



Trip Itinerary: Minnesota's Boreal Forests and North Dakota's Prairie Potholes

*with John Drummond, Trip Leader
and Jesse Huth*

June 2 to 9, 2018

Friday, June 1: Early Arrivals in Minneapolis

June 1 is an early arrival day, with John Drummond, the tour leader and lead bird guide, and Jesse Huth, the guide-in-training, all coming in today. Trip participants arrive today as well (or come in a few days before).

At about 7 PM tonight, Jesse Huth, the guide-in-training, will get the van to support morning pick-ups on June 2.

See "Arrival and Transfer Plans" for detailed information concerning your arrival and transfer plans in the Minneapolis area.

Saturday, June 2: Birding Early for Early Arriving Birders in Minneapolis Area; Mid-Day Transfer to Duluth with Late PM Birding in Duluth Area

John Drummond, tour leader, will eat breakfast at the hotel around 7:00 AM. All staying at the hotel should consider eating breakfast with John.

Jesse Huth, the guide-in-training, will pick up Sam and Ed in down town Minneapolis at 7:00 AM. They will then drive back to the La Quinta near the airport for a 7:30 AM start.

All tour participants should be fully packed and in the hotel lobby by about 7:30 AM. We will pack up and leave early for our birding tour at 7:30 AM from the La Quinta Inn Minneapolis Airport Bloomington at **5151 American Boulevard West, Bloomington, Minnesota** on June 2.

- ***Please note there are more than one La Quinta hotel in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul area, and please plan to be at the one by the airport.***

We will spend the morning birding around Minneapolis, primarily at sites within the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. We will be seeing fairly common birds in this area, with some of the more noteworthy targets being Wood Duck, Willow Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo, Prothonotary Warbler and Baltimore Oriole. We will have a chance at Cerulean Warbler (tough) and a few other nice species here.

Before noon, we will begin the two-and-a-half hour drive north to Duluth.

We will arrive in Duluth early enough to do some birding around town. We will stop at a few sites that overlook Lake Superior, as well as other waterways. We should see Common Terns, loons, ducks, gulls and shorebirds. Peregrine Falcons are a good possibility as well.

After wrapping up birding for the day, we will head to our hotel to check in. We will meet in the hotel lobby at 6:00 PM (maybe 30 minutes later) to review our day's bird checklist, and then go to dinner. After dinner, we will review our plans for the following day, and then go to a local grocery store to purchase items for breakfasts and lunches for the next two days. Then we will return to the hotel for a good night's sleep, in preparation for an early start the next morning.

Overnight at the Days Inn, Duluth





Sunday, June 3: Birding Western Lake County, Ely (Echo Trail) and Return to Duluth

With sunrise around 5:15 AM, we will want a very early departure from the hotel in order to arrive in the right habitat to start finding boreal bird species. The evening before, we will discuss departure time for this morning, tentatively planned for 5:00 AM.

Everyone should be ready to board the van by 5:00 AM. The hotel may be able to provide some breakfast items before that time, and you will be able to purchase additional items the night before. In addition, we will make a stop at a convenience store in Two Harbors (about a 40-minute drive from the hotel) to allow everyone to buy any needed food or drinks and use the rest rooms.

Then we turn north on County Road 2. After about a half hour of driving, we will begin making birding stops at various places along Highway 2, and eventually Highway 1, which will give us chances to look for Northern Goshawk, Spruce Grouse, Black-billed Cuckoo, Black-backed Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Alder Flycatcher, Gray Jay, Philadelphia Vireo, Boreal Chickadee, Cape May Warbler, Mourning Warbler, Connecticut Warbler and Evening Grosbeak, among many other boreal species.

At some point we will make a roadside stop to eat our picnic lunch.

If the great birding in Lake County has not taken too much of our day, we will next spend some time birding along Echo Trail, which heads north out of Ely. This route offers more opportunities for the boreal nesting species we have been seeking.

On the drive back to Duluth, if time allows, we will visit a few sites within this vast area known as Sax-Zim Bog. We do plan to spend the next morning at the bog area, but it always deserves more time than we can give it.

