



Churchill & Southern Manitoba 2022 Trip Report

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Highlights for this trip abounded. Most were memorable moments with birds -- many mentioned the displaying Spruce Grouse, the brilliant Golden-winged Warbler, and who can forget the wave of warblers & flycatchers that greeted us at St Ambroise that first morning, the unbelievably cooperative Virginia Rail and Nelson's Sparrow in St Ambroise marsh, the American Three-toed Woodpecker that made us work but eventually gave us great looks on the Boreal Trail, the Great Gray Owls that we nearly gave up on but showed up when we took one last look. I'm sure there were many more and everyone has their favorites. In fact, some of the mammals we got were almost as exciting -- a young male moose on Hwy 10 in Riding Mountain, lots of Black Bears and a brief look at a cinnamon, two Arctic Foxes along Bird Cove Road, and that king of the rock Bearded Seal at Cape Merry to mention a few. We set a target of 250 bird species for the trip and despite some bad weather days and key road washouts in the south, the Harris' Sparrow in Churchill on our final day put us over that target. We missed some iconic northern mammals like Arctic hare and caribou and were too early for Belugas or Polar Bear, but we still came up with a really impressive 28 mammal species for the trip. No doubt we were lucky with a few species, but we worked hard for many of the highlight species and we had some amazing eyes and ears, plus a super keen group working for us on this trip. Each part of the trip had so many memorable moments -- from the farmlands, aspen parklands, lakes and prairies of southwestern Manitoba that we criss-crossed the first three days, the scenic boreal and mixed woodlands of Riding Mountain National Park during the latter half of the first week, and finally Churchill which never fails to yield a plethora of memorable northern vistas and wildlife encounters. There were numerous unexpected finds, and so many stunning close-up views and photographic opportunities! Thanks to Roger & Kathy, with help from a few others, these were so well captured in the many ebird lists and photos. We certainly got to see and experience the best of what southern Manitoba & Churchill has to offer for visiting birders and wildlife enthusiasts. **Day 1 - May 29** We met in the lobby of the Hampton hotel the first evening and walked over to the nearby Victoria Inn where we dined at Chicago Joe's, got acquainted and

discussed trip logistics. Some of the participants had arrived earlier that day and of the many species that were mentioned the oddest had to be a Yellow Rail that Barb & Paul saw close up while walking along a ditch a short distance south of the hotel! Roger and Kathy had been to Assiniboine Park that day and also had an impressive list of birds - Cooper's Hawk, Olive-sided, Yellow-bellied & Great-crested Flycatcher, Canada & Blackburnian Warbler, Yellow-throated Vireo and Indigo Bunting to name just a few. Clearly migration had been delayed this spring and was still in full swing in the south. But, we'd have an early start tomorrow and the first 3-4 days would involve a fair bit of driving and minimal time for afternoon rests, so we packed it in early that evening.



Blackburnian Warbler

Day 2 - May 30 Stocked with coffee from the lobby, and a bag breakfast the hotel had made up for us, we left the hotel at 5:45 bound for St Ambrose on Lake Manitoba. On the way, we stopped at a good spot along PR 227 for Red-headed Woodpeckers and got a headstart on a number of birds including Clay-colored & Lark Sparrow, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and several others before the Red-headed finally put in an appearance. Further down the road another Red-headed was photographed on a post, and we made brief stops to look at Wild Turkey and Wilson's Phalarope. At St Ambrose we found some sheltered lakeside tables to eat breakfast and picked up a few new nearby birds including a few Western Grebes, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Sanderling, Forster's Terns, Orchard Oriole, and others. After breakfast, spurred on by reports from Barb and Steve of some interesting warblers they'd found, we took a stroll through a wooded section of beach-ridge between the marsh and the lake and were bombarded with some 50 bird species that included a variety of migrant warblers (Bay-breasted, Chestnut-sided, Canada, Connecticut, Magnolia, Blackpoll, Wilson's, Orange-crowned, Tennessee, etc), and several species of flycatchers (Least, Olive-sided, Yellow-bellied, Eastern Wood-Pewee, and singing Willow & Alder Flycatchers). We also spotted a couple of Franklin's Ground Squirrels for our mammal list. It was tough to pull away from this bonanza. But, the nearby marsh was also alive with birds and song - Yellow-headed & Red-winged Blackbirds, Marsh & Sedge Wrens, some American Bitterns posed for pictures, far-off Great Blue & Black-crowned Night Herons were spotted, as well as a couple Bald Eagles, Turkey Vultures and Northern Harriers. Several Soras were heard and seen, a Virginia Rail strolled out, and finally a Nelson's Sparrow posed for pictures. At a lookout over Lake Manitoba to the cormorant and pelican nesting

