Eagle-Eye Tours



Belugas, Bears & Birds (July 6 - 16, 2024)

Link: Belugas, Bears & Birds (July 6 - 16, 2024)

Highlights on our 2024 Belugas, Bears & Birds trip abounded. Even though the very late and extensive ice sheet that persisted on Hudson's Bay this year prevented us from getting one of our main targets for the north (the Polar Bear), we had superb cooperation from the Beluga's that seemed intent on following us around on our second Churchill River excursion… pods of large white adults and a few grayish young trailing immediately behind the zodiac and surfacing all around us. And not only did we get a respectable 218 bird and 20 mammal species overall on this tour, but we were able to get amazing photos and incredible looks at most. And who can forget the owls -- 4 Great Grays when we thought we'd be lucky to get one, 6 Great Horned, and a couple surprises… a Burrowing Owl in the southwest and a Northern Hawk Owl that zipped by in front of the van in Riding Mountain National Park! Hopefully this report & the many superb photos you took will serve to relive some of those great memories.

Day 1 – July 6

We met in the lobby of the Hampton hotel that first evening, talked a bit about what to expect the next few days, and then drove over to the nearby Chop Steak House where we dined, got acquainted and discussed more trip logistics. But, tomorrow would be a full day with a fair amount of driving and stops along the way, so we packed it in early that evening.

Day 2 – July 7

Stocked with coffee from the lobby, and bag breakfasts from the hotel, we left the hotel at 5:45 am bound for St Ambroise on Lake Manitoba. On the way, we stopped at a known spot along PR227 for Red-headed Woodpeckers (which can sometimes be hard to find, but we'd see 2 here and a total of 7 today). Carrying on to St Ambroise, we'd spot a few pole-top perched Wilson's Snipe, the first of 6 Eastern Bluebirds for the day, many Brewer's Blackbirds, some Brown Thrashers, Bobolinks, Orchard & Baltimore Orioles, a pair of Willets with young, a Marbled Godwit, an Eastern Cottontail, and the first of 5 Coyotes we would see today. At St Ambroise beach we'd have breakfast, and add a

few birds (Yellow-headed Blackbirds, American White Pelicans, Double-crested Cormorants, some Forster's and a single Common Tern, a couple of far-off Western Grebes) and also spot a couple of Franklin's Ground Squirrels. After breakfast, we'd hear many Marsh & Sedge Wrens in the marsh and eventually spot a couple. We'd also see two Black-crowned Night Herons, American Bittern, Great Blue Heron, some Northern Harriers, and a few Black Terns and Franklin's Gulls over the marsh.



Brown Thrasher © Michael Kennedy



American White Pelican © Michael Kennedy

Our next stop, Cal's place along the Portage Creek, was especially productive with decent looks at a Wood Duck with young, Eastern Wood Pewee, Eastern Phoebe, Yellow-throated Vireo, Great Crested Flycatchers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, an Eastern Chipmunk by the feeders, a Great Horned Owl flew across the creek, and a most unexpected Harris's Sparrow (a species never found in the south at this time of year). At Neepawa we stopped for a Subway lunch, and got great looks at a Swainson's Hawk as we were leaving. We checked out a bird sanctuary (Spotted Sandpiper with young & some close-up American White Pelicans) and a large Richardson's Ground Squirrel colony on the edge of town. Along the Highway north of town, a hunting Cooper's Hawk and Turkey Vultures were spotted, and a few Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrels darted off the road edges. As we jogged through coniferous and mixed woods south of the park we came upon a roadside Great Grey Owl (a major highlight bird which we were able to watch and photograph to our heart's content at very close range). Taking the Rolling River Road into the park in a downpour, a second Great Gray Owl flew up from the roadside. Along PR19 in the park, a few Wild Turkeys and a Ruffed Grouse with chicks were added to our list. Checking into the Elkhorn Resort shortly after 5, we had a couple hours to relax before dinner at TR McCoys in Wasagaming, followed by a short trip north on Hwy #10 to Moon Lake where we spotted some Common Loons, Ring-necked Ducks, Green-winged Teal, a Broad-winged Hawk, Trumpeter Swan pair, and had brief looks at our first of 14 Black Bears we would see in and around the park.



