country, as evidenced by the fact that we saw it in New York, North Dakota, and Washington. The North Dakota bird was at Denbigh Experimental Forest and represented the first time we've ever seen the bird on that segment of the tour.

Black-backed Woodpecker (*Picoides arcticus*) – Black-backed Woodpecker is an uncommon but resident bird of the central Adirondack region. Within the overall region of the Adirondack League Club, it is the remarkable natural area known as Ferd's Bog where birders go to try for this species. Our first visit, on the afternoon of May 20, proved fruitless, despite a lovely walk into the bog; but an optional second visit on our last morning, May 18, was successful when Michael coaxed a male bird into view. Black-backed Woodpecker is a retiring denizen of the north woods and a symbol of Canadian zone forest. We were thankful for such a wonderful last-minute find. This now makes us three for four in our attempt.

Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*) – We saw several flickers throughout the trip: Yellow-shafted birds in New York and North Dakota and Red-shafted birds in Washington.

Pileated Woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*) – It's interesting how a bird can perform so differently from one year to the next. Take Pileated Woodpecker, for example. This species is actually fairly common in New York and uncommon-to-common in Washington, but regardless, can prove either easy or difficult to find. We struggled with the bird on the 2010 tour, with some people never seeing it at all and other seeing it with ease. This year we had wonderful views of a perched bird on our first morning out of Albany when an adult Pileated perched on a telephone pole on Tygert Road on May 17. Others were seen and heard on ensuing days in the Adirondack Mountains.

Tyrant Flycatchers (*Tyrannidae*)

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (*Empidonax flaviventris*) – We had fabulous looks at a brightly colored migrant bird (among many other birds that day) at the headquarters of Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge in North Dakota. It is difficult to overstate the satisfaction that resulted from our having such wonderful views of a bird that can be very challenging to identify. This was also the first-ever occasion this bird has been recorded on the North Dakota segment of this tour.

Least Flycatcher (*Empidonax minimus*) – Our first Least Flycatcher was noted in the

Adirondacks while walking to the Brown's tract boardwalk on the morning of May 18, but this year, North Dakota was the place to see this species. We found both migrants and breeders all over on May 23 and 24 including at Upper Souris NWR and Oak Park.

Pacific-slope Flycatcher (*Empidonax difficilis*) – We had pretty good looks at a somewhat elusive bird at Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge in Washington on May 27.

Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*) – We never see many Eastern Phoebes on this tour, but this year's sighting was of an active bird outside the Sagamore Lodge in the Adirondacks on May 18.

Great-crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus crinitus*) – We saw two individual Great-cresteds this trip: one in New York and one in North Dakota. The New York bird was seen the first morning at the Helderberg Workshop (May 17), and was an individual foraging high up among trees during a rainstorm (yes, we were in the rain as well); but the North Dakota bird offered sublime views as it perched in the open in the top of a sun-splashed tree in Oak Park (May 24).

Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*) – Western Kingbirds were not exactly common in North Dakota, but we had little trouble finding them daily from May 22-24.

Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) – We saw this handsome bird in New York on May 17, outside of Albany; en route to the train station on the 20th; and every day in North Dakota.

Shrikes (*Laniidae*)

Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) – Loggerhead Shrike has undergone dramatic decline across much of its range over the last two decades, but nowhere has the decline been more dramatic than in the Northeast and Midwest. As usual, only one bird was seen this year: a somewhat flighty individual in McHenry County, North Dakota, on May 24.

Vireos & Allies (*Vireonidae*)

Yellow-throated Vireo (*Vireo flavifrons*) – The only place we ever record this species is in Oak Park in Minot, where it breeds among the park's many tall deciduous trees. We have never missed the bird on a previous trip and this year hued to that pattern as we had excellent views of vireos on three separate days from May 22-24.

Blue-headed Vireo (*Vireo solitarius*) – A calling territorial bird was seen along the road to East Lake in the Adirondacks on the morning of May 19, while a migrating bird was noted at Oak Park in Minot, North Dakota on the morning of May 23.

Hutton's Vireo (*Vireo huttoni*) – An aggressively calling individual was seen at Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge in Washington on May 27. It should be noted that this bird, although resident, can be surprisingly difficult to find at times.

Warbling Vireo (*Vireo gilvus*) – Like the Yellow-throated Vireo, this species is a breeding bird at Oak Park in Minot. We saw Warbling Vireo on all three visits to the park, from May 22-24.

Red-eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*) – A common and widespread species of the eastern forests, we found Red-eyeds on two of four days in the Adirondacks (May 18 & 20) and on three successive days in North Dakota (May 22-24).

Philadelphia Vireo (*Vireo philadelphicus*) – A couple of individuals among many other migrating birds at Oak Park in Minot on the morning of May 23 offered wonderful views. This sighting was all the more significant in that it represented a first-ever for this tour.

