

Churchill & Southern Manitoba Itinerary

[Link: Churchill & Southern Manitoba](#)

Tour Overview

Manitoba is rapidly establishing a reputation as one of the premier locations on the continent for viewing and photographing iconic northern birds and mammals. This tour will take you to many of Manitoba's premier wildlife-viewing sites and to an incredible diversity of habitats including the rich prairies, wetlands, aspen parklands and mixed forests of southern Manitoba and finally to Churchill, the premier gateway to the north, where one can revel in taiga, tundra and other arctic environs.

Our Churchill and Southern Manitoba birding tour occurs when breeding will be well underway, with nesting Willow Ptarmigan, Hudsonian Godwit, American Golden-Plover, Stilt Sandpiper and many others on the tundra and in the boreal forest. Our tour also coincides with the migration of those species which breed in the High Arctic, such as Long-tailed Jaeger and Sabine's Gull.

Coupled with the spectacular birding will be rewarding mammal viewing with possibilities including elk, moose and black bear in Riding Mountain. As well, we may see caribou, beluga and with luck even fox, lynx or even polar bear in Churchill. This is sure to be a very diverse and rewarding tour!

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Winnipeg



Our Churchill and Southern Manitoba birding tour begins with arrival in Winnipeg and check-in at our hotel. We meet for dinner to discuss the adventure ahead and perhaps go birding for a couple of hours before retiring. Night in Winnipeg.

Day 2: St. Ambroise/Lake Manitoba to Riding Mountain National Park



Early in the morning we head west from Winnipeg, making a couple stops on route to St. Ambroise Provincial Park for Red-headed Woodpecker and other specialties. Lake Ambroise Park and associated marsh on the south shore of Lake Manitoba is usually teeming with birds including Western & possibly Clark's Grebes, a large offshore pelican and cormorant colony, American Bittern, Sora & Virginia rails, Marbled Godwit, Upland Sandpiper, Wilson's Phalarope, Willet, Common, Forster's & Caspian Tern, Franklin's Gull, Marsh & Sedge Wrens, Yellow-headed & Brewers Blackbird, Bobolink, Baltimore & Orchard Oriole, as well as LeConte's & Nelson's Sparrows. Next, we'll check out the PR 227 dump looking through hundreds of gulls trying to locate some California, Lesser Black-backed & other unusual gulls that may be found here. A stop at a residence along the Portage Creek is often good for species like Hooded Merganser, Wood Duck, California Gull, Black-billed Cuckoo, Yellow-throated Vireo, Great Crested Flycatcher, and maybe even a nesting Northern Saw-whet Owl or Cooper's Hawk. Given time we may have a quick look for shorebirds at Delta Marsh, or we may proceed to Neepawa for lunch. From Neepawa we head north to Riding Mountain National Park. We'll check out a couple spots on the east escarpment for specialties like Golden-winged Warbler, Indigo Bunting, Eastern Towhee, Scarlet Tanager and others before proceeding to our accommodations at Wasagaming, hopefully have time for a short rest before dinner. In the evening, we will probably do an optional visit to the Lake Audy bison enclosure where we'll get to see a few free-ranging wild Plain's Bison, maybe some Elk roaming in their native semi-open habitat. Night in Riding Mountain National Park.

Days 3 - 4: Riding Mountain National Park



This superb National Park rises above the surrounding parklands and farmlands to an elevation of 450 meters. The boreal and mixed forests here are rich and varied, with over 260 species of birds recorded for the Park. It has been described as one of the premier birding hotspots in all of Canada, but the park and surroundings are also superlative for mammal viewing and photography. Warblers abound as more than 20 species can be found here, including a rich array of eastern (Blackburnian, Chestnut-sided, Black-throated Green, Canada, Magnolia, Golden-winged) and northern warblers (Orange-crowned, Tennessee, Connecticut, Mourning, Cape May, Bay-breasted, Northern Waterthrush). The park also supports an array of boreal specialties including Spruce Grouse, Great Gray Owl, Canada Jay, Boreal Chickadee, as well as Black-backed, Three-toed & Pileated Woodpeckers. Other northern residents that we'll search for include Ruffed & Spruce Grouse, Osprey, Northern Goshawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Olive-sided & Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Philadelphia & Blue-headed Vireo, Winter Wren, Brown Creeper, Veery, Hermit & Swainson's Thrush, Purple Finch, White-winged Crossbill and Golden-crowned Kinglet. During daytime excursions, we'll walk a couple of the better short trails and be ever vigilant for Black Bear, Moose and a variety of boreal and parkland mammals which may be seen in and around the Park. Optional evening excursions include driving roads along the southern edge of the park, an area that had ben particularly good for Great Gray Owl, and where other owls, as well as Elk, Coyote, or Black Bear often come out near dusk. Alternatively, we may drive the park roads at dusk for deer, Elk or Moose, and stop at a couple openings after dusk where woodcock can be heard displaying or Barred Owls may be heard calling. Or, we may take a stretch along PR 19 in the Park where Lynx are occasionally spotted hunting along the road after dusk. Nights in Riding Mountain National Park.