Great Gray Owl © Michael Kennedy

Day 3 – July 8

Out by 6 am, we drove down Hwy 10 stopping near a small lake just past the Lake Audy turnoff where we added Golden-crowned & Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Boreal Chickadee, Swainson's Thrush, and a Red-breasted Nuthatch. We'd hoped to maybe get a Moose before breakfast, but settled for a couple more Broad-winged Hawks, 2 Hooded Mergansers in a roadside pond, plus a couple more Black Bears along #10. Stopping for breakfast at Grayling Lake, some Common Loons were spotted, plus a pair Trumpeter Swans with 4 young. But a large animal mostly hidden in the nearby bulrush was what really caught our attention; it eventually stepped out into full view and hung around for all to get great looks – a large female Moose! A few more nearby birds caught our attention during and

after breakfast including more Boreal Chickadees (6 today), American Redstarts, Northern Waterthrush, Yellow-rumped & Chestnut-sided Warblers. Further north, one of Ken's favorite walking trails, the Boreal trail, was closed for construction but we stopped near the gate to listen for some unique warblers that often are found there and were rewarded with great looks at Cape May and Bay-breasted Warblers, a few Pine Siskins, and a flock of Evening Grosbeaks plus some Purple Finch were observed hanging around a nearby roadside salt lick.



Moose © Michael Kennedy



Bay-breasted Warbler © Michael Kennedy



Evening Grosbeak © Michael Kennedy

Further north, we stopped at Crawford Creek to listen for Golden-winged Warblers, and instead were greeted by a couple Veeries and had our first good looks at Least Flycatcher. On to the Beach Ridge parking lot where Philadelphia Vireo and Black-and-White Warbler were added. On the way back south, we took a few short walks along the North Shore road by Clear Lake adding a Winter Wren (heard only), plus first or better looks at Nashville, American Redstart, Tennessee, Ovenbird and Blackburnian Warblers, and a real surprise Northern Parula Warbler. We stopped for a picnic lunch at the Spruces campsite along Clear Lake, before heading west and south around the lake on our way back to the resort adding a Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Orange-crowned Warbler, another Ruffed Grouse, a field full of Franklin's Gulls (at least 1000 for the day!), and a highlight Black Bear with 3 medium-sized cubs that scampered across an open field.



Franklin's Gulls © Michael Kennedy



Mama black bear and cubs © Michael Kennedy

We took a couple hours off again that afternoon and had an early dinner at TR McCoys before taking back roads south of the park to Lake Audy. On the way, we'd add Cliff Swallows, Red-necked Grebes with young, Belted Kingfisher, Alder Flycatcher, a Painted Turtle that we had to escort off the road, and nice looks at a roadside American Bittern. The American Bison were a bit hard to find but when we did, we got close up and personal with some 60 cows, calves and at least one bull. At Lake Audy,

we’d see more Common Loons, Common Mergansers, Common Goldeneye, some Bank Swallows, and get our first good looks at a Clay-colored Sparrow. The trip back near dusk was uneventful until an accipiter-like Northern Hawk-Owl darted across Hwy 10 in front of the van and vanished into the forest. A great way to top off a most successful first full day in Riding Mountain National Park.



Red-necked Grebe and young © Michael Kennedy



Bison © Michael Kennedy

Day 4 – July 9

Out at 6am, we headed east on PR 19 and did a brief walk by Lake Katherine where a pair of American Three-toed Woodpeckers were a major highlight. But the mosquitoes were bad that morning so we decided to forego breakfast at Whirlpool Lake and instead carried on the a more open breakfast spot (Gorge Creek) where we had a more peaceful breakfast interrupted by a Red Fox along the road and later by a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker pair feeding a bunch of noisy young. Backtracking to Whirlpool, we added our first Snowshoe Hares (6 today), Magnolia Warbler, more Boreal Chickadees & Yellow-rumped Warblers, plus a group of large Red-sided Garter Snakes in an opening near some stumps. On to the East Escarpment where we took some pics at the historic east gate, and drove around to the Agassiz Ski Hill Road west of McCreary. We heard but couldn't get any more than brief looks at a few Mourning Warblers, added Downy Woodpecker and White-breasted Nuthatch, and on the way to and from our picnic lunch spot near the base of the old ski hill added Eastern Towhee, Indigo Bunting, some Hermit Thrushes, two Broad-winged Hawks, and a couple more Black Bears (one with a small young that briefly climbed a tree before scampering off with mom).



