

SOUTHERN MANITOBA

JUNE 6 – 12, 2011

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While Churchill is famous among naturalists as the most easily accessible Arctic tundra on this continent, there are many more diversified ecosystems to explore in the province of Manitoba. Winnipeg, the capital, lies in the “big sky” country near the southern edge of the boreal forest. North of the city, we will visit the Oak Hammock Marsh Wildlife Management Area and Conservation Center where we will see the only example of native tall-grass prairie left in the area. West of Winnipeg, there are scattered patches of native short-grass prairie with a wealth of breeding birds, plus the “pothole” country with its breeding ducks and grebes. At Riding Mountain National Park there exist superb examples of the flora and fauna typical of high boreal forests as well as characteristic of eastern deciduous forests, which harbor a wide variety of birds in full breeding plumage.

Along with some of the finest scenery of the far north, the combination of the Churchill and the Southern Manitoba tours offers participants an outstanding natural history experience and a remarkable cross-section of the wide variety of habitats of central Canada. Photographic opportunities abound. Those combining both tours should see some 225 species of birds, including several rarities and specialties, plus an impressive number of mammals. There will be ample opportunity to study bird song and observe bird behavior. Without question, this combination provides one of the most popular experiences in our VENT North American repertoire.

Note that this tour can be taken by itself or in combination with our June 12-18, 2011 Churchill tour.

June 6, Day 1: Travel to Winnipeg. Upon arrival in Winnipeg, you may call the Hilton Suites Hotel for complimentary transportation from the airport. Participants arriving early may wish to consider a visit to the elegant and informative Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, which is about 15 minutes by taxi from the hotel and/or Assiniboine Park, which contains the Zoo and is about 10 minutes away by taxi. At 6:00 p.m., we will assemble in the hotel lobby for our get-acquainted dinner.

NIGHT: Hilton Suites Hotel, Winnipeg

June 7, Day 2: Winnipeg to Oak Hammock Marsh Wildlife Area and Riding Mountain National Park. Early this morning, we head north to Oak Hammock Marsh Wildlife Management Area and Conservation Center, which has one of the most fascinating interpretive centers we have seen. Waterfowl and shorebirds are easy to find here and many will not be seen anywhere else on this tour. A small corner of the preserve includes the only pristine tall-grass prairie ecosystem that we will visit. This and other nearby grassy areas harbor some target species for this tour: Le Conte’s, Nelson’s, and Grasshopper sparrows, and maybe a displaying Sprague’s Pipit. The area is so rich in birds that we seldom get away before noon. From here, we drive west to Delta Beach at the south end of Lake Manitoba, and then, directly to Riding Mountain National Park. Our route will take us through rich farm country that formerly was covered with native prairie. We will stop for any interesting birds along the way. Boreal Chickadees can sometimes be found in trees around our hotel in the company of singing,

Southern Manitoba, Page 2

breeding-plumaged Blackburnian Warblers. One lucky group saw both species while waiting for the bags to be unloaded at our hotel. After dinner, we will have an optional trip to get a representative sample of local birds in dense boreal forest around Wasagaming. The ethereal songs of White-throated Sparrows and Swainson's Thrush, as well as the joyous melodies of Ruby-crowned Kinglets, often ring from nearby trees throughout the park.

NIGHT: McTavish's, Riding Mountain

June 8, Day 3: Riding Mountain National Park. The beautiful and superbly maintained Riding Mountain National Park preserves a rolling upland of ancient glacial debris deposited by recession of the last great ice sheet. The Manitoba Escarpment, rising 1500 feet above the plain to the east of the park, formed the ancient shore of Lake Agassiz, the gigantic post-Ice Age meltwater lake that stretched halfway to Hudson Bay and was the largest body of freshwater ever known. The increased elevation creates a somewhat cooler climate, and the plateau supports an "island" of boreal forest in this region, which stretches unbroken farther north in the province of Manitoba.

