

MONTANA OWL WORKSHOP

APRIL 22 – 27, 2010

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High, wide, and handsome, Montana is the country's fourth largest state. Its biological diversity reflects its immensity. Among its great plains, river breaks, mountains, marshes, and alpine tundra, Montana lists over 400 species of birds, 108 species of mammals, 13 species of amphibians, and 18 species of reptiles. Join researchers for four full days of learning how to survey, locate, and observe owls in the field. Montana boasts the largest number of breeding owl species in any state within the United States. Fifteen species of owls occur in Montana, of which 14 species breed: American Barn Owl, Flammulated Owl, Eastern Screech Owl, Western Screech Owl, Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl, Great Gray Owl, Northern Hawk-Owl, Northern Pygmy-Owl, Burrowing Owl, Boreal Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Long-eared Owl, and Short-eared Owl. Snowy Owls are winter visitors only. Although all species will not be seen, chances are good for 5-7 species, and with some luck, 8-9 species are possible. Highlights can include; Great Gray Owl, Northern Pygmy Owl, Boreal Owl, and Northern Saw-whet Owl.

We will observe researchers of the Owl Research Institute who are conducting a long-term study of Long-eared Owls. They will capture, band, weigh, measure, and record other biological data on this secretive nocturnal and rarely seen species. We will then discuss the importance of research, and how researchers share their findings with the scientific community and the public. We will learn about the natural history of owls. We will also discuss evolutionary adaptations in owls: how do owls hear, see, fly silently, conceal themselves, and hunt. We will learn to identify roost sites, and collect and dissect owl pellets in the field. If time and weather allows, we will use one evening to listen and call for the Western Screech Owl or Northern Saw-whet Owl.

We will learn techniques for investigating woodpecker, and natural holes in trees for cavity nesting species such as: Northern Pygmy Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, and other cavity nesters. We will discuss the pros and cons of nest boxes programs for species such as the Boreal Owl. We hope to observe the elaborate “sky dancing” courtship display of the ground-nesting Short-eared Owl. We will spot for stick nests in stands of trees around farms, tree groves, and woody thickets for species such as Great Horned Owls. We will also hike the coniferous forest in search of the very elusive Great Gray Owl. Please remember that the schedule, locations, and numbers of owls can change, depending upon prey species populations and the timing and whereabouts of the owls.

April 22, Day 1: Arrival in Missoula, Montana. Participants should make arrangements to arrive in Missoula today and transfer to the hotel, where rooms will be reserved in their names. We will meet in the hotel lobby at 6:30 PM and drive or walk to one of Missoula’s many restaurants for a get-acquainted dinner.

NIGHT: Doubletree Hotel, Missoula

April 23, Day 2: Mission Valley. This morning after breakfast, we will meet in the lobby at 8:30 AM for our departure to the Mission Valley. We will spend the morning looking for Pygmy Owls and the afternoon searching for Long-eared Owls. We will arrive at the Nine-Pipes Lodge in late afternoon for check-in and dinner.

NIGHT: Ninepipes Lodge

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April 24, Day 3: Mission Valley. This morning after breakfast, we will meet in the lobby at 8:00 AM. We will spend the day in the Mission Valley learning techniques for locating stick nesting owls, such as the Great Horned Owl. We will learn how to find owl roost sites, and hopefully collect, and then dissect owl pellets in the field. After an early dinner, we try to observe the “sky-dancing” courtship display of the Short-eared Owl.

NIGHT: Ninepipes Lodge

April 25, Day 4: Mission Valley. After breakfast, we will meet in the lobby at 8:00 AM to depart once again for the beautiful Mission and Flathead Valleys. We will learn how to check natural cavities for nesting Northern Pygmy, and Northern Saw-whet owls. We will then hike through the forest and search for Great Gray Owls.

NIGHT: Ninepipes Lodge

April 26, Day 5: Mission Valley. After breakfast, we will make a long drive to the high mountains passes to search for Boreal Owls. It is with certainty we will be in snow. Indeed, it might be 3 or more feet deep. However, we will have fun trudging through the snow on several short walks. This evening there will be a farewell dinner at one of Missoula's best restaurants.

NIGHT: Doubletree Hotel, Missoula

April 27, Day 6: Departure to Home. Tour participants may depart at any time on this day.

EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS: Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 14 participants.

