



Manitoba Owls Tour Trip Report (Feb 24-28, 2025)

[Link: Manitoba Owls Tour Trip Report \(Feb 24-28, 2025\)](#)

The polar winter weather from the week before turned quite mild during this tour and we had really good luck with most of the owls (5 in total) and 42 species of birds plus 7 mammals - both among the highest totals for this tour in recent years.

Day 1 - Feb 24

On the first day of our tour, participants gathered in the lobby of our hotel for introductions and greetings, and we carried on to a local restaurant for dinner. Lively discussions continued, and we outlined what our plans and itinerary were 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 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 - Feb 25

After a hearty continental breakfast, we headed to some fairly open residential areas on the north end of the city proper, locating a few Gray Partridge, a couple Eastern Cottontails, and a White-tailed Jack Rabbit that was crouched down so low that scope looks were required to confirm what it was. Swinging around the west perimeter, we detoured to Beaudry Park to look for some Great Grays that had been reported there (no luck) and took some gravel roads to Oak Bluff where we made a brief pit stop before heading south of the city into Snowy Owl country. From Brunkild we headed east and south picking up some Horned Larks and brief looks at a Snow Bunting flock, but the owls that had been seen here a few days earlier were nowhere to be found. Finally one was spotted not too far off Hwy 330 south of Osborne; it cooperated giving us great looks and photo ops from fairly close (at least close for a Snowy Owl which tend to be one of the more jumpy owls).



Snowy Owl © Mitch Doucet



Gray Partridge © Mitch Doucet

Back in Winnipeg, we stopped for lunch in St Norbert before heading to Fraser's Grove Park in the north end spotting a couple Black-billed Magpies as we drove through the city. We had a quick look from the road at a perch where the Eastern Screech Owl sometimes hangs out but weren't expecting too much as it has rarely been seen there this winter. But luck was on our side, as there it was! We approached to a safe distance for nice looks and we met Rudolf Koes (the original guide for this tour

who lives in the area) who assisted us taking a group photo with the owl visible way off in the background. Swinging around to a nearby area with some feeders, we took a little walk adding Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Downy Woodpecker, Redpoll, Pine Siskin, and House Finch to our list. But a highlight was when a juvenile Cooper's Hawk (a surprise write-in for our list) flew over. Before leaving the city, we checked out a Great Horned Owl nest in Bunn's Creek Park where we would get terrific looks at and a multitude of photos for the female with at least two fluffy young in the nest, and the male perched nearby.



Eastern Screech-Owl © Mitch Doucet



Great Horned Owl chick © Dan Aranha

The rest of the afternoon was spent checking out some open water on the Red River by Lockport (nothing on it this time but interesting looks at over a hundred fishing shacks and many vehicles on the ice below the locks). Some feeders were checked near Oak Hammock yielding 3 straggler Common Grackles, and 6 Sharp-tailed Grouse in a tree quite far off at Oak Hammock Marsh. Heading northwest to Balmoral, a Merlin was spotted in town before checking out a report of a Great Gray earlier that day a few miles west of town. As we approached the site, there it was perched on a fence post close to the road! Proceeding past it for better light conditions, we enjoyed superb looks and great photo ops. The sun was getting low so we started to make our way back to Wpg, but not before spotting another Great Gray, and unsuccessfully checking out another recent report. It had been a terrific 4 owl day, with superb looks at all four, and many participants had several other lifers. We celebrated over dinner at the Chop Steakhouse that evening.



Sharp-tailed Grouse © Mitch Doucet



Great Gray Owl © Mitch Doucet

Day 3 - Feb 26

First order of business after breakfast today was checking out Kildonan Park where the rather uncommon (for Manitoba) Red-bellied Woodpecker is occasionally found. Not only did we find a Red-bellied, we located several Downies, a couple Hairy Woodpecker, heard a Pileated, and some had brief looks at a Northern Flicker (our second write-in for the day and our 5th woodpecker for the park!). Other good birds there was a fly-by Merlin, 3 Purple Finches, and a couple White-winged Crossbills that flew over calling. Next destination was Bird's Hill Park where a stop by some crab apple trees yielded our first Red-breasted Nuthatch and great looks at a single Bohemian Waxwing. We made another stop in the park walking into an area with a few feeders where many Redpolls, trusting Black-capped Chickadees, and a more Red-breasted Nuthatches were added. On the way to our lunch spot, we made a restroom stop at Beausejour and had a flock of White-winged Crossbills fly over, and later searched for and eventually found a flock of about 40 Bohemian Waxwings.