island, we added Caspian & Common Terns, and on the way in and out Sharp-tailed Grouse, several Bobolink and Brewers Blackbirds. Our next destination was the PR 227 garbage dump where we identified a nearby Lesser Black-backed Gull among an estimated 2000 Ringed-billed, Herring and Franklin's Gulls. It was getting on to lunch time so we drove around to Delta Marsh hoping to find a sheltered spot from the high winds coming off the lake but there was none. We added a few more Sanderling, a Spotted Sandpiper, Blue-headed Vireo, and a Common Nighthawk roosting in a tree, before carrying on the Portage where we dined in comfort at a Subway. On route to Brandon we stopped at Camp Hughes where we photographed a cute Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel near the parking lot and took a quick drive-through in the pine plantation to check out an old nest before proceeding to Shilo where we hoped to find Eastern & Mountain Bluebirds but settled for some good looks at a couple pairs of Loggerhead Shrikes. We arrived at our hotel at 5:30 and had an hour to freshen up before dining at Montana's. It was still very windy and it had been a long day so we retired for the night. **Day 3 - May 31** The winds & rain had been fierce all night and it was still quite miserable when we went out for a pre-breakfast scout at 6. At the Ag Research Station we picked up some close ups of Swainson's Hawk and Wood Duck. After breakfast at the hotel we walked in a sheltered riparian woodlot on the Dave Barnes property adding Downy Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, Yellow-throated Vireo, Eastern Phoebe, Swainson's Thrush, Nashville Warbler and a Beaver. At some ponds in east Brandon we had Red-necked & Pied-billed Grebe. Driving through the Brandon Hills we got a couple more Olive-sided Flycatchers and a variety of ducks including our first Canvasback, Ring-necked, and Buffleheads. After a pit stop in Wawanesa we carried on to Pelican Lake/Ninette getting more Wild Turkeys en route, plus our first American Wigeon, Ruddy Duck, Hooded Merganser and Black Terns at the lake, as well as several Bald Eagles and at least 500 American White Pelicans. Taking gravel roads to Boissevain we stopped at a pasture with several Richardson's Ground Squirrels and a White-tailed Jackrabbit. Past Ninga we stopped at a lake that had some Ruddy Ducks, Eared Grebe, Willet & a sleeping grebe that looked like a Western but turned out to be a Clark's when it finally lifted its head. On to Boissevain where we dined in comfort at another Subway. After lunch we found Pine Siskins, White-crowned Sparrow, Merlin and a Fox Squirrel in Boissevain and proceeded around the north end of Whitewater Lake being careful which roads we took as this area had experienced quite an overnight soaker. At some roadside ponds we picked up all four of the shorebird "peeps" (Least, Semipalmated, Baird's & White-rumped), some Stilt Sandpipers, a few American Avocets, and our first Marbled Godwits. Near the north end we found a Great Horned Owl nest with one large young, a pair of Gray Partridge, and a fly-by Peregrine Falcon. At an overview of Whitewater, a large flock of Black-bellied Plovers were spotted with a splendid breeding Red Knot among them and a belated Ruddy Turnstone (only discovered when Roger looked at his photos of the flock as they flew by us and discovered the turnstone among them!). Before taking off for Melita we drove around Deloraine looking for Eurasian Collared-Dove (2 eventually observed in flight), but also picking up a few Swainson's & 1 Gray-cheeked Thrush, several Cedar Waxwings, and a couple Brown Thrashers. Making haste for Melita, we got to the Western Star hotel at 6 and made plans for a 7 o'clock dinner at Chicken Chef. After dinner some of the group took a drive through the downtown checking out some of the Chimney Swift chimneys and spotting at least 3 swifts nearby. **Day 4 - June 1** It wasn't super windy when we got up for a continental breakfast in the hotel at 6 but it sure wasn't calm either and the winds would get quite strong by early morning. After breakfast we headed straight to a favorite spot for prairie birds a few miles west of Lyleton, but made stops on the way for a roadside Ring-necked Pheasant, a Raccoon, and a couple of Sharp-tailed Grouse leks.