American Three-toed Woodpecker © Michael Kennedy



Eastern Towhee © Michael Kennedy



Indigo Bunting © Michael Kennedy

We added little new on our way back around to the east gate and down 19 to the resort (save for a couple of heard-only Blue-headed Vireos). It was getting quite hot so we retired for a couple hours before another early dinner at TR McCoys. After dinner, we dodging some rain and even hail storms eventually making our way south of the park and west to Proven Lake where we were able to get really good looks at a LeConte's Sparrow, heard a Nelson's Sparrow, and stopped by some large

lakes loaded with Red-necked Grebes (60 today), pelicans, cormorants, various other waterfowl including our first Green-winged Teal, Lesser Scaup & Canvasback, Belted Kingfisher, and several Great Blue Herons. That evening we spotted a Beaver swimming across a large lake just south of the park, and another Moose. We'd wanted to get back to Proven Lake to give the Nelson's Sparrow another shot, but heavier drizzle and rain eventually drove us back to the Elkhorn.

Day 5 – July 10

Today we had a fair bit of driving and multiple stops to do, so we loaded up & were off at 6. Our first stop was at Proven Lake, but even before we turned off the Highway a Great Gray Owl was spotted on a roadside hydro pole. At Proven, we tried unsuccessfully to call in a Nelson's Sparrow, and as we prepared to leave another Great Gray Owl materialized – this one landed in some roadside trees giving more amazingly close looks and photos of this normally hard to locate owl! On to Minnedosa where we had breakfast at a rather secluded downtown park by the South Saskatchewan River before carrying on to the Minnedosa pothole country -- a series of small glacial depression lakes south of town. Here we added our first 2 Horned & 9 Eared Grebes, many more Red-necked & a few Pied-billed Grebes, our first Northern Pintail & Northern Shoveler, many more Ruddy Ducks, Redhead, Gadwall, Lesser Scaup and other waterfowl, as well as numerous American Coot (150 today) and Black Terns (75). For mammals we spotted our first Muskrat, a coyote, and a rather cooperative Red Fox.



Great Gray Owl © Michael Kennedy



Eared Grebe © Michael Kennedy

On the way to Brandon we flushed up our first 4 Sharp-tailed Grouse for the trip and spotted the first of 10 Swainson's Hawks we would see today. At Brandon we stopped for gas and restrooms, before carrying on south to the Brandon Hills (where a stop at a small pond yielded a Virginia Rail that eventually came out onto the road for great looks/photos). On the way to our lunch spot, we got first looks at a few American Avocets in a small pond and some Horned Larks along the roadsides. We stopped at a roadside park near Deleau for lunch, before proceeding west through some sandy sections of the Lauer Sandhills where we'd hoped to maybe spot some elk but settled for our first looks at a couple Grasshopper Sparrows perched on fence wires. On to the southern edge of the Plum Lakes where at least 7 White-faced Ibis were observed and we played around with a couple Nelson's Sparrows but got only brief looks. The old town of Broomhill was our next destination but the hoped for Say's Phoebe there was nowhere to be found. West of town, however, we scanned over a very large, lush pasture where Burrowing Owl releases had been done in previous years hoping one might be found. Sure enough, one was found perched on some far-off shrubs -- too far for decent looks but unmistakable nonetheless. Making our way to Melita we would spot our first Wilson's Phalaropes, Stilt & Solitary Sandpipers, and a Ruddy Turnstone in some ponds north of town.



Virginia Rail © Michael Kennedy

Checking in at the Western Star Hotel in Melita, we had a short break before heading out for dinner. We wanted to get down to the best prairie and have a good look around that evening so after locating some Chimney Swifts circling above town plus a couple of Eurasian Collared-Doves, we headed right out. We got side-tracked by a bunch of shorebirds in a pond (Least, Stilt & Pectoral Sandpipers, Short-billed Dowitcher, Lesser & Greater Yellowlegs), our first Gray Partridges, several Upland Sandpipers, our first good looks at Vesper Sparrow (15 today) and Upland Sandpipers, as well as a couple of Loggerhead Shrikes. In the extreme southwest, we crossed a fence and took an extended walk in some lush native mixed-grass prairie. There, we were able to get ggreat looks at some Chestnut-collared Longspurs and heard several more Grasshopper Sparrows, but the hoped-for Sprague's Pipits or Baird's Sparrow that normally occur here could not be found. On the way back to Melita, we drove through a section of the Poverty Plains north of Pierson, spotting a Great Horned Owl (3rd for the day!), and three occupied Ferruginous Hawk nests (nests that Ken had created in the 1990s by placing some sticks in a wire basket half way up a large isolated tree well removed from roads and disturbance). Many of these artificial nests have been used by Ferruginous for decades and have been built up annually to where some now are several feet in height and width.