TOUR LEADER: Denver Holt and Megan Fylling

Denver Holt is a wildlife researcher and graduate of the University of Montana. He is founder and president of the Owl Research Institute, a non-profit organization located in Charlo, Montana. He is a field researcher and believes in long-term field studies as the primary means to understanding trends in natural history. Denver has researched owls in North and Central America, and in 2000 he was named Montana's Wildlife Biologist of the Year by the Wildlife Society of North America. Since 1978 Denver's particular focus has been researching owls and their ecology. He has published about 80 papers and technical documents, including three species accounts for the *Birds of North America* project. He was also the team leader for the Strigidae (owls) family species accounts for *The Handbook of the Birds of the World, Volume 5*, covering 189 species of the world's owls. Denver has co-authored, with two elementary school teachers, two children's science books on owls: *Owls: whoo are they?*, and *Snowy Owls*. His Snowy Owl research was featured as the cover story for *National Geographic Magazine* in December 2002. In 2006, he was a chapter author on owls for the book *Arctic Wings*, highlighting the birds of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The foreword was written by former United States President, Jimmy Carter. The book has won the prestigious National Outdoor Book Award for Design and Artistic Merit. Denver's research has been acknowledged in many television programs on ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN Science News. His research has also been featured in Audubon's *Up-Close* series, Disney, PBS's *Bird Watch*, and David Attenborough's *Life of Birds*, among others. His research on Snowy Owls has been featured in documentaries for National Geographic Explorer, NHK Natural History Unit of Japan, and the Norwegian Broadcasting Company Natural History Unit. Recently, his research has been the focus of the British Broadcasting Company's (BBC) new documentary series, *Frozen Earth*, the sequel to the highly acclaimed *Planet Earth* series. He also has been a keynote speaker at several major bird festivals in the United States.

Megan Fyiling, a wildlife biologist, received her zoology degree in 2000 before moving to Montana. She has studied birds and their ecology throughout the western United States, and enjoys birding as a hobby. Most recently, she is working for the Avian Science Center at the University of Montana as part of a long-term fire ecology study, and also works for an aquatic invertebrate consulting firm in Missoula. Megan has also performed volunteer work for various organizations including the Owl Research Institute and RaptorView Research. In addition to wildlife and ecology, her interests include botany, reading, skiing, road-racing, and playing hockey.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$1425** per person in double occupancy from Missoula, MT. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 5, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Missoula and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$260**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$300** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Cancellation Penalties and Refunds are based on the following schedule: If cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less **\$150** per person is refundable. If cancellation is made between 120 and 90 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 90 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions, as well as any transfers from one tour to another. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.***

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| <u>If you cancel:</u> | <u>Your refund will be:</u> |
| 120 days or more before departure date | Your deposit minus \$150. |
| Between 120 and 90 days before departure | No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance will be refunded. |
| Fewer than 90 days before departure date | No refund available. |

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE: A brochure and application form for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. **We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. VENT recommends *Travel Insured International* as our preferred insurance provider.** Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available however stipulations apply usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. **Contact *Travel Insured***

International prior to registration for details. Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than Travel Insured International, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

CLOTHING: This time of year in Montana, it is advisable to dress for the unexpected as temperatures can range from 30 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit. We recommend cold weather, warm weather, and wet weather clothing. A hat, gloves, coat or jacket, shelled parka or overcoat, and boots are a must. We recommend light, layered clothing, as opposed to bulky, heavy clothing. Leisure clothing, such as running shoes, short sleeved shirts, and sweat pants can be a welcome addition.

EQUIPMENT: You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good repair, along with a belt pack or day pack (good for carrying books, sunscreen, extra film, etc.). As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications, and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Your leader will have a spotting scope; but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so. Other items you should bring are an alarm clock, sunscreen, and mosquito repellent.

HEALTH: If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication. As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots.

SUGGESTED READING: Our website, www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from this store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You may also visit such other online stores such as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print or hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com or www.buteobooks.com which specializes in ornithology books.

Burt, William H., and Richard P. Grossenheider, *Field Guide to the Mammals of America North of Mexico*. Peterson Field Guide Series #5. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Clark, William S. and Brian K. Wheeler. *A Field Guide to Hawks - North America*. Peterson Field Guide Series #35. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.

Dunn, Jon L. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America* (4th or 5th edition). Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2002 or 2006.

Ehrlich, Paul R., David S. Dobkin and Darryl Wheye. *The Birder's Handbook. A Field Guide to the Natural History of North American Birds*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988.

Kaufman, Kenn. *A Field Guide to Advanced Birding*. Peterson Field Guide Series #39. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990.

Peterson, Roger Tory. *A Field Guide to Western Birds*. Peterson Field Guide Series #2. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990.

Zimmer, Kevin. *The Western Bird Watcher. An Introduction to Birding in the American West*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1985.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

RESPONSIBILITY: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. Where this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect July 22, 2009 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.