Ring-necked Pheasant

Driving the grassy trail up to a favored prairie birding spot, we listened for LeConte's Sparrow (one sang briefly but wouldn't come in to play-back) had great looks at a Grasshopper Sparrow on the fence wires, and half a dozen Mule Deer ambled by. Striding out into the native prairie we recorded several more Grasshopper Sparrows and great looks at Chestnut-collared Longspurs, but none of the hoped for Baird's Sparrows or Sprague's Pipits.



Chestnut-collared Longspur

Backtracking to Lyleton, we made use of Joan Murray's outdoor restroom and spotted our first Ruby-

throated Hummingbird and Purple Finch. Next we went to a spot along the Antler Creek that had been a Lazuli Bunting locale years ago. A Belted Kingfisher and couple dozen swallows were checked out and some Northern Rough-winged were spotted. As we were getting ready to go, a migrant Connecticut Warbler sang from the old farm shelter-belt and when we went to find it, a Lazuli Bunting lit on a branch long enough for a few people to see it well. Carrying on to our lunch spot, Coulter Park near the confluence of the Antler Creek and Souris River, we were immediately greeted by a Say's Phoebe (its nest would later be found under an interpretive sign overhang). A variety of other birds were seen there including our first and only Cooper's Hawk, more Rough-wings, a Common Nighthawk, Belted Kingfisher, and more good looks at Blackpoll & Wilson's Warbler. Proceeding north to a riparian woodlot along the Souris, we happened upon another shorebird pond, this one had a good variety of peeps, our first and only Pectoral Sandpiper for the trip, and a pair of Gray Partridge strode into view. At the riparian woodlot we'd get our first looks at Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Great Crested Flycatcher, and as we pulled away Viveka identified a fly-by Black-headed Grosbeak.



Say's Phoebe

Proceeding north to a riparian woodlot along the Souris, we happened upon another shorebird pond, this one had a good variety of peeps, our first and only Pectoral Sandpiper for the trip, and a pair of Gray Partridge strode into view. At the riparian woodlot we'd get our first looks at Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Great Crested Flycatcher, and as we pulled away Viveka identified a fly-by Black-headed Grosbeak.



Chipping Sparrow

Proceeding west to Pierson we had a couple nice male Hooded Mergansers and a Great Blue Heron at a small dugout. North through the Poverty Plains, an Upland Sandpiper posed for pictures on the road beside the vans, and we found a couple of Ferruginous Hawk nests offering good looks at perched and flying adults as well as some downy young.



Upland Sandpiper

Near Broomhill, we scanned a pasture where Burrowing Owls were being released (all were still in their pens but would be released once they had started nesting). A wild Burrowing Owl that had

been seen here, but Ken eventually had to walk a stretch of the pasture to flush it so all could get a far-off look at this Manitoba rarity. After unsuccessfully walking one more pasture where Sprague's usually resided, we headed back to Melita, had an earlier dinner, and drove around town for better looks at Chimney Swifts and our first House Finches. **Day 5 - June 2** Today would be a prairie mop-up day making our way north to Riding Mountain, but the hoped for calmer conditions never materialized as a brisk breeze would only get stronger as the morning wore on. Up for breakfast in the hotel lobby with our bags packed at 6, we headed straight for the same native prairie where we'd looked for the Baird's & Sprague's yesterday. Walking a different stretch of the pasture, we came upon more Chestnut-collared Longspurs (including a nest with tiny young), a lek with 30+ Sharp-tailed Grouse in the middle of the pasture, and finally we stumbled upon a Baird's Sparrow that had not responded to the playback but cooperated for great looks. After stopping at Joan's in Lyleton for a restroom break, we went looking for bluebirds driving a short stretch on the Manitoba-Saskatchewan border.



