

# MINNESOTA & NORTH DAKOTA

JUNE 2 – 10, 2008

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*From the remote coniferous forests of the Superior National Forest north of Duluth, to the sedge meadows and tamarack bogs of the Sax-Zim Bog and Aitkin County, and west to the vast rolling grasslands and alkaline wetlands of North Dakota, this tour encompasses a wide variety of habitats which are home to a long list of highly sought birds. These include Gray Partridge; Ruffed and Sharp-tailed grouse; Greater Prairie-Chicken; Yellow Rail; Black-billed Cuckoo; Great Gray Owl; Whip-poor-will; Black-backed Woodpecker; Yellow-bellied and Alder flycatchers; Boreal Chickadee; Sedge Wren; Golden-winged, Connecticut, and Mourning warblers; Baird's, Le Conte's, and Nelson's Sharp-tailed sparrows; and Chestnut-collared Longspur. These are just a few of the specialty birds one can reasonably expect to see during this tour.*

*In addition, there is also a multitude of more familiar species here in full song, in colorful breeding plumage, and involved with their nesting habitats and habits—all facets of their life histories which may be wholly unfamiliar to those who only experience these birds during migration or winter. The diversity of birds possible during this excursion from boreal forest to prairie pothole will be evidenced by our final trip list, which has approached or even reached 200 species on some past tours, with almost all of these breeding season residents!*

**June 2, Day 1: Arrival in Duluth.** Tour participants should plan to arrive in Duluth today, where a room will be reserved in your name at our hotel. We will gather at 5:00 p.m. in the hotel lobby to head for an early get-acquainted dinner. After dinner, there should then be enough time for an evening birding trip, most likely to search for a Great Gray Owl hunting at dusk along roadsides in the so-called Sax-Zim Bog. For those unable to arrive in time for this evening's dinner and birding, a message will be left with instructions for Day 2.

NIGHT: Edgewater Resort and Waterpark, Duluth

**June 3-4, Days 2-3: Boreal Forests of the Superior National Forest, Sax-Zim Bog, and Douglas County, Wisconsin.** Within an hour's drive of our base in Duluth, there is an impressive assortment of habitats which are favored by virtually all of northern Minnesota's most highly sought specialties, and we will be up very early each of these mornings to take full advantage of the possibilities.

At dawn on one of these days we will penetrate the depths of the boreal forests of black and white spruce, balsam fir, alders, and aspens of the Lake County portion of the Superior National Forest northeast of Duluth. Ruffed Grouse, Black-backed Woodpecker, Gray Jay, Boreal Chickadee, and Evening Grosbeak are some of the characteristic—but often elusive—permanent residents of this country. In addition, such passerines as Yellow-bellied, Alder, and Least flycatchers; Blue-headed and Red-eyed vireos; Winter Wren; both kinglets; Veery, Swainson's, and Hermit thrushes; and 20 or more species of warbler (including Blackburnian, Ovenbird, Northern Waterthrush, Mourning, and Canada); and Lincoln's and Swamp sparrows should also be present and in full song. With luck, there will also be the possibility of turning up one of the rarer specialties of this country such as Northern Goshawk, Spruce Grouse, Great Gray or Northern Saw-whet owl, Three-toed Woodpecker, Philadelphia Vireo, or White-winged Crossbill. This is also the part of the state where male Boreal Owls are heard call-

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ing on territory each spring. Unless there is a known nest site, however, the odds of hearing or seeing one are quite low. Such mammals as moose, black bear, and snowshoe hare are also characteristic of these remote forests, and there is even a small chance of spotting a gray wolf, pine marten, or fisher.

There will also be an early morning departure to roam through the more open habitats of the so-called Sax-Zim Bog just northwest of Duluth. Over the years, the tamarack bogs, alder brushlands, sedge meadows, and upland hayfields of this famous area have proven to be consistent for such sought-after birds as Sharp-tailed Grouse, Black-billed Cuckoo, Great Gray Owl, Yellow-bellied and Alder flycatchers, Boreal Chickadee, Sedge Wren, Golden-winged and Connecticut warblers, and Le Conte's Sparrows. Of these, the grouse and Great Gray tend to be the most elusive, but we have managed to find both on most previous tours. On the other hand, the Sedge Wrens and Connecticut Warblers of Sax-Zim can be found at several locations and are relatively easy to see here.

In some years, the curious rhythmic ticking of the Yellow Rail can be heard at dawn or dusk at a favored sedge marsh at Sax-Zim. This rail, one of the most highly sought birds of any kind in North America, can be heard from the road. Those who wish to see one will venture out into the shallow marsh where, if vocalizing, a Yellow Rail is not that difficult to view after careful stalking.