We will try to return to Duluth for dinner between 5:00 and 6:00 PM. After ordering our meals, we will review the day's bird checklist and set plans for the following morning.

Overnight at the Days Inn, Duluth

Monday, June 4: Morning Birding at Sax-Zim Bog; Afternoon and Evening Birding in Aitkin County; and Search for Yellow Rails at McGregor Marsh after Dark

During the previous evening, we will determine our start time for today. The current plan is to be packed and ready to leave the hotel, after checking out, at 5:00 AM. Once again, the hotel may be able to provide some breakfast items before that time, but we should be prepared with food purchased from a grocery store.

We will spend the morning in the area of Sax-Zim Bog, targeting any species we have not yet seen. Possibilities include Ruffed Grouse, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Sandhill Crane, Great Gray Owl, Least Flycatcher, Black-billed Magpie, Winter Wren, Sedge Wren, Marsh Wren, Golden-winged Warbler, Connecticut Warbler, Le Conte's Sparrow, Bobolink and both Eastern and Western Meadowlarks.

Following our picnic lunch, we will drive southwest to Aitkin County, about two hours away. As we drive the roads through this county, we will make a stop or two to look for additional birds. Some bird species we may add here include Wilson's Snipe, Short-eared Owl, Pine Warbler, Nelson's Sparrow and Dickcissel.

We will try to get to our hotel between 4:00 and 5:00 PM, so that we can have an earlier dinner and then rest for a while before heading back out again to try for Yellow Rails at McGregor Marsh. Even though we may add a few more species later tonight, we will review our bird checklist at dinner.

Sunset today is around 9:00 PM. Since Yellow Rails are more active after dark, we will schedule an evening time to depart the hotel to visit the nearby McGregor Marsh, a great place to listen for and hopefully see nesting Yellow Rails. American Bittern, Sora and American Woodcock are also possible here. Before we get too tired, we will return to the hotel for a well-deserved rest, keeping in mind the fact that Yellow Rails are also possible in the wetland behind the hotel.

Overnight at the Country Meadows Inn, McGregor.





Tuesday, June 5: All Day Birding Between Aitkin and Bemidji, including Itasca State Park

Because we will have been birding late the night before, a later departure is planned for today. The hotel serves breakfast from 7:00 to 10:00 AM. We'll decide on a time the night before, but we should plan to check out of the hotel by about 8:30 AM.

Tonight we will stay in Bemidji, about two hours to the west. There are many potential birding stops in between, including Botany Bog State Natural Area, Mud-Goose Wildlife Area and Leech Lake.

We should find a few more warblers in these areas, including Ovenbird, Nashville Warbler, Northern Parula, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler and American Redstart. We will end the day at Itasca State Park, which has prime pine forest and is a great place to look for Black-backed Woodpecker, Olive-sided Flycatcher and several key warblers (Bay-breasted, Cape May, Magnolia and more).

We'll find a restaurant for lunch around midday. Later, we'll visit a grocery store to stock up on food items we can use for picnic lunches over the next few days.

An afternoon visit to Itasca State Park offers us a chance to look for Black-backed Woodpeckers.

We should arrive at our hotel between 5:00 PM and 6:00 PM. After getting settled in our rooms, we'll meet in the hotel lobby and review the bird checklist and plans for the next day, then head out for dinner.

Overnight at the Quality Inn, Bemidji.

Wednesday, June 6: Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge, Prairies East of Fargo, then North Dakota Prairie Birding

Everyone should meet for breakfast at 6:00 AM. We will leave the hotel no later than 6:30 AM.

Our first stop will be Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge. Here we will look for Common Loon, Red-necked Grebe, Trumpeter Swan, Bald Eagle, Red-shouldered Hawk, Black-billed Cuckoo, Golden-winged Warbler, Pine Warbler.