Baird's Sparrow

Proceeding northeast, we stopped in Pipestone for gas and refreshments and then checked out some large marsh complexes on the south end of Plum Lakes and east of Deleau. At Oak Lake resort we found a nice sheltered spot to have a picnic lunch. Several warblers were found in the nearby trees, a Fox Squirrel scampered nearby and a rare Western Wood-Pewee showed up giving its distinctive Pee-urr call. After lunch we drove a section of the dike between Plum & Oak Lake spotting huge numbers of Black Terns, a handful of Forster's, a couple Common and a Caspian Tern. It was time to make the long haul to Riding Mountain so we hit the highway spotting a Horned Grebe as we drove by a small highway pond (unfortunately the only one we would encounter on the trip). We checked out Proven Lake to see if it might be suitable for Yellow Rail later on but water levels were way up and had flooded all available habitat. Arriving at Mooswa Resort at 6, we made dinner reservations at TR McCoy's for 7 and took the rest of the evening off. **Day 6 - June 3** We would be especially hampered by road closures in Riding Mountain due to an extremely wet spring. PR 19 (a favored birding road) was out, as was the Lake Audy Road leading to the bison compound. So we took advantage of anything along Hwy 10 and areas immediately south of the park. Before we left, Barb had been up early and heard the unmistakable repeated single hoots of a Long-eared Owl near

the resort! Up and off by 6, we heading down Hwy 10 to the extreme north end of the park spotting some quite tame Black Bears eating grasses & dandelions on the way (the first of 5 Black Bears today and a total of 13 we'd see during the next three days!). We'd intended to walk a stretch of the Beach Ridges trail on the north end, but it was too wet so we picked up a few good birds in the parking lot (Philadelphia Vireo, a singing Hermit Thrush, Veery, Ovenbird & Northern Waterthrush) and back-tracked to Grayling Lake for a picnic breakfast adding Broad-winged Hawk, Wood Duck and Common Goldeneye in route. The lakeshore here was alive with warblers (Canada, Mourning, Blackburnian, Wilson's, Blackpoll, etc) and various other birds were seen or heard (Common Loon, Pied-billed Grebe, Boreal Chickadee, Purple Finch, Philadelphia Vireo).



Canada Warbler



Boreal Chickadee

After breakfast, near the Lake Audy turnoff, a Broad-winged Hawk soared low overhead, 2 Greater White-fronted Geese flew over, and a Groundhog was spotted in the ditch. At a rest stop on the north end of Clear Lake, a Least Chipmunk scampered across the road, and 4 far-off swans were believed to be late migrant Tundra Swans. We walked stretches of North Shore Road producing a Brown Creeper, another daytime perched Common Nighthawk, great looks at several of the warblers we'd seen briefly earlier, and a variety of woodpeckers but not the hoped-for Black-backed or Three-toed Woodpecker. For lunch we headed to the Whitehouse Bakery in Wasagaming, usually a very good place to eat but service was unusually slow today. Before retiring for a few hours that afternoon we drove out of the park picking up some Dark-eyed Juncos and a Striped Skunk but little else. We decided to drive north on Hwy 10 to Moon Lake for a picnic dinner; a good choice as we found some Canada Jays and a young male Moose on the way. After dinner we again headed out of the park and east on PR 262 to a spot that had been good for Great Gray Owls in the past. We waited around but had no luck at the first spot, nor at a good lookout near Mrs Robinson's yard. We wondered if we had enough time to drive back and check another potential spot near Onanole, but decided to give the first spot one more look. Success - a large female was perched on a fencepost near the road but it was actively hunting and soon flew off to the treeline. As it neared the trees a second Great Gray was spotted flying towards the trail ahead. Hoping that it might be visible up ahead, we drove further and there it was - a slightly smaller male about 50 m away giving much better photo ops. Driving back, exuberant over our success, we spotted a Great Horned Owl on a utility pole. A small group that were really wanting Yellow Rail went with Ken to a marsh a few miles south, but it was a longshot and never panned out, save for a pack of Coyotes that howled in the distance, and a Porcupine and Red Fox that were along the roadside on the way back. Stepping out of the van at the resort, we were sure a nearby Screech Owl called but it only called once and we weren't positive so we couldn't add it to the list.



Canada Jay

Day 7 -June 4 Some primary target birds for this morning would be the two three-toed woodpeckers, but before breakfast we headed west of Onanole and around the west end of Clear Lake before connecting with Hwy 10 in the park. Along the west shore of Clear Lake some Common Mergansers were seen, Ruffed Grouse were drumming in a couple spots, and the second van spotted a River Otter when they went back to make sure a shoeless & lost-looking native girl was OK! Breakfast at Grayling yesterday had been so good we went back, this time adding a nice close-up flock of Evening Grosbeaks.