We will spend all of today exploring Riding Mountain National Park. Amid extensive aspen groves and spruce woods, forest lakes and bogs, we will seek the resident species: Common Loon, Common Goldeneye, Pileated Woodpecker, Alder Flycatcher, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Gray Jay, Boreal Chickadee, Evening Grosbeak, and a host of spiffy warblers including Chestnut-sided, Cape May, Bay-breasted, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Black-and-white and American Redstart.

Time will also be spent in an attempt to observe some of the very challenging warblers found in the park, such as Ovenbird, Mourning, Connecticut, and possibly the localized Canada warbler. Although there have been no extensive burns in recent years, we may be lucky enough to find an American Three-toed or Black-backed woodpecker. Spruce Grouse and Great Gray Owl are also resident in the park. They can be very difficult due to their scarcity, but we've managed to find both most years. Predictable mammal observations include snowshoe hare, red squirrel, thirteen-lined ground-squirrel, and white-tailed deer. Moose, elk, bison, black bear, beaver, porcupine, and even the very rare gray wolf are also present in the park.

NIGHT: McTavish's, Riding Mountain

June 9, Day 4: Riding Mountain to Brandon. During our final morning of birding in this boreal forest ecosystem, we will drive toward the eastern edge of the park on Highway 19, and bird our way down the escarpment road, from the evergreen boreal forests on the plateau to the lush deciduous woodlands on the slopes. Among the wide diversity of species in this beautiful park, there are a few that are fairly restricted to the escarpment and environs. Although difficult to observe, we will make a concerted effort to search for such specialties as Ruffed Grouse, Veery, Swainson's Thrush, Philadelphia Vireo (very uncommon), and Golden-winged Warbler (highly localized). After descending the escarpment, we drive south through rolling farm and pasture lands, punctuated with prairie "potholes." These small, marshy ponds serve as breeding sites for many species of ducks. For several years this region was plagued with serious drought conditions, and the breeding populations of ducks and grebes plummeted. In 1996, conditions began to return to normal and the number of species on these ponds has shown improvement that has continued through 2010. As we scan the ponds, we will be especially alert for Horned and Red-necked grebes, decked out in their fancy breeding plumages.

After an early dinner, there will be an evening trip to look for the elusive Yellow Rail in the previously fairly reliable Douglas Marsh. Prior to dusk, we will watch the wonderful "winnowing" displays of Wilson's Snipe, look for chattering Sedge and Marsh wrens, and make a special effort to find two very shy inhabitants of the marsh: Le Conte's and Nelson's sparrows. When darkness descends, we will listen intently for the characteristic "tapping" calls of the secretive Yellow Rail. If we hear one, on the portion of the Douglas Marsh still open to the public, we will wade the shallow waters and dense grasses in a team effort to locate the source of the calls.

NIGHT: Victoria Inn, Brandon

June 10, Day 5: Prairie Birding. We will be up very early this morning, when the specialized avian inhabitants are more active, in order to bird some of the few remaining patches of natural prairie in this region. Scattered fields of short-grass prairie support an amazing number of breeding birds. On past tours, we have observed Swainson's Hawk, Upland Sandpiper, displaying Sprague's Pipit, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Gray Partridge (an introduced game species that can be difficult to find), Black-billed Magpie, Chestnut-collared Longspur, and sparrows such as Grasshopper and Baird's.

In the last few years, more and more mixed-prairie areas are being converted to cropland. Because of the problem this has created in locating our target birds, we now drive to the southwest corner of Manitoba. In the most reliable birding areas in this corner of the state, we will attempt to locate the species mentioned above, and also the more localized Say's Phoebe, Lark Bunting (irruptive), Ferruginous Hawk, Mountain Bluebird, Marbled Godwit, and Yellow-throated Vireo.