Yellow Rails are even more consistently found in northern Aitkin County just west of Duluth, and there will be time to schedule a visit there, probably on Day 8, if the Sax-Zim Bog is not productive. Additionally, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows are also present in small numbers in Aitkin County's famous McGregor Marsh, along with Sedge Wrens and Le Conte's Sparrows. The Sharp-tailed Grouse and the Great Gray Owls in this county are often more reliable than those of Sax-Zim.

NIGHT: Edgewater Resort and Waterpark, Duluth

**June 5, Day 4: Duluth and Vicinity; Drive to Detroit Lakes.** Our final morning in Duluth will be set aside for a return visit to one of the areas checked previously, or a visit to Douglas County, Wisconsin, just south of Duluth, where the forest tends to be more deciduous in character and where most of the coniferous trees are red and jack pines. Douglas County will offer additional chances to see Ruffed Grouse; Black-billed Cuckoo; Alder Flycatcher; and Golden-winged, Connecticut, and Mourning warblers. In addition, it also provides our best opportunity to see American Woodcock or Whip-poor-will (both at dusk), Eastern Wood-Pewee, Wood Thrush, Yellow-throated Vireo, Pine Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, Eastern Towhee, and Field Sparrow.

In the afternoon we will make the 200-mile drive west to Detroit Lakes. Time permitting, we may make a brief detour en route to look for Sharp-tailed Grouse or Cape May Warblers in Aitkin County, or search for Red-necked Grebes or introduced Trumpeter Swans nesting on wetlands along the highway.

NIGHT: Best Western Holland House and Suites, Detroit Lakes

**June 6, Day 5: Felton Prairie; Drive to Jamestown.** After four days of seeking out birds concealed within coniferous forests, alder swamps, and sedge marshes, the wide open spaces of western Minnesota and eastern North Dakota are a refreshing and exciting change of pace. We will begin our prairie experience at dawn, in the Felton prairie area near Moorhead, where female Greater Prairie-Chickens are concealed on nests and a few males may still be frequenting the booming grounds. Our route will then continue west into North Dakota, our home for the next two nights. Time permitting this afternoon; we will tour some of this state's numerous marshes and alkaline potholes en route to Jamestown, with more opportunities to explore these wetlands in the next two days. This fascinating country is home to a multitude of nesting waterbirds including Eared, Western, and a few Clark's grebes; American White Pelican; Piping Plover (rare); Willet; American Avocet; Wilson's Phalarope; and California and Franklin's gulls.

NIGHT: Holiday Inn Express, Jamestown

**June 7-8, Days 6-7: Kidder and Stutsman Counties.** The extensive prairie grassland tracts west of Jamestown offer some of the fanciest birds of the tour. The elusive and declining Baird's Sparrow nests here, and its unique and beautiful trill should lead us to this little known specialty. The highly sought Sprague's Pipit nests here as well, and our concentrated search might locate some skylarking high over the prairie. Both these specialties may be difficult to find, but we will have two full days to search for these and other prairie specialties. The Ferruginous Hawk, most appropriately named *regalis*, is widespread, as are those musical and colorful Chestnut-collared Longspurs. Other grassland species in evidence in this magnificent country will be Swainson's Hawk, Upland Sandpiper, Marbled Godwit, lots of Grasshopper Sparrows, Dickcissel, Bobolink, and Yellow-headed Blackbird. Willow Flycatchers and Orchard Orioles can be seen in farm groves and thickets, while Gray Partridges lurk and hide in the croplands.

NIGHTS: Holiday Inn Express, Jamestown

**June 9, Day 8: Jamestown and Vicinity; Drive to McGregor.** With all the grasslands and wetlands these northern Great Plains have to offer, it will be difficult to leave. But we will start driving back east in the morning, which will allow some time for birding the mixture of woods and wetlands in the oak savanna country of west central Minnesota. Some of the possibilities of this countryside include Trumpeter Swan, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-headed Woodpecker, and Field Sparrow.

Our final night's stay will be in McGregor, 60 miles west of Duluth. We will plan to arrive for a relatively early dinner since it is likely a final evening's birding excursion will still be needed to find a Great Gray Owl, Yellow Rail, or some other Aitkin County specialty which may have eluded us earlier in the tour.

NIGHT: Country Meadows Inn, McGregor

**June 10, Day 9: Aitkin County; Departure for Home.** Since Aitkin County is also a favored area for other Minnesota specialties besides owls and rails, part of our final morning will be available to seek out some other sought-after birds which often prove difficult to find. These may include such birds as Sharp-tailed and Ruffed grouse, Sandhill Crane, Black-billed Cuckoo, Boreal Chickadee, Wood Thrush, Golden-winged and Cape May warblers, Scarlet Tanager, and Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow.

Late this morning, we will return to Duluth where the tour will end. Participants may plan to depart on any flight scheduled **after 12:00 noon**.