Crows, Jays & Magpies (*Corvidae*)

Gray Jay (*Perisoreus canadensis*) – One or two individuals were seen at Brown’s Tract Boardwalk in the Adirondacks on the morning of May 18 while another individual was recorded as “heard only” at Ferd’s Bog on the morning of May 20. Birds of the Northeast are of the widespread boreal race *canadensis*. Of interest to this author, this year marked the first time in the last three trips that we found this bird in New York; conversely, this was also the first time that we every missed it in Washington (race *obscurus*).

Steller’s Jay (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) – Steller’s Jay is a common inhabitant of the big forests of the Pacific Northwest, and we saw it all three days we were in Washington, from May 26-28.

Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*) – This was an excellent year for us for seeing this bird. We saw Blue Jays every day we were in New York and on two days in North Dakota.

Black-billed Magpie (*Pica hudsonia*) – Several individuals were seen from the train in Montana and eastern Washington on May 25 & 26.

American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Crows were commonly seen throughout the trip, and missed on only one day, May 21.

Northwestern Crow (*Corvus caurinus*) – Although we saw some birds on the Olympic Peninsula that we called Northwestern Crow, particularly around Port Angeles, it is unlikely that these birds were “full” Northwesterns, but rather some degree of Northwestern/American Crow intergrades. Here’s why. The Birdfinding Guide to Washington (2003) says this about Northwestern Crow:

“After lengthy discussion it is pretty well settled that the Crow of the northwestern sea-coasts is merely a dwarfed race of [American Crow], and that it shades perfectly into the prevailing western type whenever that species occupies adjacent regions” (William Leon Dawson, *The Birds of Washington, 1909*). True a hundred years ago, still true today. Northwestern Crow originally inhabited Puget Trough shoreline [and the] outer coast from Gray’s Harbor north, isolated by uncut, deep forests from American Crow populations along streams in Eastern [and] southwestern Washington. Deforestation by settlers [and] commercial loggers fostered interbreeding along south Puget Sound by [the] late 1800s, with [the] result that Dawson found it “impossible to pronounce with certainty upon the subspecific identity of Crows seen near shore in Mason, Thurston, Pierce, or even King County.” With continuing development American Crow invaded [the] whole Puget Trough, swamping indigenous Northwestern populations. Phenotypically pure Northwestern Crows [are] still recognizable along [the] outer Olympic Coast (ex. La Push), [and] in the San Juan Islands.

So what does this mean for the crows around Port Angeles? Are there any pure Northwestern Crows here? It’s possible, but probably not. Their much lower pitched calls are very different than those of typical American Crows found across the U.S., suggesting a major difference; however, the vocalizations of American Crows in the Puget Sound region are also lower-pitched than those of their widespread brethren, and I can’t say that I can recognize a difference in the calls of the Puget Sound Americans versus true Northwesterns. Local birders used to say that the birds from Port Angeles west are more likely Northwestern, but with the ongoing American Crow invasion, that line has likely continued moving west. Can you count Northwestern Crow? It’s up to you. The birds we saw on Ediz Hook are almost certainly at least part Northwestern. Apparently, to be 100% sure of seeing Northwestern Crow, one must go all the way out to the

outer Olympic Coast or the San Juan Islands. The crows of Vancouver Island are also Northwestern.

Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) – Common Ravens were seen on two full days in the Adirondacks on May 18 & 19, and then again daily in the West from May 25-28.

Larks (*Alaudidae*)

Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*) – A couple of birds were seen amid the pastures of native prairie in McHenry Country on the cold morning of May 24.

Swallows (*Hirundinidae*)

Purple Martin (*Progne subis*) – Purple Martin is a widespread but very local breeding bird in North Dakota. The colony at the headquarters of Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge offered wonderful views of many birds on the morning of May 23, as well as hosting the only individuals we saw anywhere on the trip this year.

Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – A common bird across the northern tier of the country, we saw Tree Swallows almost daily and in every part of the country we visited.

Violet-green Swallow (*Tachycineta thalassina*) – This is a common breeding bird in Washington and was seen well on May 26 and 28. The Diamond Point bird on the 26th provided the best views as it perched on a power line only yards away from the group.

Northern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) – Very scarce this year. A single bird was seen along the road by the dam at Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge on May 23.

Cliff Swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) – This is a common bird in North Dakota and was seen daily from May 21-23. Others were seen in Washington from May 25-27.

Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) – Barn Swallows were recorded here and there in every part of the country we visited.

Chickadees & Tits (*Paridae*)

Black-capped Chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*) – This common woodland bird was seen daily in New York and North Dakota.

Chestnut-backed Chickadee (*Poecile rufescens*) – This is a common but somewhat retiring bird of the big forests of the Pacific Northwest. We had excellent studies of a couple of birds at Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge in Washington on May 27 & 28.

