

CHURCHILL

JUNE 10 – 16, 2012

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Churchill is famous among naturalists as the most easily accessible Arctic tundra on this continent. Tundra in June means nesting shorebirds in glorious plumage, display, and song. It also means wildflowers and a surge of activity in every corner, as plants and animals adapted to the Arctic environment take advantage of the long summer days.

Churchill is uniquely situated beyond the northern limit of the great boreal forest on the shores of Hudson Bay, the largest bay in the world. Both the tree line and the permafrost line run right through the Churchill region. Vegetation north of the tree line is called “tundra,” and is a low, dwarfed, often mat-like habitat, comprised of many grasses, sedges, and lichens. Between the high “boreal forest” to the south and the tundra of the north lies a transition zone called “taiga,” a broad belt of stunted and windswept conifers. Few species of plants and animals are hardy enough to inhabit this region of long, harsh winters.

The Churchill River enters Hudson Bay at Churchill, creating another very important habitat, an estuarine tidal zone rich in seabirds, shorebirds, fish, seals, and beluga whales. It is now, in June, that the pack ice, which covers the huge bay in winter, is melting and breaking adrift, to shift with the winds and the tides, fitful with promise of far-wandering Arctic species.

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 may be taken in combination with our June 4 - 10, 2012 Southern Manitoba tour.

June 10, Day 1: Travel to Winnipeg. Upon arrival in Winnipeg, you may call the hotel for complimentary transportation from the airport. Participants arriving early may wish to consider a visit to the elegant and informative Manitoba Museum, 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 with each other, the leader, and participants from the Southern Manitoba tour that will go on to Churchill with us.

NIGHT: Hilton Suites Winnipeg Airport, Winnipeg

June 11, Day 2: Flight to Churchill. There is much to see in Churchill and we will have almost five full days. Upon landing in Churchill, we will board our small bus and drive straight to the northwest side of town to check the famed “granary ponds” and the “dock” overlooking the Churchill River. These locations have been where we have most often encountered Ross’s (formerly), Little, Sabine’s and other special gulls. They also provide a great location for seeing Arctic Terns and many of the ducks and shorebirds who visit these freshwater ponds and this tidal portion of the river. After checking into our rooms at the famed Tundra Inn, we will have lunch and head for Cape Merry. Jutting out into the Hudson Bay at the mouth of the Churchill River, Cape Merry affords a unique, panoramic vista of a constantly changing spectacle. Pods of beluga whales, with the magnificent pure white adults and their gray-colored young, feed in the river amid huge blocks of drifting ice floes that are moved upriver or downriver with the tides. Standing on the ancient, ice-smooth boulders at the river’s edge, one can sometimes hear the blowing of the belugas as they surface for air. On a warm summer day, one is certain to hear the constant dripping of the melting ice and the occasional thunder of two crashing or splitting floes. Across the river are the ruins of Fort Prince of Wales, built during the mid-1700s by the Hudson Bay Company to insure the safety of coastal traders. Offshore to the north is the Hudson Bay ice pack itself, shimmering in the sun and appearing to fill the entire horizon. The feeding activities of the whales stir up fish, attracting scores of Arctic Terns, sleek in gray summer plumage with black caps and blood red bills. Parasitic Jaegers may give the successful terns pursuit. Among the many species that feed off the Cape are Long-tailed Duck, Red-breasted and Common mergansers, Common Eider, Pacific and Red-throated loons, and all three scoters. Although less likely, King Eider; Harlequin Duck; Sabine’s, Iceland, Glaucous and Thayer’s gulls are also possible. Unfortunately, the closure of the old, open dump at Churchill has greatly decreased the number of and variety of gull species we now encounter. The turnover rate of late migrants can be impressive, and we will check Cape Merry several times.

NIGHT: Tundra Inn, Churchill

June 12-14, Days 3-5: Churchill and Environs. Besides the margins of Hudson Bay, there are taiga and tundra ecosystems to cover. Each zone has its distinctive flora and fauna. By mid-June, the short sub-Arctic summer will be in full swing, with dwarf lapland rosebay carpeting the tundra and providing the perfect backdrop for seeing and photographing a myriad of shorebirds in glorious breeding plumage. We will watch for shorebird nests, being very careful not to disturb them or to keep the parents away. On past tours, we have found nests of Stilt and Least sandpipers, Hudsonian Godwit, Whimbrel, American Golden-Plover, Semipalmated Plover, and Red-necked Phalarope. In addition, we have watched nests of Little and Bonaparte’s gulls, Arctic Terns, Willow Ptarmigan, Northern Shrike, and American Three-toed Woodpecker. One memorable morning along the tundra-lined coast east of Churchill, we saw a Red Phalarope in resplendent breeding plumage, Short-eared Owl, both Common and Hoary redpolls, plus the handsome Smith’s and Lapland longspurs, and Snow Bunting. Our trips to the taiga and boreal forests have often yielded such species as Gray Jay; Orange-crowned, Palm and Blackpoll warblers; Northern Shrike (very uncommon); Rusty Blackbird; Spruce Grouse; American Tree Sparrow; and Pine Grosbeak.

A morning trip along Goose Creek Road provides an opportunity to hear some of the wonderfully characteristic sounds of the north: the incredible flight song of Lesser Yellowlegs, the “winnowing” display of Wilson’s Snipe, the strange pumping call of American Bittern, the beautiful refrains of Gray-cheeked Thrush and Fox Sparrow, and the haunting whistles of the Harris’s Sparrow, whose nest was unknown until it was discovered at Churchill not too many years ago. With luck, we may find Yellow Rail, Bohemian Waxwing, Spruce Grouse, Boreal Owl, or Bald Eagle. We might end one of our days by observing the Tundra Swans on the Churchill River and perhaps a pair of Sandhill Cranes flying over the nearby marshes.