Chestnut-collared Longspur © Michael Kennedy

Day 6 – July 11

Breakfast in the hotel this morning would be at 7, but a few of us got up at 6 and went north to look for more prairie birds. In a mowed hayfield near the Broomhill Wildlife Management Area a couple Sprague's Pipits were heard. One was eventually coaxed down from its aerial flights allowing excellent looks/photos of this normally difficult to observe species on the ground. We also spotted two Mule Deer and a White-tailed Jack Rabbit that morning. After a hearty breakfast, we headed west for better looks at Ferruginous and a few other prairie birds. Driving south through the grassland/pasture-dominated Poverty Plains, we succeeded in finding a couple Say's Phoebes, two roadside Black-billed Cuckoos, two Lark Sparrows, 3 more Sharp-tailed Grouse, more Gray Partridge (10 today), 2 more Loggerhead Shrikes, many more Upland Sandpipers (80 today!), got better looks at some Ferruginous Hawk nests with young (8 adults and young today), and another White-tailed Jack Rabbit. Before heading east to Whitewater Lake, we stopped to look at a large Bank Swallow colony on the banks of the Souris River, noting at least 3 Northern Rough-winged Swallows mixed in. Crossing the broad grassy Blind Souris valley south of Melita, a couple of us got to see a Badger slink off the road into a lush grassy ditch, but we were not able to get another look at this elusive prairie resident. At Whitewater we stopped at a few accessible viewing spots along the west and north ends of the lake spotting our first Baird's, White-rumped & Semipalmated Sandpipers, and getting better looks at American Avocets, Marbled Godwit, Stilt Sandpipers, and many the shorebirds we'd seen yesterday. After a Subway lunch in Boissevain, we started the long haul to Winnipeg. Near Shilo, we stopped to look for bluebirds and were successful in finding a nice male Mountain (that flew too far off for great photos), as well as a couple of Eastern Bluebirds and another Loggerhead Shrike. We'd planned to check a park in western Winnipeg, but we hit some road construction so instead headed straight to the hotel, taking an hour off before walking across the back alley to Chicago Joes for dinner. Our southern adventure was over. We'd had great weather, a few mosquitoes and ticks but nothing too serious, and the birds and mammals had cooperated really nicely.

Day 7 –July 12

We'd have an early (7:15) flight to Churchill today, so we took the shuttle to the airport at 5:45, and grabbed some breakfast grub at Tim Horton's in the airport before the flight. We boarded on time, but sat on the tarmac for almost an hour, delaying out arrival in Churchill until 10:30. On the flight in, we could see an expansive ice sheet offshore on Hudson's Bay – great for the welfare of the Polar Bears as they like to stay on the ice as long as possible fattening up on seals, but that would definitely reduce our chances of seeing any Polar Bears on the boat trip or on shore. Checking in at the Polar Inn, we quickly grabbed some extra layers (it was quite cool), and headed out for an initial look at the granary ponds (Long-tailed Duck & Greater Scaup), and the Lower Docks along the Churchill River (first looks at Arctic Tern, Common Eider & some far off flying Parasitic Jaeger and Pacific Loons). We had a picnic lunch at Cape Merry getting our first looks at Whimbrel (20 for the day), more Parasitic Jaegers (5 today) and some Beluga's – their white and gray backs obvious when they surfaced in the Churchill River below. Before heading out of town, we checked out the Beach on Hudson's Bay getting first looks at 20 White-winged & 2 Black Scoters, along with large numbers of Common Eider (50 today). At Akudlik, Ken remembered he had to fill the van so he dropped off everyone for a walk in a trail where a nearby Pacific Loon with chicks was a treat. Heading down Goose Creek Road, we stopped by the feeder at the cabins getting superb looks at several Pine Grosbeaks, a couple of Harris's Sparrows, our first Common Redpoll, a Pine Siskin, Dark-eyed Junco, White-throated Sparrow, and a couple of the most common of sparrows in the north (White-crowned). Further along Goose Creek Road, we had our first looks at American Black Duck (8 today), 3 Rusty Blackbirds, 4 Red-breasted Mergansers, as well as 15 Lesser Yellowlegs, 5 Greater Yellowlegs, 8 Pectoral Sandpipers and 10 Short-billed Dowitchers. At Goose Creek, we'd get nice looks at a Trumpeter Swan (rather rare for the north). We stopped for restrooms at the Marina and drove a short distance up Hydro Road stopping to look at an Osprey, a couple Bald Eagles, and while scanning groups of Bonaparte's Gulls hunting along the Churchill River we spotted the one we we'd been hoping to find -- a Little Gull, its dark underwings very obvious in flight!



