Eagle-Eye Tours



Saskatchewan Whooping Crane Tour with Canadian Geographic (Oct 6 - 12, 2026)

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Day 1: October 6

We met with the group and went over the plan for the trip; we quickly got acquainted over dinner at a local restaurant.

Day 2: October 7

After a quick breakfast, we made our way to the Whooping Crane staging area. We stopped briefly along the way at the North Saskatchewan River, which was quiet aside from a handful of Greater Yellowlegs and a Belted Kingfisher that was hunting near the Petrofka Bridge. We continued onwards to Marcelin and the cranes, but detoured slightly when we found a large, accessible flock of geese. While most of the birds were Snow Geese – possibly over 100,000 when including the constant flocks passing over – there were also a respectable number of Ross's Geese and Greater White-fronted Geese.



Greater White-fronted Geese © Josh Dewitt



Snow Geese © Josh Dewitt

Once satisfied, we left this group and continued down a nearby grid road, towards where we had spotted some cranes fly in. We were happy to find not just one trio, but two! Each family group had a pair of adults and their colt. These birds were feeding in fields next to a large pond, which was full of Tundra Swans and other waterfowl. We made our way towards Leask, and lunchtime. Along the way we found a large group of Whooping Cranes feeding in a grain field, with a strange dark-coloured

lump walking around in front of them. A porcupine was feeding with the cranes! Our luck continued when on our way towards Marcelin we found a family of cranes foraging near the road!



Whooping Cranes © Josh Dewitt

After an enjoyable lunch, with a great presentation from Carol Patterson, our Can Geo Ambassador, we set off to get some more birds. Leask Lake proved to be quiet, so we chose to look at some nearby ponds. Throughout the afternoon, we got some good views of the expected waterfowl seen throughout the prairie potholes during migration. We started making our way back towards Saskatoon, spotting a few cranes on our drive towards Blaine Lake.

Day 3: October 8

With a desire for more cranes, our group set off after breakfast south of Saskatoon. We were rewarded with some large groups of Sandhill Cranes, the largest of which was roughly 700! We watched as the cranes danced and fed in a grain field. Curiously, one crane appeared to have a bit of white on its body, a crane with a rare genetic mutation, leucism!



Sandhill Cranes © Katelyn Luff



Our group watching the cranes © Katelyn Luff

After this interesting sighting, we drove over to Pike Lake to find some of the more localized waterfowl. Straight away we were greeted by some Ring-necked Ducks. Nearby we checked another pond, and here we were able to find a beautiful pair of Blue-winged Teal, as well as an equally fantastic pair of Wood Ducks. Satisfied, we made our way over to Blackstrap Reservoir.



Wood Duck © Katelyn Luff

Driving into our lunch spot at Blackstrap Provincial Park, we were surprised to find a pair of Surf Scoters hanging out close to the road. It was a wonderful sighting, and we followed it up with a nice picnic lunch.



Surf Scoters © Josh Dewitt

Afterwards we went over to the far side of the lake, where we were happy to find a good collection of water birds. Among them were a fair number of Double-crested Cormorants, a lone American White Pelican, and a healthy assortment of ducks. A large raft of them were floating in the open water, and

within this group we picked out Lesser and Greater Scaup, Canvasback, Bufflehead and Redhead. One Redhead stood out, because it actually had a white head! This was our second leucistic bird of the day!



American White Pelican and Double-crested Cormorants © Carol Patterson

We made one last stop before making our way back to Saskatoon. The Blucher Salt Sloughs proved to be an excellent place to have a comparison between Black-bellied and American Golden-Plover. Both fed on the mudflats, and just around the corner we had our last goodie for the day, a pair of Sabine's Gulls, feeding in the water. These gulls typically migrate along the coasts, making them a rare sight in landlocked Saskatchewan. We decided to end on this high note, and headed back to Saskatoon.



Sabine's Gulls © Josh Dewitt

Day 4: October 9

Today, we traded the prairie potholes for the boreal transition. After breakfast we loaded up and made the drive out to Prince Albert National Park, but not before checking out a lead on a rare bird. We were tipped off to a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper sighting, in the same area as the Whooping Cranes! A rarity, with a second opportunity to see Whooping Cranes, all en route to the park? It was a no-brainer. We stopped at Ashe Lake to see who was in the neighbourhood. Small flocks of yellowlegs, as well as several Baird's Sandpipers were present around the lakeshore, as well as a small group of Pectoral Sandpipers. On closer inspection, one of the Pectoral Sandpipers was actually our target: a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper! These birds are largely a Eurasian species, with a few breeding in Alaska. This was a first record for Saskatchewan, and a lifer for everyone! As we continued on, a group of Whooping Cranes flew into a nearby field, then we spotted another group of nine adults, and finally two parents and a colt. Feeling accomplished with our birding, we headed onwards to Prince Albert National Park.



