

CHURCHILL AND SOUTHERN MANITOBA

JUNE 5 – 17, 2008

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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 at 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.

But, in addition to Churchill, there are even more diversified habitats to explore in the province of Manitoba. Winnipeg, the capital, lies in the “big sky” country near the southern edge of the boreal forest. In the general vicinity of the city, there are several local and regional parks that harbor a variety of birds, characteristic of the eastern deciduous forests. West of Winnipeg, there are scattered patches of short-grass, native prairie with a wealth of breeding birds, plus the “pothole” country with its ducks and grebes. At provincial and national parks north of Winnipeg, there exist superb examples of the flora and fauna typical of the high boreal forests.

Along with some of the finest scenery of the far north, the combination of Churchill and southern Manitoba offers participants an outstanding natural history experience and a remarkable cross-section of the wide variety of habitats of central Canada. Photographic opportunities abound. We 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 is one of the most popular tours in our VENT North American repertoire.

June 5, 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.

NIGHT: Hilton Suites Hotel, Winnipeg

June 6, Day 2: Winnipeg to Riding Mountain National Park. Today 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 Sharp-tailed, 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, 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 Wasagamung. 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 7, 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, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (very rare and localized), Western Wood-Pewee, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Gray Jay, Boreal Chickadee, Evening Grosbeak, and a host of spiffy warblers including Chestnut-sided, 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 a Three-toed or Black-backed woodpecker. Spruce Grouse and Great Gray Owl, also resident in the park, 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 8, Day 4: Riding Mountain to Brandon. During our final morning of birding in the park, 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 "pot-holes." 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 plum-

meted. In 1996, conditions began to return to normal and the number of species on these ponds has shown improvement that has continued through 2007. 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 Sharp-tailed 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. When heard close enough to the road, Yellow Rail might be seen with patient stalking.

NIGHT: Victoria Inn, Brandon

June 9, 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, Clay-colored, 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. A local birder will be hired to show us the most reliable birding locations in this corner of the state for locating 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 10, Day 6: Brandon to Winnipeg and Flight to Thompson. Sometime this morning we will begin driving back to Winnipeg. En route, 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 look for the very unusual conifer appropriately called prostrate juniper. We must plan our visit carefully in order to arrive at the Winnipeg airport in time for our early afternoon flight to Thompson, a nickel mining town in the heart of the vast boreal forests of central Manitoba. If we arrive early enough, there may be an optional trip to the forests around Thompson, but in these forests, the best birding is from dawn until around noon.

NIGHT: Mystery Lake Motor Hotel, Thompson

June 11, Day 7: Thompson Area and the Great Northern Train Ride. A road southwest of Thompson provides access to magnificent black spruce and tamarack forests, as well as several bogs in the region. After an early hot breakfast, we will head for the beautiful Paint Lake Provincial Recreation Park to spend several hours birding excellent dirt roads and forest trails. Possibilities include Pileated Woodpecker (uncommon); Winter Wren (elusive); Golden-crowned Kinglet; Hermit Thrush; Tennessee, Magnolia, Cape May, Palm, Wilson’s and Bay-breasted warblers (all in magnificent breeding plumage); and White-winged Crossbill (erratic). Later in the morning, we will continue further south toward Sasagui Rapids, scanning the trees along the road for the rare Northern Hawk-Owl. After lunch at a local roadside restaurant, we will bird a nearby scenic river crossing where we often see Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, and Spotted Sandpiper in breeding plumage.

On our way back to Thompson, we will stop at Pisew Falls, named by the early Cree Indians for the hissing of a lynx, a sound that penetrates the boreal forest. The falls were created by a fault in the earth’s crust and are the highest accessible waterfall in Manitoba. Here one can stand on granite outcrops of the famed Canadian Shield, the oldest bedrock on this continent. In the late afternoon, we will return to Thompson and board the train to

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Churchill. This remote arm of the Canadian National Railway line is something of a legend. At least one of its crew can remember a day back in the 1940s when the train stopped for five hours, waiting for a herd of caribou to cross the tracks! Even now, a black bear or a few caribou are sometimes seen from the train, and Northern Hawk-Owl and Great Gray Owl have been glimpsed from the train. This is one of the last great wilderness train rides in North America. After a relaxed meal in the diner, one can pass the evening in the comfort of a Pullman sleeper, watching the wilderness and the Indian villages slipping to the south. As midnight approaches and twilight sets in, the forest becomes less solid and the trees are shorter. By the time we arise the next morning, the train will be sailing through taiga, the stunted, windswept conifers separating boreal forest from tundra vegetation. Somewhere in this stretch, about 60 miles south of Churchill, the route passes near the western edge of perhaps the largest polar bear denning area in the world.