Day 5: Riding Mountain Park to Whitewater Lake and Melita



Today we may check out a couple more spots in Riding Mountain searching for any highlight species that we have not yet found, or we may head south to Minnedosa and have breakfast in a park there. After breakfast we will likely drive through some nice wetland areas in the Minnedosa pothole country (great for a variety of ducks, grebes, and occasionally a fox, skunk or raccoon looking for duck nests to raid). Carrying on to our lunch spot in Boissevain, we'll remain vigilant for Gray Partridge, Sharp-tailed Grouse and Swainson's Hawk, as well as various open country mammals (White-tailed Jack Rabbit, Red Fox, Coyote, plus Richardson's, Franklin's & 13-lined Ground Squirrels). In the afternoon we'll make numerous stops to check out several accessible vantage points along Whitewater Lake. This lake is usually teeming with shorebirds, waterfowl, gulls, terns, and various other waterbirds. It is one of the only spots in the province where species like White-faced Ibis, and occasionally egrets (Cattle, Great and Snowy Egrets) may be found. Six species of grebes including Red-necked, Western and rarely Clark's occur here. The last of the large migrant mixed flocks of shorebirds that pass through here in May will likely still be present, and nesting shorebirds include numerous American Avocet, Wilson's Phalarope, and rarely Black-necked Stilt or Piping Plover. Eventually we'll get to the west end of this lake and proceed on to Melita where we'll check in at the hotel. After dinner, we may check out the town looking for Chimney Swift, House Finch and Eurasian Collared-Dove, or head out for a couple hours to extensive pasturelands in a broad valley south of town known locally as the "Blind Souris" for specialty grassland birds, and maybe spot a Gray Partridge, mule deer or a hunting badger. Night in Melita.

Day 6: The Mixed-grass Prairies



Today is our big day for prairie birds and the winds can really play havoc in this open country, so after an early breakfast at the hotel we'll head straight to the best mixed-grass prairies in the extreme southwest corner of the province. West of Lyleton we'll hope to find some Sharp-tailed Grouse still on dancing grounds (leks) and then explore some native mixed-grass prairie - main targets being Sprague's Pipit, Baird's & Grasshopper Sparrow, and Chestnut-collared Longspur. This corner (abutting Saskatchewan and North Dakota) is also about the only spot in the province where one can find the endangered Ferruginous Hawk, Loggerhead Shrike, and with luck maybe even a Burrowing Owl. Other prairie or southwestern specialties we'll look for that morning and early afternoon include Ring-necked Pheasant, Swainson's Hawk, Upland Sandpiper, Willet, Marbled Godwit, Willow Flycatcher, Say's Phoebe, Mountain Bluebird, Brown Thrasher, perhaps Lazuli Bunting, and other prairie birds. We'll have lunch along the Souris River at Coulter Park, and in the afternoon check out some good riparian woodlots along the Souris before heading north through largely uninhabited grasslands known locally as the Poverty Plains. After a couple hours rest and dinner in Melita, we may do an optional evening outing to some small shorebird ponds in the area, or head south of town traversing sections of the Blind Souris and open grasslands along the Souris River. Night in Melita.