Sharp-tailed Sandpiper © Josh Dewitt

This park is an excellent place to get boreal species. While it was a moody day, the cloudy weather made the changing leaves glow, and we wound our way along the Scenic Drive. Along our route, we had a few good encounters with Ruffed Grouse, as well as a surprise Striped Skunk! Once we reached the Waskesiu townsite, we were welcomed by their resident herd of elk, who were cozied up near the beach.



Striped Skunk © Josh Dewitt



Bull Elk © Katelyn Luff

Day 5: October 10

Starting after breakfast, we took a little drive over to the Red Deer Trail. We were excited to see that

the nearby field had been filled up with elk; we counted roughly 50! The females had come down to join the few males in the area. The weather was less than ideal, and bird activity on the trail proved to be sparse – aside from a group of Boreal Chickadees – so we followed our chilly walk up with a stop at the Visitor Centre. Just as we were leaving, we found a small group of Evening Grosbeaks feeding on maple keys next to the Visitor Centre. The grosbeaks were also joined by a couple of White-winged Crossbills.



Evening Grosbeak © Katelyn Luff

With the rain increasing, we decided this would be more of a “car birding” day. We drove down the Narrows Road, stopping regularly at open sections of the lake where gulls were actively feeding and relaxing on the shoreline. Most of these gulls were Ring-billed, with a handful of Bonaparte’s Gulls mixed in. We had additional sightings of Pileated Woodpeckers and Rusty Blackbird, but the real surprise was when we came around the corner and saw a mammal running along the road. It was a River Otter! With a morning full of sightings, we warmed up back at the inn’s restaurant, before heading out for the afternoon. This time we went north along Kingsmere Road. Stopping at Birch Bay, we added Ring-necked Duck and Red-necked Grebe to the list, and feeding in the parking lot was a lone White-crowned Sparrow, seemingly undisturbed by our presence. Nearby we had a very close encounter with a one-eyed Red Fox, a famous resident of the park! Rain had turned to snow, making road conditions along the unpaved section questionable, so we turned around and made our way back to the inn. Before we arrived, we took another look at the elk who were right at home in the Waskesiu townsite.



White-crowned Sparrow © Josh Dewitt



Red Fox © Katelyn Luff

Day 6: October 11

The following morning, we saw that the precipitation had stopped, leaving a dusting of snow. We

took a walk before breakfast along the Red Deer Trail once more, finding Fox Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos. On our drive back to the hotel for breakfast we were also happy to spot a Red-necked Grebe in the bay, with a pair of juvenile Common Loons nearby. Following breakfast, we loaded up our belongings and drove to Boundary Bog. This trail is an excellent spot to find some of the best birds the boreal has to offer, and it didn't disappoint. In the lake we were able to spot a group of Lesser Scaup, along with a single Ring-necked Duck. On our return we were surprised by a male Spruce Grouse feeding on the path. Undisturbed by our presence, we attempted to walk past it, but the grouse kept walking along the path in front of us! Then just before getting back to our vans we had another two boreal birds: first a lovely female American Three-toed Woodpecker, and a couple of Canada Jays.



Spruce Grouse © Katelyn Luff



American Three-toed Woodpecker © Katelyn Luff

Our drive back to Saskatoon was also very birdy, with a brief stop at Great Blue Heron Provincial Park yielding a small group of Snow Buntings. A lunch stop at a restaurant at Christopher Lake was also good for seeing more Blue Jays and Evening Grosbeaks, and a single Pine Grosbeak welcomed us to lunch! As we headed back into Saskatoon, we decided we weren't quite done for the day, and made one final stop at Heritage Park before dinner. While it was fairly short on the species list, we did add both Red- and White-breasted Nuthatches, which had previously eluded us. We had a flurry of activity including nuthatches, Black-capped Chickadees, Dark-eyed Juncos, and a Downy Woodpecker all visiting the park feeders for the dinner rush. At this point, we were also thinking about dinner, so we headed back to the hotel. With a wonderful trip behind us, we had our final dinner at a local restaurant, complete with pumpkin pie!

Day 7: October 12

After a fantastic trip, full of great memories and great birds, everyone headed home.



Our group © Carol Patterson