



Natural Selections

BIRDING, WILDLIFE, AND PHOTO TOURS



Great Gray Owl

Minnesota's Winter Birding and the Sax-Zim Bog

5 Nights/6 Days

Northern Minnesota might not be high on your list for typical winter getaways. In fact, it's one of the coldest places you can put yourself in the lower 48. Everything is covered in a lovely blanket of wind driven snow. Despite, and oftentimes due to this, hundreds to thousands of birders flock to the "Arrowhead" region of Lake Superior every year to take part and marvel in the frosty winter wonderland, along with the creatures within. A change in perspective makes a trip like this uniquely special.

Join tour leader Brandon Lentz on a journey through the arctic northland as we search the world-famous Sax-Zim Bog for boreal forest specialties (Owls!), enjoy the incredible vistas and hardy wildlife of a harshly beautiful Lake Superior, hunt for elusive, rarely seen birds like Spruce & Ruffed Grouse, and much, much more.

Note: This itinerary is an accurate description of the places we'll visit and bird, however we prefer to remain flexible in order to respond to weather conditions, where birds may be found on a particular day, etc.

5 Night/6 Day Itinerary:

Day 1, Arrival, birding stops in the metro, travel to Duluth:

Today a morning or early afternoon arrival is ideal, to allow for local birding. We'll gather at MSP airport and begin by spending a bit of time birding in the metro. Targets include Snowy Owls at the Airport, Long-eared Owls at a nearby park, possible Saw-whet Owls. We'll travel to accommodations in Duluth in the afternoon.

Lodging at Days Inn, Duluth

Days 2&3, Sax-Zim Bog:

These two days will focus on the Sax-Zim Bog. The Sax-Zim Bog is a world-renowned, 300 square mile expanse of unique habitats, namely large tracts of Black Spruce and Tamarack Bog, essential for the survival of Boreal specialties like Great Gray and Northern Hawk Owls. Our days here will be spent exploring the fantastic winter wildlife that call "The Bog" home.

Most of our time will be spent in a comfortable, heated van to escape the depths of a frozen Minnesota winter, with small forays outside when photo opportunities knock (of which there will be plenty, including many feeder setups) or we want to stretch our legs a bit. There are a handful of boardwalks we can peruse, each offering us a unique, up close and personal look at the otherwise hidden habitats of hardy winter flora and fauna. Possible species here include: Great Gray Owls, Northern Hawk Owls, Boreal Chickadees, Pine



Bohemian Waxwing

Grosbeaks, Evening Grosbeaks, Redpolls, White-winged & Red Crossbills, Moose, White-tailed Deer, Pine Marten, Snowshoe Hare, Red Fox, Ermine, and much, much more.

Lodging at Days Inn, Duluth

Days 4&5, Duluth, Superior WI, Minnesota's North Shore from Two Harbors to Grand Marais:

These two birding days will be spent around Duluth, Superior WI, and Minnesota's North Shore. Nestled on the shore of Lake Superior, the largest freshwater lake in the world (by surface area), the cozy city of Duluth will act as our home base as we travel northward along the famous Highway 61, or the North Shore Scenic Drive. This 150 mile stretch to the Canadian border not only offers incredible views of the icy, windswept shores of Lake Superior, but some unique birding opportunities as well. We'll spend

our days on 61 in search of Owls (Great Gray, Snowy, Northern Hawk, Barred, and Boreal if we're very lucky), Spruce Grouse, Gulls (Iceland, Glaucous, and Great Black-backed are all expected), big water diving ducks (White-winged, Black, and Surf Scoters, Long-tailed Ducks, Common Goldeneyes), winter finches like Crossbills, Bohemian Waxwings, Black-backed and American Three-toed Woodpeckers, and more. Our northernmost destination will be Grand Marais, a lovely small town with big views of "the big lake".

Lodging at Days Inn, Duluth

Day 6, Additional Birding and departure:

This morning is flexible and we'll either spend the morning at Sax-Zim, drive to a nearby Sharp-tailed Grouse hotspot, or bird around the Duluth area. We'll have a few hours to bird before needing to travel back to MSP, where the tour would conclude at noon. Late afternoon flights home today are essential.



Spruce Grouse



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Included for the duration of this itinerary:

5 nights Lodging in double or single occupancy, private guide services from day 1 through day 6, all ground transportation throughout, entrance fees.

Not Included:

Airfare, meals, tips for hotels, waiters, guides or drivers during the trip, items of personal use, travel insurance, medical expenses, prescription drugs, additional services offered in hotels (Spa, massage, etc.), alcoholic beverages, laundry, souvenirs, any other expense or extra tours not listed as included above.

Travel insurance:

We highly recommend you obtain travel insurance. In the event that you need to cancel your trip due to medical or other reasons, this insurance will protect you. For details, please see

<https://www.naturalselectionstours.com/travel-insurance/>

Note on meals:

When we are spending our days in the Bog, the only option for breakfast and lunch is the Wilbert Cafe in Cotton, unless folks want to grab an early breakfast at the hotel before we leave. The Wilbert Cafe has decent standard American fare and a couple of vegetarian options too. Otherwise, we like the Blackwoods Bar & Grill, Burger Paradox, Grandma's Saloon, Va Bene, and Pizza Luce.