



Manitoba Owls 2023 Trip Report (Mar 1 - 5, 2023)

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Guides: Rudolf Koes & Ken De Smet

Day 1 - 1 March 2023

All participants on the tour arrived in time to meet Rudolf and Ken for an introductory meeting at 6:30 p.m. in the lobby of the Hampton Inn in Winnipeg. After briefly getting everyone to introduce themselves, we discussed the itinerary for the coming days, explained viewing and photography procedures and entertained questions. Afterwards we enjoyed a pleasant dinner.

Day 2 - 2 March.

We were up early and after a nice continental breakfast we were on our way. First order of business was to see Gray Partridges in semi-rural part of northwest Winnipeg, which we succeeded in quickly. Also in the area were a few Black-billed Magpies, White-tailed Jackrabbits and an Eastern Cottontail. Next we headed north on Hwy. 8, where we soon spotted an adult male Snowy Owl on a utility pole along the road. It was splendid, almost pure white. We expected to see more, so we continued north, where a Northern Hawk-Owl had established a winter territory. During our search of the area we spotted two Sharp-tailed Grouse, perched in a tree, plus a lone Bohemian Waxwing in a crab-apple tree - the only waxwing we were to see on this tour. After a bit of searching we found a **Northern Hawk Owl**. It perched in the bare top of a tall tree, and as is typical for this species, it showed no concern when we walked closer. We braved the cold - it was -18°C, with a windchill of -28 (0 and 18 below F). The bird was beautifully lit in the morning sun, as it sat with fluffed-out feathers. Ken opined that it could be a female, as it looked rather large.



Northern Hawk Owl © Bob Gerard



Looking at Northern Hawk Owl

When we got back into our vans, we got the chance to warm up on our ride to Oak Hammock Marsh, where we made a pitstop at the Ducks Unlimited Canada headquarters and Interpretive Centre. Nearby we found the first of many Snow Buntings we were to see, but we missed the Short-eared Owls that were seen here recently. Perhaps it was too windy and too late in the day. We now drove to the area southwest of Winnipeg, looking for more Snowy Owls. Here we found another adult male

and some Horned Larks, but overall it was rather quiet, so we headed for the city. At a busy Tim Horton's we enjoyed lunch, after which we continued to the East Kildonan neighbourhood. A stroll in the area produced a female cardinal, a Manitoba rarity, Hairy and Downy Woodpecker, House Finch and a few more suburban species. The hoped-for Eastern Screech-Owl was not at its roosting spot. Near Bird's Hill Provincial Park we checked for another hawk-owl, without success. Via a rather circuitous route we eventually reached Maple Creek Road, where recently a Great Gray Owl had been reported. No luck with that bird either, but we did tally more Snow Buntings, two Bald Eagles and a couple of Coyotes. After a long day we all enjoyed a hearty meal at our "home" for the next two nights.

Day 3 - 3 March.

On last year's tour we had had success on a before-breakfast outing, so we again opted for this, departing the hotel at 7. We drove across the Powerview Dam, where we explored Broadlands Road and side roads. Here we encountered several Sharp-tailed Grouse, but they did not remain long enough for everyone to get a good look. Some folks in the second van saw a Red Fox. Via an ice-road we crossed the Winnipeg River - a new experience for most. No worries, the ice was at least half a metre (two feet) thick. Across the river in the small Metis town of St. Georges we found a large number of Pine Grosbeaks, plus a few Evening Grosbeaks and Common Redpolls. Lots of cameras clicked. Then it was back to the hotel for a hearty, well-deserved breakfast. The meal took a bit longer than hoped-for, but it was worth the wait. Waiting for our packed lunches to be readied cut even more into our time, but eventually we got on our way. Our next target was a home with several productive feeders at Henry Bellin Road east of Lac du Bonnet. It did not disappoint: numbers of Evening and **Pine Grosbeaks**, Common Redpolls and even a few Hoaries (these had been all-but-absent this winter), lots of Blue Jays and single Hairy and Downy woodpeckers. One of the male **Evening Grosbeaks** was in stunning dark plumage.



Pine Grosbeak © Shawna Rousseau



Evening Grosbeaks © Bob Gerard

In Lac du Bonnet we made an other pitstop, followed by a visit to River Hills, where we ate our packed lunches. The weather was pleasant and we could comfortably stand outside while eating. Next we drove east and found more sharptails, but little else. Then we gave Maple Creek Road another try. A cattle feedlot gave great views of a large flock of **Snow Buntings**.



Snow Buntings

We were back at the hotel at 5 and had dinner at 5:45. Afterwards it was time for some night owling - it was not too cold and the wind was light. After a couple of quiet stops Chuck and Rudolf thought

they heard a Boreal Owl call once, but there was no repeat, so we were not sure. In the distance we could hear a Barred Owl call and when we stopped again we were very near it. A few in the group got a brief glimpse, but it seemed to retreat immediately into the woods. At several later stops we could still hear it call. No more owls that evening.

Day 4 - 4 March

Breakfast was at 7 and departure at 8:30. The first order of business was a return visit to Maple Creek Road. Again no luck with Great Gray Owl - it was one of those rare years when they had decided not to appear or stick around. Along PR. 317 we finally had good scope views of Sharp-tailed Grouse. Next we headed for Elma, where we walked around for a bit, picking up two Red-breasted Nuthatches and a singing Purple Finch. Just outside of town Shawna spotted a perched **Merlin**. It belonged to the Prairie or Richardson's race, the pale variety that breeds in the region.



Prairie or Richardson's Merlin © Shawna Rousseau

Then followed an outdoor bagged lunch along Lewis Road, where we saw a distant Spruce Grouse. It had walked up on a snowbank and the flown into the trees. Try as we might, we could not find it again. During a gas stop at Anola we saw and heard one of three Pileated Woodpeckers of the day. In Winnipeg we tried again for **Eastern Screech-Owl** and this time we were lucky. It was perched under a leafy squirrel nest, where it had been present off-and-on for about a month. We then drove to Bird's Hill P.P., but there was no sign of the Northern Hawk-Owl. At Lockport we found a Canada Goose and a Mallard, which had wintered there.



Eastern Screech Owl © Bob Gerard

Continuing to Oak Hammock Marsh, a **Red Fox** was spotted, and this time all got a nice look at the animal. Oak Hammock was quiet bird-wise, but two Coyotes were seen. It was nearing dusk as we headed into the city, where after checking into the hotel, we once again visited Chicago Joe's for our last dinner together.



Red Fox © Bob Gerard

Notwithstanding missing Great Gray Owl, this was a successful tour. Decent weather, no mishaps, fine company, some good birds and mammals and lots of great photo-ops. Ken and Rudolf thank you

for your generosity and hope you enjoyed yourselves and may we see you again some time in the future, perhaps on an other Eagle-Eye Tours venture. Rudolf Koes and Ken De Smet



Manitoba Owls Tour group 2023