ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Minnesota

Sax-Zim Bog – Northern Owls

19th February to 25th February 2021 (7 days)



Great Grey Owl by Lev Frid

Minnesota during winter may not sound much like a birding destination, but it is renowned for being one of the only places in the U.S. where one can see most of the boreal breeding birds typically seen only in Canada. Every winter, sought-after northern owls – Snowy, Great Grey, Northern Hawk and Boreal Owls, emerge from their usual haunts in the depths of the woods to hunt along forest edges, roadsides and agricultural fields only a short distance from the northern outpost of Duluth. Minnesota's location in the north means that every winter provides chances to see these birds, and in some years their numbers

can be astronomical! Add this to a backdrop of flocks of colourful winter finches and a suite of boreal specialty birds and it becomes a fantastic winter escape!

Our Minnesota tour will focus on the famous Sax-Zim Bog, a patchwork of spruce bogs, aspen stands and open agricultural land. This excellent mix of habitats should produce most of the boreal specialties we hope to encounter. In open fields and meadows we will find Snowy and Great Grey Owls as well as Sharp-tailed Grouse and the occasional Black-billed Magpie. We will scan the skies for Bald and Golden Eagles and Rough-legged Hawk, and the treetops for Northern Hawk-Owls. Feeding stations scattered throughout the bog feature excellent songbird viewing, including Red and White-winged Crossbills, Common and Hoary Redpolls, Pine and Evening Grosbeaks, Pine Siskin, Boreal Chickadee, Canada Jay and others. The feeders are also the best place to find Boreal Owls, patiently waiting for nightfall.

The bog also gives us some excellent chances for elusive mammals - the most common being American Marten, North American Porcupine, White-tailed Deer, Bobcat and Long-tailed Weasel with an outside chance at Gray Wolf when we venture deeper into the boreal forest on our final day.

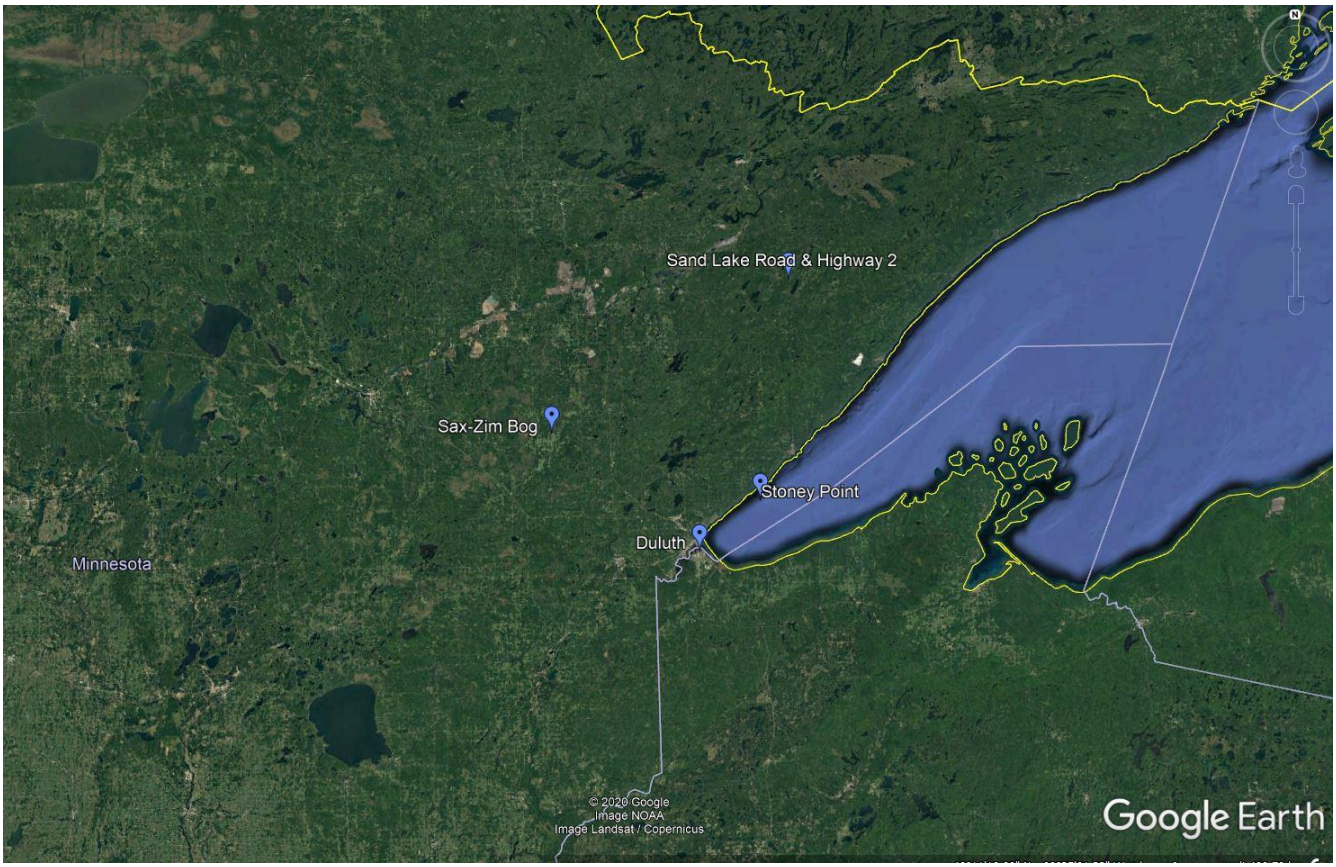
We have many chances to find our targets in a variety of locations, and we will be at the start of the breeding season for many of these birds, which will be singing and easier to find.