Evening Grosbeak

Boreal Trail has always been good, so we headed there next. It did not disappoint with good looks at Osprey, Bald Eagle, Blue-headed Vireo, Mourning & Cape May Warblers, and a drumming woodpecker that resisted coming in to playback eventually was coaxed to fly in and give us good looks (thankfully, it was the one that most of the participants really wanted - American Three-toed).



American Three-toed Woodpecker

Hoping to get a Black-backed, we tried a few spots where bark had been chipped off in three-toed fashion on North Shore, on Hwy 10, and Lake Katherine but to no avail. Settling for better looks at and pics for several species, we made our way to Lake Katherine and found a nice lakeshore picnic spot for lunch. While there we had several flocks of Common Nighthawks fly over; these and others we would spot later would produce an amazing daily total of 140 nighthawks! It was getting on to mid-afternoon, so we headed back for an afternoon rest. Dinner that evening was at the Lakeside Restaurant in Wasagaming, followed a short trip to Onanole where Ian had heard of a potential Northern Saw-whet Owl nest. We met up with the fellow who had them nesting in his backyard and he allowed us to wait with him hoping they would show up or resume calling. But they were too shy to do anything with all of us standing around in his backyard, so after 20 minutes we gave up on the Saw-whets, tried in another spot to call up a Barred Owl and decided to call it an evening. **Day 8 - June 5** Today we needed to take the long way around to the east side of the park so we were packed and headed south on Hwy 10 by shortly after 6. There were lots of nest boxes along Mountain Road to check out on the fly and finally Barb spotted one occupied by Eastern Bluebirds. Further down the road, a confused pair of Ruffed Grouse hung near the roadside in a rather open area. We were quite ready for breakfast and a restroom break by the time we got around to the east park gate. We took group pictures at the gate and had a short walk around. There was an alternate Golden-winged Warbler spot north of the east gate so we checked it out; good idea because it panned out very nicely and there were none to be found later at their primary nesting area on the Aggasiz Ski Hill Road.



Golden-winged Warbler

That was our next destination, but not before stops for some roadside Lark Sparrows and a couple more Wild Turkeys. We had done well on most of the species we usually would get at Aggasiz, save for Indigo Bunting and Eastern Towhee, so we made repeated stops in the oaks trying for these and more Golden-wings. After multiple stops we finally latched onto a stunning male Indigo Bunting and soon after found a singing Eastern Towhee. Our Aggasiz mission complete, we stopped at the top for restrooms and beat it for Neepawa where we dined at yet another Subway.



Indigo Bunting

Hauling it back to the Delta Marsh region, we made a quick stop at Cal's place before proceeding to the PR 227 dump which unfortunately was closed. We detoured north a few miles to a roadside marshland complex in the Portage Community Pasture hoping to possibly pick up a daytime singing Yellow Rail or LeConte's Sparrow, but had to settle for 3-4 Bald Eagles, and better looks at a few waterbirds.

Last order of business was to drop off the cooler and some extra supplies at Ken's place in Stonewall but rather than hold everybody up, we piled all the luggage and participants in one van that headed straight for the Hampton hotel in Winnipeg, while Ken detoured slightly to Stonewall and met the group at the hotel just as everyone was heading out to Chicago Joe's for dinner. After dinner, most stayed back and packed but a couple keeners accompanied Ken to check out an Eastern Screech Owl perch (no luck today) and to search for a relatively new Winnipeg resident - the Northern Cardinal. It took us a couple spots and a fair bit of walking but we finally found the Cardinal along with some more House Finches, several Eastern Cottontail rabbits and a Gray Squirrel. The vans had to be returned to the rental locale across the city, which was accomplished in good time.



Little Gull



Hudsonian Godwit

Day 9 - June 6 The flight to Churchill was a bit later than usual this year (10:15), so we got to sleep in a bit, had a leisurely continental breakfast in the hotel and start shuttling to the airport by a bit before 8. Everything went smooth and we landed in Churchill at around 1. Enquiring at the hotel what the best lunch spot in town was, we discovered that the Seaport was the only restaurant open with limited service (another covid surprise!). Instead, we picked up some supplies and did picnic lunch at Cape Merry. On the way, we stopped for a quick look at the Granary Ponds, but that was as far as the second van made it! Thankfully Rose was still in the rental office & Ian was able to get a smaller but newer suburban vehicle. While we waited for the vehicle exchange, 3 Greater White-fronted Geese flew over, we had first looks at some northern sparrows (White-crowned, American Tree & Fox), a few of the standard northern ducks (Long-tailed & Greater Scaup) and a variety of southern dabblers including a pair of Gadwalls (not common for the north).