Long-tailed Tits (*Aegithalidae*)

Bushtit (*Psaltriparus minimus*) – As is their wont, Bushtits often travel in small groups. One such group was seen along the highway during our return from Diamond Point, Washington on the morning of May 28.

Nuthatches (*Sittidae*)

Red-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*) – We probably didn't see more than 5 or so individuals, yet one or two were seen in each major region of the country we visited, from New York to North Dakota to Washington.

White-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*) – Our first nuthatch seen was the individual at

Thatcher Nature Center southwest of Albany on May 17; another was seen on the property of the Adirondack League Club on the 19th. From then on, we saw the bird daily in North Dakota from May 22-24.

Creepers (*Certhiidae*)

Brown Creeper (*Certhia americana*) – A calling bird was first detected by Michael O'Brien at Ferd's Bog on May 18. It's hard to believe, but this sighting represented the first-ever for this tour!

Wrens (*Troglodytidae*)

Bewick's Wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*) – We enjoyed superb looks at an active bird in a hedgerow at Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge, Washington, on the afternoon of May 27.

House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) – Despite its status as a widespread bird, we never see more than a couple of House Wrens on this tour. This year we had 2 or 3 individuals, all of which were in North Dakota. At least one was at Oak Park on May 22, while 1 or 2 others were at Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge on the 23rd.

Winter Wren (*Troglodytes hiemalis*) – We recorded Winter Wrens on two days in the Adirondacks, but the sighting that took the cake was the extended study we enjoyed of a singing bird along the boardwalk at Ferd's Bog on the morning of May 20.

Pacific Wren (*Troglodytes pacificus*) – We struggled with this bird somewhat this year. Our first sighting was of an elusive, singing male in the Heart-o'-the-Hills campground in Olympic National Park on May 27. Thanks to Louise Zemaitis, who spotted the bird, we all eventually enjoyed good views. The second sighting was clearly our best, however, as a single bird attending a nest at Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge was discovered by Louise, also on the 27th.

Sedge Wren (*Cistothorus platensis*) – Beautiful studies of this grass-loving bird were obtained at Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge on the morning of May 23.

Kinglets (*Regulidae*)

Golden-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus satrapa*) – Pretty good views were obtained of a couple of birds in the Adirondacks on May 18 (grounds of Sagamore Lodge) and May 20 (Ferd's Bog), but dazzling views were had of a bird in Olympic National Park (Heart-o'-the-Hills Campground) on May 27.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus calendula*) – A late migrant Ruby-crowned was found at Oak Park on the morning of May 23, as well as our first-ever on the North Dakota segment of the tour.

Thrushes & Allies (*Turdidae*)

Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) – A couple individuals were recorded in New York on May 18 and 20 while another individual or two were seen in North Dakota on the 24th.

Veery (*Catharus fuscescens*) – This was a tough year for our finding Veery. A single calling bird was seen well, but by only a few people, along Tygert Road southwest of Albany on the morning of May 17. None were seen after that initial sighting.

Swainson's Thrush (*Catharus ustulatus*) – Migrant birds were seen daily, and well, in North Dakota from May 22-24.

Hermit Thrush (*Catharus guttatus*) – Singing birds were heard only in the Adirondacks on May 19 and 20. A single bird in Heart-o'-the-Hills Campground, Washington, was seen well by about two-thirds of the group on May 27.

American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) – One of the continent's most widespread birds, American Robins were seen every day of the trip.

Varied Thrush (*Ixoreus naevius*) – An early morning drive along the highway in Olympic National Park on the morning of May 27 produced satisfactory views of a female bird; a return trip the following morning resulted in excellent studies of a male bird foraging along the roadside.

Mockingbirds & Thrashers (*Mimidae*)

Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*) – One or two were seen the first morning in New York on May 17 while others were seen on two separate days in North Dakota.

Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Northern Mockingbird is actually a thinly distributed bird in the northern tier of the United States. One bird on a power line in Albany on the morning of May 17 was the only one of the trip!

Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*) – Brown Thrashers were seen on two days in North Dakota on May 23rd and 24th. The bird we saw at Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge on the 23rd provided our highest quality sighting.

Starlings (*Sturnidae*)

European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – We saw this bird every day of the trip except one.

Pipits (*Motacillidae*)

Sprague's Pipit (*Anthus spragueii*) – Finding Sprague's Pipit provided a great challenge this year. On the day we searched for the bird in McHenry County, North Dakota, the weather conditions were daunting—cold temperatures and strong wind under an overcast sky—and definitely not conducive for walking the prairie in search of a bird that employs an extravagant flight display to advertise itself. We began the search by entering a couple of pastures of native grass (which the species requires) and listening for the clear cascading song of the displaying male bird, but the conditions were so difficult that it seemed unlikely that any birds would be active. Although we initially struck out, the search continued until we finally located a singing bird in another pasture drifting high overhead and issuing its signature flight song. With most of the group now outside the vehicles (and displaying the patience of Job), the pipit finally landed on the road a short distance away from us where we enjoyed fine views. Sprague's Pipit is a declining species across much of its range. That we saw the bird at all, let alone under such difficult circumstances was very gratifying.