Red-breasted Mergansers © Michael Kennedy



Trumpeter Swan © Michael Kennedy

On the way back, we drove a short distance into Kennedy Park. In the vicinity where Ken had found a Spruce Grouse weeks earlier, we spotted a female and as we got closer noticed it was accompanied by at least one tiny chick. At the cabins we spotted a couple of fledged Great Horned Owls (another good bird for the north). Along Scrap Metal Road, we would hear some Blackpoll Warblers and finally get to see a Fox Sparrow (5 heard elsewhere today). Carrying on up Launch Road, we added a couple Tundra Swans. Lastly, we took the very rough and rocky Half-way Road, a spot that has often been good for some unique mammals and birds, but today we would add nothing new along it. Despite a few mosquitoes and black flies that had pestered us at some stops, we'd had a very productive first day in Churchill. We celebrated over a nice dinner that evening at the Lazy Bear Restaurant. After dinner, a few folks headed out for another quick look down Goose Creek Road and the Nodwell Trail, adding to our totals and getting better looks at many of the birds we'd seen earlier today, as well as adding a couple new birds for the north (Hooded Merganser, Merlin, and Canada Jay) but no new birds or mammals for the trip.

Day 8 – July 13

Our routine in Churchill was an optional pre-breakfast excursion to some sites near town for an hour or so, coming back to a nice continental breakfast at the Polar Inn at 7-7:30. But the forecast for today called for early-morning drizzle with a slight breeze, so we opted out of the pre-breakfast excursion. After breakfast, we checked out the Flats along the river -- our first Semipalmated Plover with a chick, first Hudsonian Godwits (20), many more Whimbrels (30 today), at least 1000 adult and young Canada Geese, and several Bald Eagles (total of 12 today). At the Granary Ponds, we found our first Red-necked Phalaropes, plus some rarer birds for the north – a Barn Swallow, 2 Soras and an American Bittern. On to Cape Merry where we spotted some Surf Scoters and Common Mergansers. Taking the RX road to Akudlik, we heard more Blackpoll Warblers, and got better looks at Orange-crowned Warbler and Lincoln's Sparrow before heading it back to town to get ready for the Beluga Whale & Fort Prince Of Wales Zodiac Tour at 11:30. On the tour, the belugas cooperated nicely giving us nice close up looks as they surfaced near the zodiac. The tour of the fort was also enlightening, but the Polar Bears that are normally found just beyond the fort at Eskimo Point at this

time of year were not around. Even the Ringed & Harbour Seals that are normally seen from the zodiac as well as along the bay and Churchill River shorelines were nowhere to be found this year – these too presumably had remained near the icepack further from shore. After the zodiac tour, we changed and then warmed up over a nice late lunch/early dinner at the Ptarmigan Restaurant.



Beluga © Michael Kennedy

We wanted to get down past the Northern Studies Centre this afternoon to give the Willow Ptarmigan and shorebirds a good first look, so we planned to be out for a few hours. Along the Coast Road we had a quick look at Miss Piggy (the cargo plane that had safely crash landed among the rocky bay shoreline decades ago). Along Launch Road we checked out a side road to the coast, and stopped for a pair of Tundra Swans with young, some close up Pacific Loons, and had a couple fly-by Merlins. After a washroom stop at the Northern Study Centre, we headed inland on Twin Lakes Road eventually making our way to the fen where much shorebird research has been and continues to be conducted. There were lots of possibilities for new birds to be found here, but other than a nesting pair of Parasitic Jaegers, a Northern Harrier and some treetop perched Least Sandpipers, the fen had little else to offer today. We carried on to the cabin at the very end of Twin Lakes road getting to see a close up Red Fox and a more distant dark-colored Red-Fox along the road before heading back, running into heavy rain on the way back after the Study Centre.