Day 7: Melita, Oak Lake to Brandon



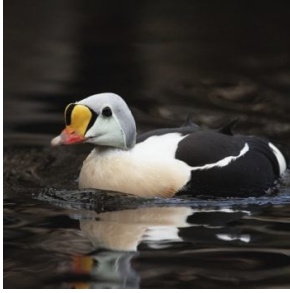
Depending on how we made out in the prairies yesterday, we may go back to try for some southwestern specialties we missed or needed better looks at. In the Pipestone/Deleau area we'll check out some large marsh complexes (Hunter's Lake, Oak/Plum marshes) and make our way to Oak Lake where we'll have lunch. In the afternoon we'll check out some spots near Oak Lake, and perhaps do a short walk in the Brandon Hills before making our way to our accommodations in Brandon and catching up on some rest. After dinner we'll take a couple hours to follow up some local leads or visit some particularly good birding spots within town or on the outskirts of Brandon before retiring for the night. Alternatively, if Yellow Rail have been reported in the Douglas Marsh, we may rest up for a couple hours after dinner, and head to the marsh at dusk to try for this difficult species (Yellow Rails generally do not start calling until well after dusk so this can sometimes be a waiting game and a rather late evening. Night in Brandon.

Day 8: Transfer to Winnipeg



Today, after breakfast in the hotel we'll spend the morning exploring some good birding spots within and near Brandon (Forestry Farm, downtown Peregrine nest, etc.), and head east to Shilo where Loggerhead Shrike, and both Eastern & Mountain Bluebirds may be found. After driving for a couple hours, we will likely have lunch in Portage la Prairie. In the afternoon we may revisit or explore new spots in the Delta Marsh area north of Portage, or we may continue east to Winnipeg. Given time, we may check out some city parks where Eastern Screech Owl and Northern Cardinal are occasionally found or we may head straight to the hotel. Night in Winnipeg.

Days 9 - 11: Churchill



On Day 9, we catch an early flight into Churchill, and settle into our accommodations before eagerly heading out in search of arctic birds and mammals. Our days will be organized around weather conditions, reports of target birds, rechecking some of the best sites several times, and venturing further afield as far as the trails and road systems will safely take us. In town, we will make frequent excursions to the nearby granary ponds, the Churchill River docks, and Cape Merry (where the Churchill River flows out into Hudson Bay) as these sites are readily accessible and superb spots to witness the constant changeover in bird composition. In years when Ross's Gull were more readily seen, they were often seen here. Hundreds of Ruddy Turnstone and Sanderling often hang out at the docks, and this is always a good spot to check for Red Knot or Black-bellied Plover as they pass through, or to find a few lingering Lapland Longspur, Snow Buntings or maybe even a recently arrived Smith's Longspur feeding along the railroad tracks or rocky shorelines. Standing on the elevated rock outcrops at Cape Merry offers a paramount viewpoint for observing gulls, jaegers, loons, waterfowl, and a rich assortment of other waterbirds within and along the Churchill River and Hudson's Bay shorelines below. Certainly, this is one of the best areas for Sabine's, Thayer's, Glaucous, Iceland, or for less expected gulls that funnel along the coast. It is also where rarities like King Eider, Harlequin Duck, Black Guillemot, Pomarine & Long-tailed Jaeger and numerous other less expected birds generally show up. The high outcrops of the Cape are also a great vantage point for observing the rhythmic surfacing of Beluga Whales as they cruise up and down the Churchill River feeding on schools of Capelin and other larger fish. Seals are regularly seen here as well; those on the river generally being Harbour Seals, while Ringed Seals (a favored food of the Polar Bears), tend to frequent the bay shorelines. The ancient lichen encrusted rocks at the Cape are also a typical American Pipit nesting area, and this is one of a handful of areas frequented by Arctic Hare or the dark "cross fox" color phase of the Red Fox. The road systems around Churchill are not terribly extensive, but get us out to all of the best areas for finding unique birds and other wildlife in the area. We'll make frequent excursions down Goose Creek road alongside the Churchill River checking out some productive feeders for various sparrows including Fox, American Tree & Harris's, Canada Jay, Pine Grosbeak, Common & Hoary Redpolls, Rusty Blackbirds, and who knows what else - Merlin and even Boreal Owl have been seen here on occasion. Goose Creek Road is also littered with roadside mudflats and river overlooks where a rich assortment of shorebirds, waterfowl, raptors, and various songbirds may be found. It is also a great area to spot Thayer's, Little & Sabine's Gulls among flocks of Bonaparte's and Ring-bills, and where the extremely rare Ross' Gull may show up at any time as there are still indications that a few nest further inland or downstream. The various roads east of town and along the coast will also be explored, including the Twin Lakes road beyond the Northern Studies Centre. This area can be particularly productive for nesting shorebirds, including Stilt Sandpiper, Whimbrel, Short-billed Dowitcher, Dunlin, American Golden Plover, Hudsonian Godwit and others adorned in full breeding plumage and frequently observed displaying from treetops or performing acrobatic aerial manoeuvres. A large fen near Twin Lakes is often among the most productive for various breeding shorebirds, and it is one of the best spots for finding Golden Eagle, Short-eared Owl, Northern Shrike, and Smith's Longspur. Displaying Willow Ptarmigan or males decked out in full breeding attire are always a treat to observe and they become more common further from the town site. In a variety of wooded and shrubby habitats along Goose Creek Road and near Twin Lakes, we'll search for specialty boreal and tundra species such as Three-toed Woodpecker, Spruce Grouse, Boreal Chickadee, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Northern Shrike, Bohemian Waxwing, Pine Grosbeak, Harris's Sparrow, White-winged Crossbill, as well as Blackpoll, Orange-crowned, Wilson's & Palm Warblers. In years when vole and small mammal prey are more abundant, nesting Rough-legged Hawk, Parasitic Jaeger, Northern Hawk and Boreal Owls may be found. Medium-sized or larger lakes in these areas are usually worth a look for Tundra Swan, Pacific Loon, Long-tailed Duck, or maybe even a nesting scoter. Nights in Churchill.