THE TOUR AT A GLANCE…

THE ITINERARY

Day 1	**Arrival in Duluth**
Day 2	**Lake Superior and travel to Sax-Zim Bog**
Days 3 to 5	**Sax-Zim Bog**
Day 6	**Sand Lake Peatland Scientific and Natural Area**
Day 7	**Final departures**

TOUR ROUTE MAP…



THE TOUR IN DETAIL…



Snowy Owl by Lev Frid

Day 1: Arrival in Duluth. Today is set aside as an arrival day in Duluth. This evening we shall meet for a welcome dinner to discuss our plans for the forthcoming days.

Day 2: Lake Superior shoreline near Duluth. This morning we will head northeast of Duluth along the shores of Lake Superior. This will likely be our only opportunity on the trip to see water-dependent birds like ducks and gulls but this can also be a good area for early migrating raptors and flocks of boreal songbirds like Common Redpoll and Two-barred Crossbill. Some of the over-wintering duck possibilities include Long-tailed Duck, Common and Red-breasted Merganser, Common Goldeneye, with an outside chance at rarities like Harlequin Duck, Barrow's Goldeneye and all three North American Scoter species. Some of the gulls we might run into include Glaucous, Herring and Iceland. The lakeshore can also produce Bald Eagles in numbers, with the possibility of an early migrant Golden Eagle mixed in. After a morning on the lakeshore, we'll start making our way towards Sax-Zim Bog, aiming to arrive in the afternoon so we can settle into our lodging for the next 4 nights and hopefully have time for a late afternoon drive to look for mammals and owls emerging to feed for the night.

Days 3 to 5: Sax-Zim Bog. The famous Sax-Zim Bog is widely considered to be the best spot in the U.S. to observe high concentrations rare boreal breeding birds. During breeding season, these birds are dispersed of the entirety of the vast boreal forest of Canada. But in the winter, many of them congregate in the peat bogs, aspen uplands and meadows of northern Minnesota, the southernmost extent of boreal



Northern Hawk Owl by Lev Frid

forest in North America. It is here that we shall concentrate the bulk of our efforts for the trip and we are sure to be rewarded with many excellent sightings, as well as cozy accommodations and daily bird lists beside a crackling fire at our well-appointed lodge right in the middle of the bog. Owls will be some of our major targets and we will devote time each day to scanning the trees and meadows for owl-shaped blobs (which will often turn out to be Ruffed Grouse or Porcupine!). Open meadows should produce majestic Great Grey Owls and spectacular Snowy Owls. As we drive we'll be constantly scanning the tops of the tallest trees, the favored perches of the unusual Northern Hawk-Owl. At feeder stations and various forest trails we will search for Barred Owls and the rare and elusive Boreal Owl.