Tundra Swans © Michael Kennedy

Day 9 – July 14

Despite some light drizzle and fog, a few of us went out for a check of the town sites before breakfast hitting Cape Merry (two Arctic Hares were a highlight) and the Flats (many Whimbrel, Hudsonian Godwits, 30 Semipalmated Sandpipers, and again 1000+ Canada Geese). After breakfast a Chipping Sparrow was spotted in town (rather rare for the north), and along the Nodwell Trail we heard a couple singing Hermit Thrushes, and had more looks at Orange-crowned & Tennessee Warblers. At the Goose Creek feeders, 12 Pine Grosbeaks, 3 Harris's Sparrows, a Common Redpoll, and White-throated Sparrow joined the regular White-crowned Sparrows, plus a couple Bohemian Waxwings were briefly seen nearby. After driving to CR30 at the end of Hydro Road we hit Kennedy Park again this time coming up with our first and only Palm Warbler for the trip. Back at the motel, we had a bite to eat before the 12:30 Zodiac tour on the Churchill River with the Belugas. In the heavier fog today, it seemed to be more difficult to locate the Belugas. But when we did, they really put on a show. Following us closely, pods of several whales would trail along closely behind or beside the zodiac, surfacing regularly giving us amazing looks and a better perspective on how large they really are. I quickly ran out of battery on my iphone camera and had to just marvel at the show the Belugas were putting on. Others had decided to leave their camera behind as we weren't sure about the damp weather and we really hadn't expected the show to be better than it had been yesterday. But today we even had a Little Gull briefly join in the show, flying low and directly over us in the middle of the river! As we got out to the entrance of the river, it started to drizzle, and we turned to head back. It only took a few minutes, but by the time we got back to the dock, we were getting drenched in a full-on rainstorm. After changing into dry cloths, we took some time off before having an early dinner at the Ptarmigan. Conditions were not great afterwards, but a few of us headed out hoping it might clear up. But it did not, so we were out only a short while that evening before retreating to the motel.

Day 10 – July 15

Waking to slight drizzle and cool temps (a windchill below zero Celsius this morning), a few of us

went out for a short while before breakfast to Cape Merry & the flats -- today dominated by some 700 American Avocets, the first few of 15 Bald Eagles for the day, and a few godwits, Whimbrels, and other shorebirds including a Ruddy Turnstone. We really wanted to give ptarmigan another chance this morning so we headed straight out towards and beyond the Study Centre after breakfast checking out a couple of promising new roads by the Golf Balls (2 Horned Larks) and Bird Cove Road (where we met a group that were preparing to walk out to the Ithica at low tide!). We had not encountered Sandhill Cranes on the trip before, but today they were everywhere; total of 16 in several spots today including a pair with a chick along Launch Road. The best spot for ptarmigan is usually along the first stretch of Twin Lakes road so we drove slowly and were about to turn back as we were getting a little low on gas (none to be had on Sundays & only by appointment on Monday mornings!) when a male Willow Ptarmigan materialized along the roadside – what a relief and great looks/photos.



Willow Ptarmigan © Michael Kennedy

After gassing up, having a bite to eat at the motel, and loading our gear onto the van, we headed back beyond the Study Centre exploring Ramsey Trail (American Kestrel, Tundra Swan with 4 young) and Twin Lakes Road to the fen (more Canada Jays, Bald Eagles, territorial Hudsonian Godwits and Lesser Yellowlegs on treetops, and excellent cooperation by a territorial pair of Parasitic Jaegers). Back in town, a few folks wanted to check out the excellent Eskimo Museum, while the rest of us headed back up Goose Creek Road for one more look at the feeders and the Marina/Weir areas. Since our return flight to Winnipeg would be at 6 pm today, we had decided to have our last meal together mid-afternoon at the Ptarmigan. Ken challenged all to come up with their two favorite birds, mammals or memories from the trip – a tough task indeed. Each part of the trip had so many memorable moments – from the scenic boreal and mixed woodlands of Riding Mountain National Park early in the trip, to the aspen parklands, lakes and prairies of southwestern Manitoba that we criss-crossed the rest of the first week. Finally to Churchill which never fails to yield a plethora of memorable vistas, northern wildlife encounters and surprises -- the biggest surprise this year was the unusually late ice-pack on the bay!



Parasitic Jaeger © Michael Kennedy

After dinner, we headed to the airport, caught our flight back to Winnipeg, and most of us said our goodbyes as we waited for our bags at the airport. I think I can speak for all that we'd had a truly memorable trip and a great time. There were many unexpected finds; so many close-up bird and mammal views/photographic opportunities. Thanks to all for a wonderful trip, a great group, and for helping capture some of those memorable moments in the attached photos. Thank you all; may our paths cross again sometime in the future. Ken De Smet Belugas, Bears, & Birds 2024 species list