About one hour out of Churchill, the train enters the “barrens,” a seemingly endless flat stretch of lichen-covered tundra where we normally encounter Willow Ptarmigans, sometimes amazingly close to the tracks. We will have finished breakfast by the time the tall gray grain elevator at Churchill, a prairie seaport and the last stop on the line, looms into view.

NIGHT: Pullman sleeper on VIA Rail

June 12-15, Days 8-11: Churchill and Environs. Upon arriving in Churchill, we will drive out to Cape Merry via the famed “granary ponds” while our luggage is being delivered to the Tundra Inn. 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, pushed 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 whales 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-1700's 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. The turnover rate of late migrants can be impressive, and we will check Cape Merry several times.

There is much to see in Churchill and we will have almost five full days. Besides the margins of Hudson Bay, there are taiga and tundra 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 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 Longspur, Lapland Longspur, 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 will observe, this species is the specialty of the region. Some years, this endearing gull is easy to find and observe; other years, it is a challenge. Thus far, we've been fortunate and only missed this coveted treasure on two of our tours. **BUT ONLY 1-2 INDIVIDUALS HAVE BEEN PRESENT THE LAST 3 YEARS. JOIN US NOW, IF THIS IS YOUR MAIN TARGET BIRD!**

If this weren't enough, Churchill is always full of avian surprises. We've been blessed with some exciting rarities on past tours over the years: a “gray phase” Gyrfalcon carrying a 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 waterbird in the world more sleekly beautiful than this tastefully attired northern diver.

NIGHTS: Tundra Inn, Churchill

June 16, Day 12: Flight to Winnipeg. After a final morning in Churchill, we will depart for Winnipeg on a late morning flight.

NIGHT: Hilton Suites Hotel, Winnipeg

June 17, Day 13: Departure for Home. Participants may plan to depart for home anytime today. Bon voyage!

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

TOUR LEADERS: Jeri Langham and Cal Cuthbert

Jeri M. Langham has a Ph.D. in plant ecology from Washington State University and has been a professor of biological sciences at California State University in Sacramento since 1970. 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, 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.

Cal Cuthbert was born in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba and raised on the family farm beside Lake Manitoba's renowned Delta Marsh. He became interested in natural history and especially birds at an early age. After graduating from high school in Portage la Prairie he attended Kelsey Institute of Applied Arts and Sciences in

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan taking Renewable Resources Technology. Following graduation in 1975 he was contracted by both the Manitoba Museum and Manitoba Conservation. During this time field work and studies took him from one side of the province to the other and as far north as the Seal River along the Hudson Bay coast line. In 1980 he began work as a biological technician with Ducks Unlimited Canada, that country's largest conservation organization. He has been employed by Ducks Unlimited Canada for the past 27 years, most recently as a Conservation Programs Specialist. A keen birder, Cal has always made time to organize, lead, and co-lead both local and international birding tours throughout the province. He takes great pride in showing others what can be seen in this beautiful province. Cal is currently the President of the Brandon Naturalists Society and a co-author of the recently published book *Finding Birds in Southern Manitoba*. He and his wife Elaine reside in Brandon, Manitoba. They have two children, Stacey and Riley.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$3975** per person in double occupancy from Winnipeg and includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 12, 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, internal air from Winnipeg to Thompson and Churchill to Winnipeg (approx. \$935USD) airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement is **\$775**. 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.

Important information about charges for "internal flights": This tour requires flights from point to point within the tour (internal flights). The current cost of these flights is not included in the total cost of the tour and is subject to change. As of November 5, 2007 the cost of the internal flights is \$935 USD and includes all taxes. We suggest that you ask Victor Emanuel Travel to confirm your air reservations as early as possible to get the lowest available fares. VENT reserves the right to alter the itinerary based on air schedule changes and flight availability.

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 a tour or cruise departure. Prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While VENT will do everything possible to maintain the original price of the cruise or tour, if fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to implement a fuel surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In most cases, these additional fuel costs are being passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers who reserve the right, in their agreements to provide services for VENT, to raise their prices due to significant changes in fuel costs.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: Again, in the uncertain, often volatile 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 being passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

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 to protect yourself.***

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. **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.

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: You may experience a wide range in temperatures, from the 80s or even 90s on a hot day in Brandon and/or Winnipeg, to freezing at Churchill 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, 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 and are essential for Douglas Marsh. Raingear is also strongly advised. Dress will be casual throughout the tour. You may want a bathing suit for hotels with a pool and/or hot tubs. 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. 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 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 infor-

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mation). Your leader 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. 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 (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 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 website 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 National Geographic Society Guide or *The Sibley Guide to Birds*, both listed in full below.

Other References:

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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 entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

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