

**NORTHERN  
MINNESOTA WINTER  
WEEKEND 1**

**JANUARY 13-17, 2007**

**LEADER: KIM ECKERT**

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Leader: Kim Eckert

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc.

### Tour Summary

Sure, it was cold, but not abnormally so, as the high temperatures each day were not too far off the seasonal norm of +18 degrees, and the lows at dawn never plunged that far below zero. And we never had to face severe wind-chill readings, as the winds each day were mercifully light to moderate. It also helped to have sunny skies each day. What was newsworthy, though, was the relative lack of snow cover: officially only three inches at the airport, with several places showing more grass than snow on the ground.

But enough meteorology, especially since most of the participants never had time to fret about the cold. Less than 10 minutes after leaving the airport with five of the seven participants, our attention was entirely focused on a **Northern Hawk Owl** which had the courtesy to appear just a few miles from the airport only two days before the tour started! Indeed, this was—and still is—the only hawk owl known to be anywhere in the state this month. (And, luckily, the two later-arriving participants had already seen this species in Alaska.)

We weren't quite done owling for the day, though, since a **Snowy Owl** was waiting for us as it hunted at dusk down around Duluth's grain elevators. And this bird was nearly as special as the hawk owl, being the only individual reported anywhere in northern Minnesota this month. It also was obliging enough to show up again the next day so all seven participants could see it.

It took a bit more effort, however, to find our only **Great Gray Owl** the next day. Arriving at dusk at the Hedbom Forest Road, about an hour west of Duluth, we spotted one on its hunting perch that flew into the woods before those in the back of the van could see it. Fortunately, it didn't go far, and we were able to relocate it after a tense minute or two, and all enjoyed views in the scope before darkness fell.

While owls—especially the Great Gray—invariably are at the top of visiting birders' hopes, there is more to see here in winter. The length of our list on this winter tour may be modest (the 48 species listed this time is actually higher than normal), but this tour is more interested in quality than quantity. Witness some of this tour's highlights: **Ruffed** and **Sharp-tailed grouse** up in the aspens and tamaracks feeding on catkins; **Glaucous, Thayer's,** and **Iceland gulls** circling over Superior's landfill; both **American Three-toed** and **Black-backed woodpeckers** atypically widespread and easy to find in Hedbom Road's tamarack bog; a completely unexpected flock of **Bohemian Waxwings** in an otherwise sterile Superior neighborhood; and that amazing group of three **Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches** which had been visiting an even more sterile site in Cloquet since November (representing only about the 10th state record).

Quality, indeed! We also found such northern Minnesota specialties as **Northern Shrike**, **Boreal Chickadee**, **Pine Grosbeak**, both **Red** and **White-winged crossbills**, and **Common Redpoll**, but these great birds almost pale by comparison. In addition, note our unusual array of ducks—including **Northern Pintail**, **Harlequin Duck**, **White-winged Scoter**, **Long-tailed Duck**, and **Hooded Merganser**—which normally don't occur here in January. Despite the cold weather at the time of this tour, it had been unusually balmy earlier, and much of the harbor was still ice-free and full of ducks.

## **Itinerary**

January 13 / Five of the seven participants arrive in time to see a Northern Hawk Owl near the airport and a Snowy Owl in the harbor. (Weather: high 10, low -12, clear, moderate NW winds.)

January 14 / Morning along the Hedbom Forest Road (especially for woodpeckers); afternoon at Cloquet's rosy-finch feeder, Duluth-Superior harbor area, Superior's landfill, and Duluth's Canal Park. (Weather: high 13, low 0, partly cloudy, light N winds.)

January 15 / Morning in Aitkin County near Tamarack (for Sharp-tailed Grouse); afternoon in Sax-Zim Bog and return to Hedbom Road at dusk (for Great Gray Owl). (Weather: high 10, low -5, clear, moderate N winds.)

January 16 / All day in Duluth, Superior, and Two Harbors. (Weather: high 12, low -11, clear, light NW-SW winds.)

January 17 / Before return to airport there is time to briefly recheck Canal Park and Park Point. (Weather: high 27, low 3, clear, moderate SW winds.)

## **Bird List**

American Black Duck  
Mallard  
Northern Pintail  
Harlequin Duck  
White-winged Scoter  
Long-tailed Duck  
Bufflehead  
Common Goldeneye  
Hooded Merganser  
Common Merganser  
Ruffed Grouse  
Sharp-tailed Grouse

Bald Eagle  
Red-tailed Hawk  
Herring Gull  
Thayer's Gull  
Iceland Gull  
Glaucous Gull  
Rock Pigeon  
Snowy Owl  
Northern Hawk Owl  
Great Gray Owl  
Downy Woodpecker  
Hairy Woodpecker  
American Three-toed Woodpecker  
Black-backed Woodpecker  
Northern Shrike  
Gray Jay  
Blue Jay  
American Crow  
Common Raven  
Black-capped Chickadee  
Boreal Chickadee  
Red-breasted Nuthatch  
White-breasted Nuthatch  
American Robin  
European Starling  
Bohemian Waxwing  
Snow Bunting  
Northern Cardinal  
Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch  
Pine Grosbeak  
Red Crossbill  
White-winged Crossbill  
Common Redpoll  
Pine Siskin  
American Goldfinch  
House Sparrow

Seen on this tour but not on the second: Northern Pintail, Long-tailed Duck, Bufflehead, American Robin, Northern Cardinal.

Missed on this tour but seen on the second: Red-breasted Merganser, Rough-legged Hawk, Pileated Woodpecker, Brown Creeper, Townsend's Solitaire, Hoary Redpoll, Evening Grosbeak.