There is one bird, however, which uniquely separates Churchill from all other easily accessible birding areas in North America—the elegant, rosy-breasted Ross’s Gull. Among all the remarkable avifauna we may observe, this species was the specialty of the region. For several decades, this endearing gull was fairly easy to find and observe; but none have been seen in the last four years. Churchill is always full of avian surprises. Over the years, we’ve been blessed with some exciting rarities: a “gray phase” Gyrfalcon carrying a Northern Pintail in its talons, a Snowy Owl flying across the Churchill River, nests of both Northern Hawk and Boreal owls, a Ross’s

Goose among a flock of Snow Geese, a Long-tailed Jaeger chasing terns where the river meets the bay, and an Iceland Gull resting quietly on a rock in a roadside pond—to name a few. The birding at Churchill is nothing short of fantastic!

Our days at Churchill will be full ones, with many memorable sights and sounds. You should come away with a new awareness and appreciation of many birds you may have seen only briefly in passage before. Here, you will greet them at home in full breeding regalia, see courtship behavior, and hear their wonderful songs. To see a Pacific Loon in breeding plumage is like seeing a life bird, even if one has seen the species many times before on its wintering grounds. There is probably no water bird in the world more sleekly beautiful than this tastefully attired northern diver.

NIGHTS: Tundra Inn, Churchill

June 15, Day 6: Flight to Winnipeg. After a final morning in Churchill, we will depart for Winnipeg on a late morning flight.

NIGHT: Hilton Suites Winnipeg Airport, Winnipeg

June 16, Day 7: Departure for Home. Participants may plan to depart for home anytime today. Bon voyage!

TOUR SIZE: The Churchill tour will be limited to 8 participants.

TOUR LEADER: Jeri M. Langham

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.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$3,795*** 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 and internal air transportation (Winnipeg-Churchill round trip) during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leader. It **does not include** airfare from your home to Winnipeg and return, alcoholic beverages, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the group does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

***Cost of the internal flight (Winnipeg-Churchill round trip) for this tour is included in the total cost of the tour fee. At the time of printing the cost of the domestic flight is \$1,137 per person. Please note that airfares are subject to change without notice until the time of ticketing. In the event of an airfare increase before ticketing, Victor Emanuel Nature Tours reserves the right to surcharge for the additional amount.**

The single supplement is **\$435**. 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.

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.

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. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

CLIMATE: You may experience a wide range in temperatures, from the 80s or even 90s on a hot day caused by southern winds, to freezing at Cape Merry if the wind is off the bay.

CLOTHING: Generally, light field clothing is sufficient, but you should also pack a down or heavy jacket, gloves, a hat, and long underwear. **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 **calf-high rubber boots**. These come in handy when crossing damp terrain or soggy tundra. Raingear is also strongly advised. Dress will be casual throughout the tour. Free laundry facilities are available at the Tundra Inn in Churchill. **We ask that you limit your baggage to one medium-to-large suitcase and a carry-on bag.**

DOCUMENTS: A passport is required for citizens of the United States for all air and sea travel to or from Canada. U.S. citizens returning from Canada will be required to present a passport to enter or re-enter the United States. Non-U.S. 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. We will spend many hours scoping at Churchill. 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, but it is often too cold at Churchill in mid June for insects. The number 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 800-CDC-INFO (232-4636) or you can check their website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian

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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.

Burt, William H. and Richard P. Grossenheider. *A Field Guide to the Mammals: Field Marks of All North American Species Found North of Mexico*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998 (3rd ed.).

Chartier, Bonnie. *A Birder's Guide to Churchill*. (Manitoba: Aba/Lane Birdfinding Guide) American Birding Association, 1994 (rev. ed.).

Dunn, Jon L. *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2006 (5th ed.).

Dunn, Jon L. and Jonathan Alderfer. *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern North America*. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2008.

Dunn, Jon L. and Kimball L. Garrett. *A Field Guide to the Warblers of North America*. (Peterson Field Guide Series) Houghton Mifflin, 1997.

Floyd, Ted. *Smithsonian Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. New York: HarperCollins, 2008.

Forsyth, Adrian. *Mammals of the Canadian Wild*. Ontario: Camden House Publishing LTD., 1985. Out of print; try www.abebooks.com.

Godfrey, W. Earl. *The Birds of Canada*. Revised edition. Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1986. This is an excellent reference guide, but large and expensive. Out of print, but try both www.abebooks.com and www.amazon.com.

Grant, P. J. *Gulls: A Guide to Identification*. Academic Press, 1997 (2nd ed.).

Griggs, Jack L. *All the Birds of North America: American Bird Conservancy's Field Guide*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc. 1997.

Hayman, Peter, John Marchant and Tony Prater. *Shorebirds: An Identification Guide to the Waders of the World*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991.

Howell, Steve N. G. & Jon Dunn. *A Reference Guide to Gulls of the Americas*. Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2007.

Johnsgard, Paul A. *North American Owls: Biology and Natural History*. Washington & London: Smithsonian Institute Press, 2002 (2nd ed.).

Kaufman, Kenn, Nora Bowers, & Rick Bowers. *Birds of North America*. (Kaufman Focus Guides) New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

Madge, Steve and Hilary Burn. *Waterfowl: An Identification Guide to the Ducks, Geese and Swans of the World*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992.

Message, Stephen and Don Taylor. *Shorebirds of North America, Europe, and Asia: A Guide to Field Identification*. Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005

O'Brien, Michael, Richard Crossley, and Kevin Karlson. *The Shorebird Guide*. Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

Peterson, Roger T. *Peterson Field Guide to Birds of North America*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008.

Sibley, D.A. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. New York: Knopf, 2000.

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, 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. 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 September 15, 2011 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.