**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 LEADERS:** Kim Eckert and Brian Gibbons

**Kim Eckert**, with over 40 years of birding experience throughout the U.S. and Canada, has now been guiding birders or teaching bird identification classes for more than 25 of those years. Since the 1980s, he has annually led VENT tours to Newfoundland, Churchill, various locations in the Great Lakes and Great Plains, and to Texas—a favorite and frequent winter destination. He has authored four editions of *A Birder's Guide to Minnesota*, and has written numerous articles, notes, and seasonal reports for the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union journal, *The Loon*, and other publications such as *Birding* and *North American Birds*. Kim also operates the Minnesota Birding Weekends program of birding tours, has been a member for three decades of Minnesota's Records Committee, and for 20 years served as Naturalist at Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve in Duluth. A Minnesota resident since the 1960s, he has resided in Duluth since 1977—winters included.

**Brian Gibbons** was born and raised in Dallas, Texas. He took an interest in all things wild at a young age, but has specialized in birds since age 10. Brian graduated from Stephen F. Austin State University in east Texas with a B.S. in biology. Since that time he has worked on a variety of field ornithology research projects, from the Bering Sea and the midnight sun of the North Slope of Alaska to the Dominican Republic. From 1998 to 2000 he was an observer for the Migration Over the Gulf Project sponsored by a Minerals Management Service grant and administered by Louisiana State University. The project involved placing observers on oil and gas platforms throughout the Gulf of Mexico. The goal was to assess the impact of these platforms on the several hundred million trans-Gulf migrants that pass through the region in both spring and fall. More recently he has worked with the Smithsonian Institution in Jamaica, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Cuba as part of a team researching West Nile Virus, and assessing the role of migratory birds in the dispersal of the virus. Recreational birding and travel have taken him to The Great Wall in China, Machu Picchu in Peru, and the Himalayas in Nepal. One of his primary birding mentors was the late Al Valentine, a bird bander, who helped to instill a love of handling birds and learning from them. For many years Brian's field research has involved banding. His most amazing recoveries were a female Wilson's Warbler that had been banded in Alaska and was captured by Brian in Colorado, and a Sooty Tern that perished after a hurricane on the Texas coast; it had plied the Gulf of Mexico and the oceans of the world for 24 years.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for this tour is **\$2225** per person in double occupancy from Duluth. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 9, 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 Duluth 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 **\$375**. 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.

**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 90 days prior to the tour departure date.

**CANCELLATION POLICY:** Refunds are made according to the following schedule: If cancellation is made 90 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less **\$125** per person is refundable. If cancellation is made between 90 and 70 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 70 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.***

If you cancel:

90 days or more before departure date  
Between 90 and 70 days before departure  
Fewer than 70 days before departure date

Your refund will be:

Your deposit minus \$125.  
No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance will be refunded.  
No refund available.

**TRIP CANCELLATION INSURANCE:** Application forms 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 to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **A waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering. Contact the VENT office prior to registration for details.**

**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.

**BAGGAGE:** As space in the vehicles is limited, we ask that you restrict your baggage to one medium-sized suitcase and a carry-on bag.

**CLOTHING:** Most afternoons will be warm and pleasant with temperatures averaging from the mid-70s to low 80s. Early mornings can be quite cool, however, with temperatures in the 40s some days. Dress will be casual. Lightweight field clothing, a jacket, and sweater should be adequate. You should bring hiking shoes or boots and another pair of comfortable walking shoes. In addition, those who will be going into the marsh to look for Yellow Rails should either bring an old pair of sneakers or calf-high rubber boots. You should also bring along a rain jacket, and some may want to bring a swimsuit since all of our hotels have indoor swimming pools.

**EQUIPMENT:** You should pack a pair of binoculars along with a belt pack or day pack (for carrying books, sunscreen, water, 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. You will need an alarm clock and ear plugs if you are a light sleeper. In addition, you will need insect repellent since mosquitoes, black flies, and ticks can be a problem. Those interested in looking for the Yellow Rail should bring a good flashlight or headlamp and extra batteries.

**LAUNDRY:** The hotels in Duluth, Detroit Lakes, and McGregor have coin-operated washing machines.

**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 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (877) FYI-TRIP. You can check the CDC website at [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://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](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html) (click on travel health).

**SUGGESTED READING:** Our website at [www.ventbird.com](http://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](http://www.amazon.com), and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) or [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com), which specializes in ornithology books.

Dunn, Jon L. et al. *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. Fifth edition. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2006.

Eckert, Kim R. *A Birder's Guide to Minnesota* (4th edition). Duluth, Minn.: Gavian Guides, 2002.

Janssen, Robert. *Birds in Minnesota*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. Somewhat out-of-date but still in-print.

Sibley, David A. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. New York: Knopf, 2000. For those who prefer the smaller regional Sibley guides (2003), the Eastern Guide covers the states on this tour.

Stewart, Robert E. *Breeding Birds of North Dakota*. Fargo, ND: Tri-College Center for Environmental Studies, 1975. Out of print.

**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, 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 September 28, 2007 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.