Waxwings (*Bombycillidae*)

Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) – This was a decidedly uncommon bird this year with scattered sightings in New York (May 17), North Dakota (May 24), and Washington (May 28).

Longspurs (*Calacariidae*)

Chestnut-collared Longspur (*Calcarius ornatus*) – One of the great thrills of a visit to the High

Plains in the spring is the opportunity to view Chestnut-collared Longspurs in handsome breeding dress. We had good views of a couple of restless birds in McHenry County on the morning of May 24th. Under better weather conditions than we experienced, male birds will often perch on fence lines and sing, but, on this day, the birds were intent on avoiding exposure to the raw conditions, which kept them off the fence line and close to the ground. Still, good looks were had by all.

New World Warblers (*Parulidae*) – Through four Birding Across America by Train tours, we have never failed to record fewer than 21 species of warblers. Warblers are among the world’s most captivating bird families, and this trip certainly provides some wonderful opportunities for viewing a broad representation. This year was perhaps most remarkable in that our list of 25 species set the new high for this tour. Just for fun, I have chosen to list the warblers we saw in the order in which they were first seen, as opposed to standard taxonomic arrangement.

- 1) **Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica petechia*)** – A dazzling male was seen on Tygert Rd. southwest of Albany in New York on the morning of May 17. Many more were seen in North Dakota from May 22-25.
- 2) **Magnolia Warbler (*Dendroica magnolia*)** – Our first Magnolia was seen in the Helderberg Workshop southwest of Albany on May 17, but our best looks were had in the Adirondacks on two of the next three days. Ferd’s Bog, for instance, proved a fabulous place, for seeing this species. Spectacular male birds were also seen in North Dakota on May 23 & 24.
- 3) **Chestnut-sided Warbler (*Dendroica pensylvanica*)** – Chestnut-sided Warbler was recorded for the first time at the Helderberg Workshop amid intermittent rain on May 17, but we enjoyed our best views in the Adirondacks a few days later when we had exceptional studies of a gorgeous singing male at the crossing of the Moose River outside Old Forge.
- 4) **Hooded Warbler (*Wilsonia citrina*)** – The Helderberg Workshop outside Albany is the only site where this bird may be seen on our tour route. For the second year in a row, we had outstanding views of a lovely male on territory. Hooded Warbler reaches the northern limit of its range in this part of New York.
- 5) **Blue-winged Warbler (*Vermivora cyanoptera*)** – The second growth woodland and forest-edge habitat found southwest of Albany provides beautiful habitat for Blue-winged Warbler. The male at Thatcher Nature Center on the morning of May 17 could not have been more cooperative. Outstanding views for all!
- 6) **Blackburnian Warbler (*Dendroica fusca*)** – The morning of May 18 saw us embark on the short walk to the Brown’s Tract Boardwalk east of the town of Inlet. It was in the trees along the side of the highway where we recorded our first Blackburnian Warbler, a gorgeous male bird, among a variety of warbler species. We also had good looks at Blackburnians at East Lake, on the property of the Adirondack League Club, the next day.
- 7) **Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*)** – Our first Yellow-rumped Warbler was seen in the trees projecting from the marsh at the end of the Brown’s Tract Boardwalk on the morning of May 18. Others were seen on each of the succeeding three days. This was the “Myrtle” race; while a single “Audubon’s” type was seen in Washington on May 27.
- 8) **Black-throated Blue Warbler (*Dendroica caerulescens*)** – A Black-throated Blue Warbler

was seen by part of the group in the woods near the Brown's Tract Boardwalk on the morning of May 18. Our best views by far, however, were of the male bird singing from a perch at East Lake the next day at the Adirondack League Club. Seeing Black-throated Blue Warbler on territory in the spring is one of the great thrills of North American birding.

