Eagle-Eye Tours



Manitoba Owls Tour Trip Report (Feb 28-Mar 4, 2025)

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We had some really nice weather and a lot of great sightings and photo opportunities on this tour. We had particularly good fortune with most of the owls including some amazing close ups for Snowy, Great Gray and Great Horned Owls, nice looks at a Barred that came in quietly to playback after dark, a heard only Northern Saw-whet Owl, and a couple participants that hung around on the final afternoon got to see an Eastern Screech Owl that was a rarity in Fraser's Grove Park! The 42 species of birds plus 9 mammals encountered were both among the highest totals for this tour in recent years.

Day 1 – Feb 28

On the first day of our tour, participants gathered in the lobby of our hotel for introductions and greetings, and we walked to the nearby Oak & Grain restaurant for dinner. Lively discussions continued, and we outlined plans and itinerary for the coming days. After dinner, we had a special presentation by Jim Duncan and his Great Gray Owl education ambassador "Oska." We all got close-up views of this stunning bird that would occasionally "hoot" her approval and fly in for a closer look at the slides and videos during Jim's talk. It was a fascinating presentation that spanned 39 years of Jim and his wife Patsy's dedication to owl research and conservation activities.

Day 2 – March 1

After a hearty continental breakfast at the hotel, we checked out a feeder in the city where we had our first looks at House Finch and 3 Gray Partridges. Next, we headed to some fairly open residential areas close to the north perimeter, locating more Gray Partridges, our first Black-billed Magpies, a couple Eastern Cottontails, and two White-tailed Jack Rabbits. Swinging around the west perimeter, we stopped at Oak Bluff for a brief pit stop before heading south of the city into Snowy Owl country. Heading out Hwy 330, we spotted a couple coyotes, and had brief looks at a Rough-

legged Hawk. Past Osbourne we spotted two Snowy Owls but both were far off, so we took brief scope looks and carried on hoping to get onto a closer one. And a closer look we definitely got – a gorgeous white male on a road sign that was amazingly tolerant. We were able to get our fill of close ups and photos. We also spotted quite a few Horned Larks as some were already setting up territories in black patches in the mostly snow-covered agricultural fields, and as we neared Wpg we spotted a second Rough-legged Hawk perched on a utility pole.



Gray Partridge © Mitch Doucet



White-tailed Jackrabbit © Mitch Doucet



Snowy Owl © Mitch Doucet



Horned Lark © Mitch Doucet

Back in Winnipeg, we stopped for lunch before heading to Fraser's Grove Park in the north end. A shorty walk near some good feeders yielded many of the common feeder birds (Pine Siskin, Redpoll, House Finch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Black-capped Chickadee, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers).

The hoped for Screech Owl was not sitting at its favorite perch so we carried on to Bunn's Creek park to have superb looks at and photos of a Great Horned Owl nest -- the female fluffed up protecting a couple downy young from the rather brisk temperatures that day and the male perched nearby.



Great Horned Owl © Mitch Doucet

The rest of the afternoon was spent checking out some open water on the Red River by Lockport (nothing on it this time, but we were fascinated at the number of fishing shacks, and vehicles on the ice for miles below the locks). At some feeders near Oak Hammock we spotted our first Purple Finches, but the normally reliable Snow Buntings at another feeder were not around that afternoon. Our main goal that afternoon was to locate a Great Gray Owl northwest of Balmoral. They were not at some areas where two had been seen a few days earlier, but eventually we would locate a couple – one on a fencepost about 100 yards off-road and another in a patch of aspen forest close to the road. A surprise Porcupine was also spotted, sitting high up in an aspen no doubt having a late afternoon snack on some tree bark. The sun was getting low and we could find no more Great Grays so made our way back to Wpg spotting many more White-tailed deer (135 for the day!). It had been a very productive opening day; we celebrated over dinner at the Oak and Grain.



Great Gray © Mitch Doucet

Day 3 – March 2

First order of business after breakfast today was checking out Kildonan Park where a pair of rather rare (for Manitoba) Red-bellied Woodpeckers might be found. Not only did we find both male and female Red-bellied, we located several Downies, a couple Hairy Woodpecker, heard a Northern Flicker (a rare overwintering species this far north), and got close-up looks at two Pileated Woodpeckers. A commotion of Blue Jays and chickadees led us to inspect a dense cedar clump where a Cooper's Hawk was found (our third write-in for the day!). Next destination was Bird's Hill Park where a Red Fox was observed crossing the road, and a walk into an area with some feeders yielded many trusting Black-capped Chickadees that checked us out hoping we'd brought some seeds to share with them and a Red-breasted Nuthatch that was brave enough to land on Josh's outstretched hand. On the way to our lunch spot in Beausejour, we spotted some Snow Buntings, and later a large flock of Bohemian Waxwings in a yard -- the owner graciously allowed us to come into the yard for better looks while we had a nice visit with her and her two dogs.