Pine Grosbeak by Lev Frid

The numerous feeder stations set up throughout the bog will likely produce many of our songbirds targets, as well as some excellent mammals. Winter finches can be plentiful here and the feeding stations should give us great opportunities to see Evening Grosbeaks, Common and Hoary Redpolls, Red and Two-barred Crossbills, Pine Siskins and hopefully Pine Grosbeaks. These spots can also be productive for Boreal Chickadees, ubiquitous and gregarious Canada Jays and a host of wonderful woodpeckers including Hairy, Downy, Black-backed and American Three-toed. Various fruit trees in the nearby town of Meadowlands can often be good for flocks of Bohemian Waxwings. Along with bird feeders, carcasses are usually set up, which attract Long-tailed Weasels and Pine Marten, while the feeder refuse attracts Red Squirrels and Snowshoe Hares, and if we're lucky, a marauding Northern Goshawk! As we return to our lodging each night, we'll scan the fields for Bobcats emerging for their nightly hunt.



Boreal Owl by Lev Frid

Day 6: Sand Lake Peatland Scientific and Natural Area. On our final full day of birding we will venture north into proper boreal forest in search of the gorgeous Spruce Grouse. Numerous spots along a desolate stretch of Highway 2 north of Duluth have the potential to provide great looks at these striking birds foraging right in the road. We'll also keep our eyes peeled for both Crossbills, Pine Grosbeaks and Boreal Chickadees, as well as flocks of Snow Buntings and Lapland Longspurs. And if luck is one our side we may even chance upon a mythical Grey Wolf crossing the road. As darkness nears, we'll head back to Duluth for our final evening.

Day 7: Final departures. This morning our tours comes to an end at Duluth Airport.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:

Tour dates, prices, single supplement rates, approximate flight costs and spaces available for this tour are displayed on our website. Please see under IMPORTANT NOTES below.

This includes:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on 7;
- All lodgings;
- Ground transportation;
- Extra activities mentioned in the itinerary;
- Reserve entrance fees; and
- All guiding services (including tips for local guides and services.)

The tour fee does not include:

- Visa fees;
- **ANY** flights (see above);
- Any additional beverages;
- Special gratuities; and
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

a) Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually 4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency.

b) Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient participants, a small party supplement will have to be charged.

c) Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.

d) Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and / or the designated Rockjumper leader/s at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If, therefore, you feel that he/they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them.

Special notes:

- Be prepared for some long drives. While there are fantastic birds sought on this tour, they tend to be quite spread out. In order to find our targets, we must cover a lot of ground which means significant time on the road. We expect all guests to rotate seating each day to ensure fairness.

- Accommodations are good throughout, and we expect most days to return to hotel rooms by 18:00 each evening. We may spend a little time out at night on just one or two evenings after dinner, to see what we can find in nocturnal hours.
- At this time of year expect it to be cold, close to or below 0°C (32°F), and there is a good possibility of snow and/or rain. Wind can be a factor as well. Please dress appropriately.
- Strong, warm, waterproof footwear that is good in snow and ice is required. Nearly all birding is roadside but occasionally we may walk on trails just off the road. Long underwear, and wind/rain proof outer layers are recommended.

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE DETAILS:

This tour **does not** include **ANY** airfares. The tour will depart from Duluth International Airport (IATA: DLH). As day 1 has been set aside as an arrival day, you are free to arrive at any time. The tour will conclude at Duluth International Airport (IATA: DLH) on day 7 after breakfast.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your **Tour Confirmation** package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

FLIGHTS:

Duluth International Airport (IATA: DLH) is the main port of entry for this tour. **Please DO NOT book any flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**