- 9) **Nashville Warbler (*Oreothlypis ruficapilla*)** – Nashville Warbler is certainly not a rare species in the Adirondacks by any stretch of the imagination, yet their proclivity for perching high in the trees can render them harder to spot than one might expect. Regardless, we did have good views of a singing bird on May 18 at the Brown's Tract Boardwalk. Another was seen on the 20th on the early-morning trip to Ferd's Bog, while our last individual of the trip was a migrant noted in North Dakota on the 23rd.
- 10) **Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*)** – This species was also noted for the first time at the Brown's Tract Boardwalk in the Adirondacks on the morning of May 18th. Others were either seen or heard on other days thereafter.
- 11) **Northern Parula (*Parula americana*)** – A close but silent female at the Brown's Tract Boardwalk on the 18th was apparently in the vicinity of a nest. A male was seen at Ferd's Bog on the morning of the 20th, while still another was seen in North Dakota on the 23rd.
- 12) **Northern Waterthrush (*Parkesia noveboracensis*)** – An elusive singing male at the Brown's Tract Boardwalk on the morning of May 18 was eventually seen well. Some of us were even able to obtain scope views. This is one of the few places on this tour route where this bird may be seen.
- 13) **Canada Warbler (*Wilsonia canadensis*)** – A gorgeous male on territory by a stream crossing near the Sagamore Lodge in the Adirondacks was seen well by everyone on the morning of May 18. Canada Warbler is always a hit-or-miss bird on this tour, but this year was a big "hit" all the way! Wahoo!
- 14) **Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*)** – Our first Black-and-white was a rather difficult to-see individual at the Sagamore Lodge in the Adirondacks on the 18th. Our best views were in Oak Park, in Minot, North Dakota of a singing male perched high in a tree.
- 15) **Black-throated Green Warbler (*Dendroica virens*)** – Our first BTG of the trip was a male bird seen poorly on the grounds of the Sagamore Lodge on the 18th. We enjoyed exquisite views of a male bird the next day on the grounds of the Adirondack League Club along the road to East Lake.
- 16) **American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*)** – A young male bird at the head of the Sagamore Lodge Road was seen well by most of us on the morning of the 18th. A spectacular male was seen well the next afternoon by the crossing of the Moose River. Several others were seen as migrants in North Dakota from May 22-25.
- 17) **Pine Warbler (*Dendroica pinus*)** – As in previous years, our lone experience with Pine Warbler was the singing male bird we located in the tall white pines surrounding Arrowhead Park in Inlet in the Adirondacks.
- 18) **Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapilla*)** – Kudos to Michael O'Brien for locating a singing Ovenbird high in the beech trees along the road to East Lake at the Adirondack League Club on May 19.
- 19) **Tennessee Warbler (*Oreothlypis peregrina*)** – A small, fast-moving group of Tennessees were seen briefly overhead on the morning of May 20 during our optional return visit to Ferd's Bog in the Adirondacks. Much higher quality views of a number of birds were obtained at Oak Park in Minot on May 22-24.

- 20) Blackpoll Warbler (*Dendroica striata*)** – Blackpoll Warbler is a late-season migrant in the Upper Midwest, and we really nailed this bird this year. Several crisp males were seen in North Dakota from May 22-24, with our best views of a low-foraging male bird in Oak Park in Minot on the 22nd.
- 21) Wilson's Warbler (*Wilsonia pusilla*)** – A single, stealthy bird was seen by some of the group in Oak Park in Minot on the 23rd. Somewhat surprising is that this was the only individual we recorded this year, and a bird that was definitely not seen by everyone.
- 22) Cape May Warbler (*Dendroica tigrina*)** – On a birdlist studded with outstanding warblers, Cape May Warbler takes the cake for the 2011 tour. Until this year, we had never seen a Cape May Warbler on this tour. This is a thinly distributed spring migrant in the Adirondacks and a fairly scarce migrant in the High Plains; however, the weather conditions were perfect in North Dakota this year for depositing birds in the prairie oases. The excitement began on the morning of May 23, when Victor discovered a female bird high in the trees at Oak Park on an early morning outing. Later in the morning, two more female birds were seen in the treeline at Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge. The next day, May 24, we finally caught up with a male, accompanied by at least three females, in the experimental forest at Denbigh.
- 23) Orange-crowned Warbler (*Oreothlypis celata*)** – A late migrant of the Eastern race was seen at Oak Park on the morning of May 23, while a brightly colored individual of the Western race was enjoyed by all at Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge in Washington on May 27.
- 24) Mourning Warbler (*Oporornis philadelphia*)** – A male Mourning was seen by only a few of us in an isolated wind-blown tree shelter in McHenry Country on the morning of May 24.
- 25) Black-throated Gray Warbler (*Dendroica nigrescens*)** – The discovery of a young male Black-throated Gray at Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge in Washington on May 27 was the only one seen. More importantly, this sighting marked our first-ever for this tour, despite fairly concerted efforts to locate the species on past trips.

Buntings, Sparrows & Allies (*Emberizidae*)

- Spotted Towhee (*Pipilo maculatus*)** – Our first Spotted Towhee was seen at Tasker's Coulee in North Dakota on the afternoon of May 23, where the bird reaches the edge of its range; others were seen daily in Washington, as expected from May 26-28.
- Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerina*)** – Chipping Sparrow was seen daily in New York and on two days in North Dakota.
- Clay-colored Sparrow (*Spizella pallida*)** – Clay-colored Sparrow is among the most common birds on the High Plains in the spring. We enjoyed good views of singing birds at Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge, North Dakota, on May 23.
- Vesper Sparrow (*Poocetes gramineus*)** – Two birds seen from the vehicles at Tasker's Coulee, North Dakota, on May 23 were the only ones seen.
- Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*)** – One or two Lark Sparrows were seen at the same location of the above mentioned Vesper Sparrows at Tasker's Coulee on May 23.
- Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)** – A common species across most of its range, Savannah Sparrow was seen in North Dakota on the 24th and 25th and again in Washington on the 26th and 27th.
- Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*)** – Despite the raw conditions, we had

superb scope views of a singing Grasshopper Sparrow in McHenry County, North Dakota, on the morning of May 24th, only minutes after our unforgettable experience with the next species.