NIGHT: Victoria Inn, Brandon

June 11, Day 6: Brandon to Winnipeg. After breakfast, we will drive south to the Brandon Hills, where we sometimes locate Eastern Towhee, Scarlet Tanager, Yellow-throated Vireo, Lark Sparrow, Black-and-white Warbler, Pileated Woodpecker and both Eastern and Mountain bluebirds. From here we will search for any SW specialties in a few remaining short-grass prairie fields east of Brandon. We will also get a chance to visit the Douglas Marsh during the day to search for any marsh species we may have missed earlier. En route to Winnipeg, we will pass through the Carberry "sandhills" region, a unique blend of white spruce, oaks, and sandhills. We will search for the declining and timid Eastern Bluebird, whose habitat has been largely usurped by the more aggressive Mountain Bluebird. In this area, we will also see the very unusual conifer appropriately called prostrate juniper. There are several parks we can visit between Brandon and Winnipeg, if time permits. We will arrive in Winnipeg in late afternoon in time for dinner and bidding farewell to those who do not go on with us to Churchill.

NIGHT: Hilton Suites Hotel, Winnipeg

June 12, Day 7: Depart for Home. Participants not continuing on to Churchill may plan to depart for home anytime today. Those continuing on to Churchill with me have a day to rest that can include a visit to the elegant and informative Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, which is about 15 minutes by taxi from the hotel and/or Assiniboine Park, which contains the Zoo and is about 10 minutes away by taxi. Another option for those doing both tours is to join me for a trip to Birds Hill Provincial Park and/or Oak Hammock Marsh to search for any species that unpredictable weather may have caused us to miss earlier in the tour.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 8 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Jeri M. Langham & Bruce Di Labio

Jeri M. Langham has a Ph.D. in plant ecology from Washington State University, and after 38 years as a professor of biological sciences at California State University in Sacramento, retired in May 2008. He received the first Outstanding Teacher Award from the newly formed College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in 1997; the Outstanding Faculty Award from the Science Educational Equity and Minority Organization of Science Students organizations in 2005; and his University's third annual Lifetime Achievement Award for Community Service in 2006. Jeri has ardently birded all over North America, as well as Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, Venezuela, Ecuador, the Galapagos Islands, Peru, Argentina, Kenya, Borneo and Australia. Born and raised in Venezuela, he speaks fluent Spanish. Known for his enthusiasm and boundless energy, Jeri thoroughly enjoys searching for birds and sharing them with others. His passion for teaching and his natural teaching abilities soon become apparent as his tour participants enjoy learning more about the biological world around them. Jeri is a former member of the Bausch and Lomb Birding Council and the California Bird Records Committee. He is a Director for the Neotropical Grassland Conservancy, www.conservegrassland.org.

Bruce Di Labio's obsession with birds and birding began at the young age of 8 when he hand-tamed Black-capped Chickadees at the family cottage at Constance Bay. From these simple beginnings emerged both a lifelong passion and career in the field of birding. In the fall of 1971, after reading the *Ottawa Journal Bird Column* about an upcoming Ottawa Field Naturalists bird walk, Bruce finally convinced his dad to take him to Ottawa Beach, the meeting location for Bruce's first official field trip. By chance, Bruce met Bruce Mactavish and Steve O'Donnell on the trip and there was no looking back! The addiction had set in! During the 1980s Bruce worked for the Canadian Museum of Nature in ornithology, and then The Canadian Nature Federation as Staff Naturalist. In 1998 he launched his own birding business, "Di Labio Birding," specializing in birding courses, day-long field trips, and overnight tours to regional and Canadian destinations. Bruce has traveled extensively in North America and specializes in birding tours to many Canadian destinations including Southern Saskatchewan and the Alberta Rockies, Churchill and southwestern Manitoba, Point Pelee National Park, Moosonee and James Bay, Grand Manan Island, and numerous shorter trips to various locations in Eastern Ontario. Internationally he has led tours to Cuba, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Australia. In addition, Bruce has written articles for *Nature Canada*, *Ontario Birds*, *Birders Journal*, and *Birding*, and is a regular contributor to *Ontario Birding News*. Bruce resides in the village of Carp, west of Ottawa, with his wife Laurie and their two children, Julie-Anne and Benjamin.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the Southern Manitoba tour is **\$2595** per person in double occupancy from Winnipeg and includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 6, all lodging during the tour, ground transportation during the tour and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Winnipeg and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Southern Manitoba tour participants continuing on the Churchill Tour will have breakfast & lunch provided in the event they join Jeri on the optional Birds Hill Provincial Park and/or Oak Hammock Marsh adventures.