Long-tailed Duck



Common Eider

After having lunch & meeting Rudolf Koes and his group we explored the birds at the Cape for a bit. In short order, Common Eider, Black & Surf Scoter, Common & Red-breasted Merganser, Arctic Tern, Red-throated & Pacific Loon, and American Pipit were added to our list. A huge Bearded Seal playing king of the rock with a few Harbor Seals on the Churchill River was quite a surprise.

Heading out Goose Creek Road and all the way out to CR30 we added Tundra Swan, both Yellowlegs, Hudsonian Godwit, Semipalmated Plover, Common Redpoll, a Rusty Blackbird, and a

highlight for all - close looks at several feeding Little Gulls among a flock of Bonaparte's. Ian had tried to make dinner arrangements at the Seaport Hotel earlier but they were short-staffed, so we had to celebrate our first half day at Churchill with pick up orders and some wine at the Polar Inn that evening.



Willow Ptarmigan

Day 10 - June 7 In Churchill, we would settle into an early morning routine of heading out at 6 for a quick look around town or a section of Goose Creek Road and come back around 8 to a well-stocked continental breakfast at the hotel. Most days we'd had some nice company at the breakfast table chatting with organizers and participants doing a cross-Canada British television show "Race Around the World". Today, pre-breakfast we had another look along Goose Creek Road up to the Weir chalking up 40 species including American Black Duck, Bufflehead, Stilt Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, more Little Gulls, brief looks at a Sabine's Gull in flight, and finally a Short-eared Owl. After breakfast, we popped down to the Lower Docks (near the Churchill port) picking up a Ross' Goose, all 3 scoters, far-off looks at more Sabine's Gulls, and a flock of Ruddy Turnstones. Before carrying on up Coast Road and catching a look at Miss Piggy (the downed plane), a stop at the Beach in town yielded a small flock of Snow Buntings, fly-by Parasitic Jaeger and Rough-legged Hawk, and a few seals on the pack ice of the bay believed to be Ringed Seals. Carrying on, Launch Road was good for some nice looks at a siver/cross color-phased Red Fox, our first Whimbrels and a dark morph Rough-leg. Beyond the Northern Studies Centre we started picking up Willow Ptarmigans (at least 8 seen today) Canada Jay, and in the shorebird fen we added a large flock of Lapland Longspurs, American Golden-Plover, Dunlin, more Whimbrels and Hudsonian Godwits, and both Short-billed & Long-billed Dowitcher were identified by call.



Snow Bunting



Dunlin

We stopped for a picnic lunch along a little off-road trail called Cook Street and walked the trail afterwards adding Blackpoll & Orange-crowned Warbler, and a few fly-over Bohemian Waxwings were heard. At the end of Twin Lakes Road by the old burn we walked along a sandy ridge hoping for a Hawk-Owl or something good but it was rather quiet. That evening, after an early dinner at the Seaport, a few of us headed out for another look along Goose Creek Road, adding a Trumpeter Swan

at the Akudlik Marsh, Lincoln's Sparrow at the feeders, and Solitary Sandpiper in the flooded roadside ditches.



Bohemian Waxwing

Day 11 - June 8 Before breakfast this morning, we checked out the Lower Docks where we finally got great looks at a couple Sabine's Gulls, before hitting Goose Creek Road up to the Weir (more looks at Little Gull, Sabine's Gull, and a cooperative Gray-cheeked Thrush). After breakfast, we checked out Dump Road and Landing Lake Road in hopes of finding a Harris' Sparrow - no luck. It was a beautiful day to spend some time at Cape Merry so we had a picnic lunch there followed by a few hours on the rocks watching the comings and goings of ice-flows, seals and huge flocks Long-tailed Duck, Common & Red-breasted Mergansers, Red-throated Loons (with a few Pacific & Common), and several hundred Black Scoters with a few Surf & White-winged. We didn't see anything too special but it was quality time enjoyed by all.