Red-bellied Woodpecker © Mitch Doucet

After lunch, we headed straight to a super feeder setup east of Lac du Bonnet where hoards of Redpolls, Pine Siskins, Pine Grosbeaks, Blue Jays, and a few Purple Finches ate to their heart's content at several feeders and seeds that littered the ground. A Pileated Woodpecker flew in providing great photo ops as it munched on some suet, and some participants got brief looks at a couple Evening Grosbeaks and a Canada Jay. Taking back roads to Pinawa, Seven Sisters, and River Hills, some Sharp-tailed Grouse, a Ruffed Grouse, more Horned Larks, and a Red Fox were spotted. We also checked many areas that have been good for Northern Hawk Owls in previous years and a few where one had been seen earlier this winter, but sightings of this normally reliable winter owl had been few and we would find none. We would however spot another Great Gray Owl along Hwy 11 while heading to Powerview where we would check in at the Papertown Inn and have a short break before enjoying an earlier dinner. It was warmer than normal when we headed out to do a couple hours of after dark owling along Maskwa Road that evening. At our second stop we called in and got hazy flashlight looks at a Barred Owl that came in quietly and landed in a tree directly over our heads. At our last stop, a far-off Northern Saw-whet Owl was heard by a few participants, but it would not come in any closer. Those two owls would both be write-ins to our list (a 5 write-in day!)



Pileated Woodpecker © Mitch Doucet



Sharp-tailed Grouse © Mitch Doucet



Pine Grosbeak © Mitch Doucet



Redpoll © Mitch Doucet

Day 4 – March 3

Today would be our final birding day, so we had some coffee, fruit and muffins in the lobby, and did a little pre-breakfast birding along Hwy 304 north of town spotting another Ruffed Grouse and getting better looks at some Canada Jays. After an 8:30 breakfast at the motel, we walked a stretch

of Maskwa Road where Boreal Chickadees are occasionally found, and eventually got onto several. We also had some fly-over and brief perched looks at White-winged Crossbills, had better looks at a pair of Canada Jays, and lastly spotted a small flock of Evening Grosbeaks. Below the dam at Powerview, we spotted a River Otter frolicking on the ice, and we got close-up photos of a Bald Eagle that likes to hang out in a tree near a patch of open water there. Further downstream, we found a female Common Goldeneye in another patch of open water. We took Maple Creek Road to Lac du Bonnet, normally one of the best stretches of road for winter owls but unusually quiet this year. But luck was on our side today, as we encountered a Great Gray Owl perched on a utility pole and were eventually able to approach close enough for amazing photos – we even took one of the group with the owl clearly visible in the background.



Bald Eagle © Mitch Doucet



Group photo with Great Gray Owl in background © Mitch Doucet



Great Gray Owl © Mitch Doucet

We stopped to eat our bag lunches and had another look at good feeders near Lac du Bonnet, before proceeding on backroads to Pinawa, Seven Sisters, River Hills and Elma where we hoped to find Hawk Owls or some of the more difficult winter birds we had still not found. But the warmer than normal temperatures had made the gravel roads in some of the best areas extremely slushy, so we highwayed it back to Wpg, but not before spotting an amazing concentration of at least 10 adult Bald

Eagles along old 15 near Elma. Stopping by some open water on the Red River along Winnipeg's south perimeter, we added a large flock of 100 Mallards and 20 Canada Geese. Our last order of the day was to check out every spruce and cedar in and near the English Gardens at the Assiniboine Zoo hoping to find a Boreal Owl that had been seen there on a couple occasions in recent weeks. Unfortunately, it was not there today, so we headed back to the Hampton, and had an extended break before getting together for our final meal.



Our group © Mitch Doucet

It had been a very successful and enjoyable Manitoba Owls tour. Very good looks at 4 owl species, a 5th owl species heard, and a 6th seen by a couple participants that hung around until afternoon on Day 5 of the tour. Unfortunately, the normally reliable Northern Hawk Owls were extremely scarce and there were no locations where they were hanging out on winter territories this year. Nevertheless, the 42 bird and 9 mammal species we'd observed were well above average for this tour, and we'd had many superb looks at and photos for most of the owls plus a host of other northern winter birds. A bit weary but very satisfied with what we'd found and experienced, we shared highlights of the tour, swapped stories, laughs and experiences, and said our goodbyes after enjoying our a final meal together. Josh, Mitch and I would like to thank everyone for your patience and enthusiasm, your stories and good humour, and we wish you all the best in future birding adventures. Here's hoping our paths may cross again, perhaps even a return to Manitoba or other location on a future Eagle-Eyes tour. Manitoba Owls Tour eBird list (Feb 28 - Mar 4, 2025)