Baird's Sparrow (*Ammodramus bairdii*) – Baird's Sparrow is a declining species of the native prairie and, therefore, of the most highly-sought birds in North America. This year, we had extraordinary views of a singing male in a native grass pasture in McHenry County on the raw morning of May 24. The rich beige-rust plumage, black necklace, and characteristic facial marks were all seen well. The quality of views we enjoyed were so good that Victor proclaimed this experience the best he has ever had with this species.

Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*) – A common and widespread bird of wet habitats, Song Sparrows were seen on all three major areas of the tour.

Lincoln's Sparrow (*Melospiza lincolni*) – We enjoyed superb views of a nesting pair at Ferd's Bog, New York, on the afternoon of May 18.

Swamp Sparrow (*Melospiza georgiana*) – Along with Lincoln's Sparrow, we enjoyed superb views of a nesting pair at Ferd's Bog, New York on the afternoon of May 18.

White-throated Sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) – Our first White-throated Sparrow sighting was memorable for the outstanding views we enjoyed of beautifully marked individual in the forest near the Brown's Tract Boardwalk on the morning of May 18. Another was seen as a migrant at Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge, North Dakota, on May 23.

Harris's Sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*) – One of the great surprises of the trip was the discovery of about half a dozen Harris's Sparrows in the treeline at Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge on the morning of May 23. We were fortunate to see at least one male bird in high plumage. This sighting represented our first-ever for this tour!

White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) – Single migrant birds at Thatcher Nature Center in New York on the morning of May 17, and at Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge in North Dakota on May 23 were of the race *leucophrys*. The birds we saw daily in Washington, from May 26-28, were of the local resident race *pugetensis*.

Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*) – "Slate-colored" Juncos were seen daily in New York, while "Oregon" Juncos were seen daily in Washington.

Cardinals & Allies (*Cardinalidae*)

Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*) – Most of the group enjoyed a dazzling look at a singing male along Tygert Road outside Albany on the morning of May 17, while a somewhat less brightly marked bird was seen near East Lake at the Adirondack League Club was seen on the 19th. A couple of green females were also spotted in the latter area. With scarlet-red plumage and jet black wings and tail, the Scarlet Tanager is one of the most handsome birds in North America.

Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*) – Our first tanager was a female bird seen in back of the Wild Birds Unlimited store west of Sequim, Washington on May 26, but we enjoyed far better looks at a male bird in Quilcene on the last afternoon.

Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – Our one morning around Albany offers the only chance of the entire tour to see this otherwise common eastern species. This year we located a male bird at the Heldeberg Workshop on the morning of May 17. A second male was seen much better a couple of hours later at the Thatcher Nature Center.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) – A female grosbeak near the Brown's

Tract Boardwalk in the Adirondacks on the morning of May 18 was the only one seen until we arrived in North Dakota. On the morning of May 23rd, an optional trip to Oak Park in Minot revealed the park to be full of migrating grosbeaks. We probably saw as many as 10 individuals, including several beautiful males. It is also worth mentioning that we had good views of a male Rose-breasted x Black-headed Grosbeak hybrid. In song and plumage, the bird most closely resembled a Black-headed Grosbeak, but the distribution of orange on the breast, in addition to its lighter coloration, was clearly indicative of a Rose-breasted influence.

Black-headed Grosbeak (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*) – A male bird at the feeders at the Wild Birds Unlimited store west of Sequim, Washington on May 26 and 28 offered fine studies. Another male at the Finley house in Quilcene on the afternoon of the 28th was also seen very well.

Blackbirds & Allies (*Icteridae*)

Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) – Bursting with personality and song, the Bobolink is a symbol of all that is right with the world. Whether seen perched atop a dandelion in a verdant pasture or performing a musical flight display over rolling prairie, Bobolinks emit a vigor that reflects the halcyon days of the spring season. Our first Bobolink was a bird we saw amid the blowing grass of a green New York pasture southwest of Albany on May 17. After that we saw many in North Dakota from May 23-25.

Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – A common and widespread bird, we saw Red-winged Blackbird on all but three days of the trip.

Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*) – This is a declining North Dakota bird that we saw in McHenry County, North Dakota on May 24.

