

POLAR BEARS OF CHURCHIL

OCTOBER 29-NOVEMBER 4, 2006

LEADER: BOB SUNDSTROM

COMPILED BY: BOB SUNDSTROM

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

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Leader: Bob Sundstrom

Itinerary

- Day 1** Sunday, October 29: Arrivals and get-acquainted dinner in Winnipeg. Dinner and night in Winnipeg at the Hilton near the airport.
- Day 2** Monday, October 30: A morning flight to Churchill arrived early. Driver/guide Kelly made a stop near the polar bear “jail” and a bear live trap, before an early lunch at Gypsy Bakery. After lunch we toured the Cape Merry area and visited Kelly’s sled dog compound, as well as the Miss Piggy crash site. Late afternoon check in at the Tundra Inn, allowing time to visit the Eskimo Museum and other sites in town before dinner. First of four nights at the comfy Tundra Inn in town of Churchill.
- Day 3** Tuesday, October 31: After breakfast, we were shuttled out of town about twenty minutes to the Tundra Buggy boarding site. This would be our first of three full days with guide/driver Glenn Hopfner aboard his Tundra Buggy, exploring the tundra and near-coastal area east of Churchill. Areas covered today included Gordon Pt., coast nearby, Ptarmigan Alley, and the Tundra Buggy Camp.
- Day 4** Wednesday, November 1: Our second day on the Tundra Buggy included visits to Halfway Pt., adjacent coastline areas, and Tundra Buggy Camp.
- Day 5** Thursday, November 2: A final day on the Tundra Buggy with Glenn Hopfner included a buggy drive into the taiga and just to the edge of the boreal forest, then lunch at Polar Bear Pt. and a stop in the Tundra Buggy Camp area. Returned to the launch site via the Hudson Bay coastline and Gordon Pt. Last of four nights at Tundra Inn.
- Day 6** Friday, November 3: After breakfast and some time to visit sights in town, shuttle driver Bill took us at 9:30 to the Churchill Airport. A late morning flight to Winnipeg with a stop in Thompson arrived mid-afternoon. Final group dinner at the hotel this evening. Night at the Hilton.
- Day 7** Saturday, November 4: Departures from Winnipeg.

WILDLIFE LIST

[unexpected sightings/rarities in *bold italics*]

MAMMALS

Polar Bear - We saw a couple dozen or more bears on each day on the Tundra Buggy, including a good number of females with cubs. Sub-adult males were concentrated near Polar Bear Pt. (location of the Tundra Buggy Camp) along the Hudson Bay shoreline. We watched wonderful sequences of pairs of bears sparring (play-fighting) each day, and close enough to the buggy to get excellent photos. The three day tally was 82 bear sightings, with some of them likely repeats of bears seen on previous days.

Arctic Fox – Great views of an all white fox hunting in the mounded seaweed of the high tide line of Hudson Bay. At one point it leaped into the air several times, coming down on its front paws, presumably to dislodge a rodent from the layers of seaweed.

Red Fox – Our first afternoon in Churchill, we watched a handsome Red Fox as it worked along the roadside on an esker with close distance to the bus, making for good photo opportunities. At the edge of the boreal forest, we watched a very dark “silver” morph of Red Fox as it trotted across a broad flat expanse of the snow covered landscape.

Arctic Hare – The first afternoon in Churchill, we were able to walk very close to a huge hare as it sat among the glacier-smoothed rocks at Cape Merry. In the same area were four and five more of these beautiful, entirely white except the black of the very tips of their ears and their dark eyes and noses. Others were seen from the Tundra Buggy, some at very close range.

BIRDS

GEESE, SWANS & DUCKS:

Mallard – 15 or so drakes at Gordon Pt.

Greater Scaup – three at Gordon Pt.

Common Eider – The most prevalent duck, primarily female/immature plumage birds seen, but we had good views of a male at Gordon Pt.

Harlequin Duck – one couple flying near Halfway Pt.

White-winged Scoter – one drake on Hudson Bay

Long-tailed Duck – a flock of 15 or so flew back and forth at Halfway Pt.

GALLINACEOUS BIRDS:

Willow Ptarmigan – Seen daily on the Tundra Buggy, some close enough for nice photos. All were in full winter plumage, white (often with a slight pinkish cast), with black tail feathers, bills, and eyes. Males called a few times in the covey seen at the edge of the boreal forest.

SANDPIPERS & ALLIES:

White-rumped Sandpiper – two juvenile plumaged birds foraged alongside a Purple Sandpiper within 20 meters of the Tundra Buggy

Purple Sandpiper – close views of one winter plumage sandpiper with the White-rumped Sandpipers; a flock of 6 more flew by

JAEGERS, GULLS, & TERNS:

Ring-billed Gull - prevalent around the hotel in Winnipeg

Herring Gull – adults and immatures along the edge of Hudson Bay were a regular sight

Iceland Gull – a single, crisply plumaged first fall Iceland Gull flew along the coastline

Glaucous Gull – a few adults along the coastline

WOODPECKERS:

Hairy Woodpecker – at Kelly's sled dog compound, a male woodpecker flew from pole to pole, harassed by a Northern Shrike

SHRIKES:

Northern Shrike – chasing a Hairy Woodpecker at the sled dog compound

JAYS, MAGPIES & CROWS:

Common Raven - widespread around Churchill

STARLINGS & ALLIES:

European Starling - a few in Churchill

SPARROWS & ALLIES:

Snow Bunting – Nice looks at Snow Buntings in their striking winter plumage, with rusty highlights on mostly white bodies.

FINCHES:

Hoary Redpoll – small flocks at the edge of the boreal forest, some foraging in the trees not far from the Tundra Buggy

OLD WORLD SPARROWS:

House Sparrow - Churchill