Once we have finished birding and enjoying this area, we will drive west to begin our grassland birding at Felton Prairie (still in Minnesota). A whole new set of birds awaits us here, including: Upland Sandpiper, Marbled Godwit, Willow Flycatcher, Grasshopper Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Chestnut-collared Longspur and possibly our first chance at Sprague's Pipit.

Eventually we will enter North Dakota and head toward Jamestown. As we drive along these back roads, we will look for Gray Partridge, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Black Tern, Short-eared Owl and Yellow-headed Blackbird.

Depending on the time, we may eat dinner before we reach Jamestown, but we should be at the hotel for the night by 8:00 PM. If we haven't already completed the bird checklist, we will do it before everyone heads to their rooms for the night. We will also review plans for the next day's birding.

Overnight at the Hampton Inn and Suites, Jamestown.



Thursday and Friday, June 7 and 8: Birding Two Full Days at Arrowwood National Wildlife Refuge, Horsehead Lake, Chase Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Alkaline Lake and Other Sites West of Jamestown

During these two days, we will visit the prairie potholes region. This area holds some of the highest density of wetlands in the nation, as well as remnant areas of tall grass prairie. There are many excellent birding sites within about one hour of driving from our hotel.

Both mornings we will meet for breakfast at 6:00 AM, departing as soon as we have finished breakfast.

We will visit Arrowwood National Wildlife Refuge, Horsehead Lake Wildlife Management Area, Chase Lake National Wildlife Refuge and Alkaline Lake. In addition to these excellent birding destinations, we will take short walks exploring from the roadsides throughout the region.

Several of the birds we hope to see include Western Grebe and Clark's Grebe, Gray Partridge, Sharp-tailed Grouse, American Bittern, Piping Plover, Upland Sandpiper, Marbled Godwit, Wilson's Snipe, Wilson's Phalarope, California Gull, Black Tern, Short-eared Owl, Sedge Wren, Sprague's Pipit, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Vesper Sparrow, Baird's Sparrow, Le Conte's Sparrow and Nelson's Sparrow. With luck, we may even see a Ferruginous Hawk.

Since there are limited opportunities for restaurants here, lunches will be picnic style. We will return to the hotel in Jamestown by about 6:00 PM both days. About a half hour after getting to our rooms, we will meet in the hotel lobby to review the bird checklist and plans for the next day, before going out for dinner.

Overnight at the Hampton Inn and Suites, Jamestown.



Saturday, June 9: Morning Birding Focused on Any Species We May Have Missed, and Mid-Day Drive to Minneapolis for Departure

We will meet again for breakfast at 6:00 AM. Everyone should be packed and ready to go soon after breakfast.

John and Jesse will be well prepared for this final morning of birding, complete with a choice of two plans.

- We will likely focus our morning birding plans on finding any bird species we may have missed on the days before. We will bird at some of the key sites in the greater Jamestown area, focusing on prairie pothole species.
- If bird finding for the tour is complete (with all target species found), we can do some birding between Jamestown and Minneapolis. On some tours, we visit Sheyenne National Grassland for birding on the way back towards Minneapolis. This large area of grassland, wetland, and woodland may be our best place during the trip to see Greater Prairie-Chicken (rare), Brewer's Blackbird and Dickcissel. It is also good for American Bittern, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Upland Sandpiper, Sedge Wren, Marsh Wren, LeConte's Sparrow and Nelson's Sparrow. Wooded areas offer a fine assortment of songbirds.
- Sheyenne National Grasslands is not the only alternative birding spot. John and Jesse will be checking birding reports from the area, and they may come up with a third plan for birding this final day of the tour.
- No matter the plan, you can count on an early start, and a fun and productive final morning of birding.

After about 11:30 AM, we will need to begin the drive to Minneapolis, expecting to arrive at the airport there between 5:00 and 5:30 PM.

- We will stop at about 2:45 AM in Sauk Centre, Minnesota. Mary Keithler will meet her husband at the Walmart right off the interstate exit.
- By 5:30, we will be back in Minneapolis (near the airport) for a rendezvous point for the Eders to meet their family.
- Then rental vehicle will need to be returned by 6:00 PM.

See “Departure Plans” for more details.