Yellow-headed Blackbird (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) – We had fine views of Yellow-headed Blackbirds every day we were in North Dakota, from May 22-25. Our top sightings were of dandy male birds at the Minot Sewage lagoons on May 22, and of a raucous colony along County Road 19 north of Minot on the 25th.

Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) – We had good views of Brewer's Blackbirds on the prairie every day we were in North Dakota, from May 22-25.

Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – This is a very common bird from New York to North Dakota and was seen every day of the trip until we ran out of light on the high plains of Montana on the evening of May 25th.

Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) – Cowbirds were seen on eight separate days this trip, including on every major region we visited.

Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*) – A singing male bird was seen at Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge, North Dakota on May 23. Our sighting, near the refuge headquarters, marked the icing on the cake of a glorious, bird-filled morning.

Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*) – An electric male bird seen along Tygert Road southwest of Albany on May 17 was a fun way to start the trip. We ultimately saw several more in North Dakota from May 22-24. This is a widespread bird in the East and Midwest, but what a bird it is.

Siskins, Crossbills & Allies (*Fringillidae*)

Purple Finch (*Carpodacus purpureus*) – A couple of birds by the Moose River in the

Adirondacks on May 19 were among the few seen in New York this year. We caught up with the bird again in Washington when we had good looks at a couple individuals attending feeders at the Wild Birds Unlimited store west of Sequim on May 26, and again two days later coming to the seed feeders at the Finley house in Quilcene.

House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) – A couple birds seen in New York on May 17, and others seen in Washington on the 26th and 28th accounted for all sightings.

Red Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*) – The Olympic Peninsula is the only place where we've had this bird on past tours. This year, however, we were treated to sightings of a restless, roving flock in the experimental forest at Denbigh, North Dakota. This sighting represented the first time we've ever seen this bird in North Dakota.

Pine Siskin (*Spinus pinus*) – Pine Siskins were noted only in Washington this year, with several individuals seen at seed feeders on the 26th and 28th.

American Goldfinch (*Spinus tristis*) – An immaculate little bird, American Goldfinch was recorded on every major region of our tour route.

Evening Grosbeak (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*) Evening Grosbeak, a beautiful bird of yellow, white, and sienna, was seen well at the Finley house in Quilcene, Washington on the afternoon of May 28. This bird is neither common nor rare in Washington, yet the sheer beauty of the species always makes it a real crowd-pleaser.

Old World Sparrows (*Passeridae*)

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) – Introduced and widespread, we saw sparrows in every major area we visited.

Total = 227

MAMMALS

The list of 23 species of mammals seen on this year's tour was a record. That we surpassed the previous high mark of 19 species is due in part to the slow progress of the train through the High Plains on June 25 and 26, which allowed for prolonged viewing from the observation car. This was a banner year for rodents, which included sightings of our first-ever prairie-dogs, while the larger hoofed mammals were also well-represented. All this was in addition to a diversity of other animals that included dogs, rabbits, raccoons, seals, and sea lions.

Please note that the checklist order and common and scientific names of the mammals that appear in this list follow those given in the **Mammals of North America (Peterson Field Guides, 2006)**, by Fiona A. Reid.

Marmots & Squirrels (*Sciuridae*)

Woodchuck (*Marmota monax*) – A single animal on the side of the road east of Indian Lake in the Adirondacks on May 20, while returning to Albany, was the only one seen.

Black-tailed Prairie Dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*) – One or two small dog "towns" were seen from the train in the vicinity of the North Dakota/Montana state line.

Richardson's Ground Squirrel (*Spermophilus richardsonii*) – Remarkably, several members

of a small colony of these squirrels was well studied in the small cemetery below the hotel in Minot on the afternoon of May 24.

Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel (*Ictidomys tridecemlineatus*) – We enjoyed fine studies of this handsome little animal at the refuge headquarters at Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge in North Dakota on May 23.

Eastern Chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*) – Individuals were seen in New York from May 17-19.

Eastern Gray Squirrel (*Tamias carolinensis*) – Gray Squirrels were common in Oak Park in North Dakota.

Eastern Fox Squirrel (*Sciurus niger*) – A single Fox Squirrel was seen in a tree in a wooded draw below Tasker's Coulee, North Dakota, on May 23.

Red Squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) – A single animal was seen in the mountain forest of the Adirondacks by only one or two of us on May 18.

Douglas's Squirrel (*Tamiasciurus douglassi*) – Douglas's Squirrel essentially replaces the Red Squirrel in the Pacific Northwest. Although browner overall in appearance, it is a very closely related animal that occurs commonly in the region's larger forests. A single animal was seen by several of the group at the Heart-O'-the-Hills Campground, Olympic National Park, on the morning of May 27.

Voles & Muskrats (*Arvicolinae*)

Meadow Vole (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*) – A single animal was flushed in the Baird's Sparrow pasture in McHenry County, North Dakota, on May 24.