Red-throated Loon

Before dinner, we took another drive down Launch Road up to & beyond the Study Centre (Ramsay Trail). An intriguing looking owl perched on a tree in the distance piqued our interest but we never could get close enough to make it out entirely. We added a couple more Willow Ptarmigan, a flyover Peregrine Falcon, and a couple more Short-eared Owls. After dinner a few folks really wanted a Spruce Grouse so we headed all the way down to the end of Twin Lakes Road and walked the ridge there. And did we hit it right! Up ahead one stood on the roadside, but when we played a short call it marched right up to us stopping occasionally to fluff up and flip its tail feathers out. A nearby spruce tree offered it a perch to fly up and do its display wing flap. It was truly a magical performance. Some nearby Bohemian Waxwings temporarily distracted us before we returned to the show on the road. It was all we could have hoped for and more.



Spruce Grouse

Day 12 - June 9 Our last full day up north; we drove up to Cape Merry pre-breakfast for another look adding a Cackling Goose and at least 4 Parasitic Jaegers among the regular complement of northern birds. After breakfast it was back down Launch Road to Bird Cove where we spotted fairly close up single Ross' and Cackling Geese, more Whimbrels and American Golden Plover, our first Glaucous Gull for the trip, and a highlight for many -- 2 Arctic Foxes still mostly in their white winter plumage. The fen on Twin Lakes Road had its usual complement of shorebirds and a few other landbirds including a pair of Parasitic Jaegers - one that appeared to be on a nest.



Arctic Fox

Our destination was the Spruce Grouse spot from last evening for another walk along the trail there. As we walked the trail this time, 3 Spruce Grouse were seen, along with more Bohemian Waxwings, and our first Pine Grosbeaks.



Spruce Grouse

Getting back to the vehicles, we had lunch there and were entertained by another Pine Grosbeak, an overhead Bald Eagle and a Red-tailed Hawk. It was the afternoon we had slated for most to check out the Eskimo Museum and a few other sights in town but not before just a little more excitement. On the way back, Ian's van blew a fan belt and had to be abandoned along the roadside! But we were all able to pile into one van for the trip back to town. A couple participants wanted to spend some more quality time at Cape Merry. On the way we picked up a couple rarities for the north at the Granary Ponds (a male Ruddy Duck and a Ring-neck Duck), and at the Cape we added a couple more Glaucous Gulls, another Sabine's, a Long-tailed Jaeger (with nice comparisons to several nearby Parasitics), and huge numbers of harbour seals (an estimated 45 for the day!). We had our final formal meal together that evening at the Seaport, and reminisced about favorite species and moments on the trip. **Day 13 - June 10** We'd have one more half day in the north before flying back. We'd dipped on Harris' Sparrow earlier and one local said she had seen one in town a couple days ago so Ken was up a little early anyway and scouted the town. Sure enough, among a flock of House Sparrows on Simpson Avenue was a Harris' so when we met at 6 for our pre-breakfast excursion, it was straight to that area where not one but two Harris' were spotted.



Harris's Sparrow

The Cape offered nothing too special this AM, but a Willow Ptarmigan on some old buildings on the way back offered some cool scenery shots. After breakfast we explored Goose Creek Road checking out a potential owl nestbox (no luck) and getting some great looks at some Boreal Chickadees, redpolls and Canada Jays among other birds at the cabins. A walk along a trail at Kennedy Park also yielded some good photo ops but nothing new. In preparation for our 1:45pm flight back to Winnipeg, we had an early picnic lunch at Cape Merry, went back to the motel to pack our luggage, and were off to the airport. Back in Winnipeg by 4:15, we said our goodbyes while waiting for our luggage and everyone went their separate ways. It had been an exciting 13 days, with lots of great spotters, and an altogether great group. Our final trip totals, 251 bird species and 28 mammals, were definitely amazing. Despite some really bad weather days in the south, several road washouts in Riding Mountain, and a couple vehicle breakdowns in the north, it had been a very successful trip and most could leave Manitoba with so many favorite memories. Hopefully this report, and the photos that Roger and Kathy so generously shared with us, will bring back some of those pleasant memories of our beautiful province and our abundant wildlife. Thank you all; may our paths cross again sometime in the future. Ken De Smet & Ian Thorleifson