Red-bellied Woodpecker © Kelly McMillian



Pileated Woodpecker © Mitch Doucet



Bohemian Waxwing © Mitch Doucet

We had lunch in Lac du Bonnet, before carrying on to a nearby feeder setup where hoards of Redpolls, Pine Siskins, Pine Grosbeaks, and a few Purple Finch and Blue Jays ate to their heart's content at several feeders and on the ground a few feet from us. We also heard and briefly spotted small numbers of Evening Grosbeaks and a couple Canada Jays.



Canada Jay © Mitch Doucet



Redpolls © Mitch Doucet



Evening Grosbeaks © Mitch Doucet



Pine Grosbeak female © Mitch Doucet



Pine Grosbeak male © Mitch Doucet

On the way to our lodging for today (the Papertown Inn in Powerview), we checked out Maple Creek Road, a favorite among local birders most years but this year not so popular. We did get much better looks at Snow Buntings, Sharp-tailed Grouse and Black-billed Magpie, and spotted another Great Gray Owl. Carrying on, we checked out a couple open water patches on the Winnipeg River where 3 Common Goldeneye, a close up Bald Eagle, and a female Hooded Merganser (another write-in) were

spotted. The weather was getting blustery with increasing winds and occasional snow flurries, so we checked in to the hotel a little earlier than normal, had an early dinner, and went out for a couple hours after dark to do a little night owling along Maskwa Road in the Broadlands. Although calling owls were limited that evening, a highlight for some that evening was hearing a few Coyotes howling, an unidentified owl briefly squeaked back to playback at one stop, and at our last stop a far-off Barred Owl was heard.

Day 4 - Feb 27

Today would be our final birding day, so we had some fruit and muffins in the lobby, and did a little pre-breakfast birding along Hwy 304 north of town where we had another close up Great Gray Owl and a few more Canada Jays. After an 8:30 breakfast at the motel, we checked out Broadlands where two more Great Gray Owls and a few more Sharp-tailed Grouse were observed. We also walked a stretch of Maskwa Road - good for some real close looks at a feeding flock of White-winged Crossbills and finally some cooperative Boreal Chickadees. Backtracking to Powerview and south to Lac du Bonnet, we added our 4th Great Gray Owl for the day! and stopped to eat our bag lunches at the Lac du Bonnet feeders where we would get much better Evening Grosbeaks and a couple Pileated Woodpeckers.



White-winged Crossbills © Mitch Doucet



Boreal Chickadee © Mitch Doucet

It had been an unusually bad winter for Northern Hawk Owls with only a handful of sightings, but we checked out all the areas where they had been seen this year and in previous years to no avail that afternoon. Along the way, we were able to get some photos of 3 Pileated Woodpeckers and a Red Fox near River Hills. Along Spruce Siding Road we had brief looks at a Northern Shrike (unfortunately only seen by one van). We beat it back to Winnipeg and veered around to the Assiniboine Zoo hoping to find a Boreal Owl which had been seen there occasionally, including one the previous day, but we were unsuccessful. It was past dusk when we got back to the hotel, but we had an extended break before getting together for our final meal at the nearby Oak and Grain restaurant. It had been a very successful and enjoyable Manitoba Owls tour. Superb looks at 4 owl species, with a 5th owl species heard. 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 7 mammal species we'd observed were above average for this tour, and we'd had many great looks and photos for most of the owls plus a host of other northern winter birds. A bit weary but very satisfied with what we had seen, we shared highlights of the tour and 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 \(Feb 24 - 28, 2025\)](#)