Common Muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*) – With an abundance of ponds, sloughs, marshes, and drainages, North Dakota is a superb place to see muskrats. We saw this species daily from May 21-23.

Hares & Rabbits (*Leporidae*)

Eastern Cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) – A widespread and common animal, we saw cottontails with ease in New York on May 17, 21, and 23.

Snowshoe Hare (*Lepus americanus*) – We enjoyed outstanding looks at a single Snowshoe Hare at the edge of the middle campground at Heart-O'-the-Hills in Olympic National Park on the morning of May 27.

Dogs (*Canidae*)

Coyote (*Canis latrans*) – A single animal was seen from the train in western North Dakota on the afternoon of May 25.

Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) – We see this animal very well in some years, but not this time. A couple of Red Foxes were seen briefly by some members of the group in New York on May 17 and in North Dakota on the 22nd.

Raccoons (*Procyonidae*)

Northern Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) – A single animal in a tree in Oak Park, Minot, North Dakota, on the morning of May 23 was the only one seen.

Sea Lions (*Otariidae*)

California Sea Lion (*Zalophus californianus*) – One swimming in the nearshore water at

Diamond Point, Washington on May 26 was the only one seen (although the species is not rare).

Seals (*Phocidae*)

Harbor Seal (*Phoca vitulina*) – Many were seen on the log booms at Ediz Hook, Port Angeles, Washington, on the afternoon of May 27.

Deer (*Cervidae*)

White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) – This is a very common eastern mammal, and a species we saw every day but once from May 17-25.

Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) – Two varieties of Mule Deer were seen this year. Several of the “Western” or “typical” Mulies were seen late in the day from the train in northern Montana on May 25. Others of the same variety were seen from the train the next morning in eastern Washington. On the Olympic Peninsula we saw a form of Mule Deer known as “Columbian Mule Deer” or “Black-tailed Mule Deer.” Members of the latter group differ from their interior brethren in their smaller size and close resemblance, in appearance, to White-tailed Deer. Instead of a rosy tail, these animals possess a “powder puff” tail, albeit a little darker above than on White-tailed. There are some other structural differences that can be discerned under close viewing conditions.

Elk (*Cervus canadensis*) – We enjoyed fine views of a roadside herd of “Roosevelt Elk” west of Sequim, Washington on the morning of May 28 while returning to Seattle.

Moose (*Alces alces*) – Our Moose sightings constituted the top mammal experiences of the trip. An adult female that bounded from the forest onto the road not far from us near the Sagamore Lodge in New York on May 18 was a fairly arresting experience, while another four or so individuals were seen well from the train in Montana on the 25th. We felt the Montana moose were visible as a result of the flooding of bottomland habitat by the Missouri River that had forced the animals to higher ground. Our sightings included a female with a calf as well.

Pronghorn (*Antilocapridae*)

Pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana*) – A few were seen from the train in Montana on the afternoon of May 25.

Total = 23

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

Snapping Turtles (*Chelydridae*)

Snapping Turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*) – A massive individual was seen sunning on a rock at East Lake in the Adirondacks on May 19.

Water Turtles (*Emydidae*)

“Eastern” Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta picta*) – A painted turtle was rescued from crossing the road near the Moose River in the Adirondacks on May 19.

Softshell Turtles (*Trionychidae*)

“Eastern” Spiny Softshell (*Apalone spinifera spinifera*)

Colubrids *Colubridae*

“Eastern” Garter Snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis sirtalis*) – One near the crossing of the Little Moose River in Adirondacks on the afternoon of May 19 was discovered by participant Lorna Duncan.

Newts *Salamandridae*

Rough-skinned Newt (*Taricha granulose*) – One at Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge, Washington, was the only one seen.

Toads *Bufo*

American Toad (*Bufo americanus*) - Adirondacks

Treefrogs & Allies *Hylidae*

Spring Peeper (*Pseudacris crucifer*) – Heard only; Adirondacks

True Frogs *Ranidae*

Bullfrog (*Rana catesbeiana*) - Heard only; Adirondacks

Green Frog (*Rana clamitans*) – Heard only; Adirondacks

Northern Leopard Frog (*Rana pipiens*) – Adirondacks

BUTTERFLIES

The dearth of butterflies this year was due in large part to the cool and wet weather that dominated much of the northern tier of the country this spring. Please note that the checklist order and common and scientific names of the butterflies that appear in this list follow those given in the **Butterflies of North America (Kaufman Field Guides, 2nd Edition, 2006)**, by Jim P. Brock and Kenn Kaufman.

Whites & Sulphurs (*Pieridae*)

Cabbage White (*Pieris rapae*)

Clouded Sulphur (*Colias philodice*)

Gossamer-wing Butterflies (*Lycaenidae*)

Spring Azure (*Celastrina ladon*)

Brushfoots (*Nymphalidae*)

American Lady (*Vanessa virginiensis*)