The single supplement is **\$420**. You will be charged the single supplement fee if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

The Southern Manitoba tour is an exception to VENT's guaranteed domestic departure policy. VENT reserves the right to charge a small-party supplement or cancel the tour due to low enrollment.

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.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES (CANADA): In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refunds are made according to the following schedule: If cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$150** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$50** per person. 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. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.***

<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

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$50 per person.

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.

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.

IMPORTANT NOTE: *Please read your itinerary carefully to see whether or not your tour/cruise requires MANDATORY Medical Insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation/repatriation during the trip.* This coverage is included in the Worldwide Trip Protector plan offered by Travel Insured International. If you do not choose to purchase the insurance through Travel Insured International, you will need to do so through another insurance provider. A good website for information and acquisition of emergency evacuation/repatriation insurance is: www.insuremytrip.com.

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.

EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS: Should you wish to make arrangements to extend your stay, please contact the VENT office **at least two months prior** to your departure date. These arrangements may range from an extra night at the initial hotel of the tour to a week or more extension including accommodations and transportation. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

CLIMATE: Summer in Southern Manitoba can be quite blissful with temperatures in the low 80s to low 90s during the day and beautiful nightly star lit skies. The nighttime temperatures can dip down into the 40s-50s.

CLOTHING: Generally, light field clothing is sufficient, but you should also pack a light jacket or sweater and a hat. **PLEASE AVOID BRIGHT COLORS: ORANGE, YELLOW, WHITE, RED, PINK, LIGHT BLUE, etc.** Be sure to have a pair of comfortable walking shoes or boots, a second pair of lightweight shoes to change into, and **half-high rubber boots**. These come in handy when crossing damp terrain such as in Douglas Marsh. Raingear is also strongly advised. Dress will be casual throughout the tour. **We ask that you limit your baggage to one medium-to-large suitcase and a carry-on bag. Soft sided luggage or duffels are preferred as they are easier to load into the SUV.**

DOCUMENTS: A passport is required for citizens of the United States for all air and sea travel to or from Canada. US citizens returning from Canada will be required to present a passport to enter or re-enter the United States. Non-US citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

EQUIPMENT: You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good condition, along with a belt pack or day pack (good for carrying books, sunscreen, extra digital storage media or film, etc.). As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, alarm clock, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag (check for current airline security carry-on restrictions; see www.tsa.gov/travelers for more information). Your leaders will have a spotting scope, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so. A **flashlight or headlamp** for the Yellow Rail night at the Douglas Marsh is suggested also. Please bring a **PLASTIC COFFEE CUP** or **GLASS** to prevent excess usage of disposable cups and glasses.

INSECT PROTECTION: Mosquitoes and black flies can be a problem, especially at Riding Mountain and Douglas Marsh, but it varies greatly from year to year. Some participants use mosquito netting headgear, but most do fine with repellent. We recommend that you bring two containers of repellent; one lotion, and one pump-style spray bottle (no aerosol cans).

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, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line 877-FYI-TRIP (394-8747) or you can check their website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

SUGGESTED READING: Our Web site at 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 the store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You might also want to visit such other online stores as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com, or www.buteobooks.com, which specializes in ornithology books.

Field Guides:

For all our U.S. and Canada tours, we recommend either the newest National Geographic Society Guide and/or Sibley guides in boldface below.

Other References:

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- Peterson, Roger T. *Peterson Field Guide to Birds of North America*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008.
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- Sibley, D.A. *The Sibley Guide to Birds of Eastern North America*. New York: Knopf, 2003.**

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, and 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 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, motor-coach, 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. When 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 on a date October 20, 2010 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.