Day 12: Churchill and return to Winnipeg



We spend our last full day in the north mopping up on species and areas that we may have missed. If you haven't already done so, we'll make sure you have ample time to walk the main street, where several shops offer locally made handicrafts, and a must is a visit to the Itsanitaq Museum which has artifacts collected from centuries of local habitation. Our last dinner together that evening gives us a chance to reminisce about all the trip highlights and the adventures we've had on this trip, before catching a late evening flight back to Winnipeg. Night in Winnipeg.

Day 13: Departure

Our Churchill and Southern Manitoba birding tour ends today, you can transfer to the airport for flights home anytime today.

What to Expect

Overview

The Churchill & Southern Manitoba Tour is a moderately paced birding tour focused on discovering a variety of bird species. Expect early morning birding nearly every day, typically followed by a return to the hotel for breakfast.

Depending on the day's itinerary and travel distance, we'll usually stop in a local town for lunch or have a picnic lunch before heading out for a few more hours of birding in the afternoon. Most afternoons conclude with enough time to rest before dinner.

There will be occasional late outings, as evenings are often ideal for wildlife viewing. After dinner, we typically venture out for 2-3 hours of wildlife viewing, though participants are always welcome to opt out and relax for the evening if they prefer.

Food

We usually go out for pre-breakfast walks, and have breakfast on the road or in the field, or return to the hotel for breakfast. We either have a picnic lunch in the field, or get something on the road in between birding locations. Dinner is usually at the hotel or a nearby restaurant. Food choice in rural Manitoba can be limited. Do not expect fine dining. On the rare occasion, we may do a take out dinner if restaurants are closed.

Accommodation

We stay in standard hotel rooms that provide a comfortable stay in locations close to where we want to go birding.

Walking

The walking on this tour is rated as easy however we do cover uneven terrain, such as pastures and ditches. Most walks are under 1 km (0.6 miles) on flat trails or roads.

Driving

We spend a significant amount of time traveling between locations, often up to 3 hours at a stretch. Expect to spend the majority of the day in the van as we explore different areas. We make frequent stops during each day's travel.

Climate

Weather in late May and early June can be extremely variable, especially at Churchill, with highs sometimes reaching to nearly 30°C (86° F) and lows of around 7°C (44° F). We could even encounter freezing temperatures and snow. It's best to check the weather report in the weeks leading up to the trip to get a clearer idea of weather.

Participants should layer their clothing and bring extras in a backpack as conditions can change quickly whilst we are in the field.

Mosquitoes are typically not a major issue in early June, but if temperatures have been warm, some may be present, especially in the south during early morning and evening hours. Additionally, we might encounter wood ticks in southern areas, so if you're wary of ticks, we recommend coming prepared.

Although we will probably do very little if any off-trail walks, particularly in inclement conditions, waterproof footwear and rain gear may be necessary for damp days. Lastly, should you wish to walk in the marsh and try for Yellow Rail, knee high boots and a flashlight may be required.

Internal Flights

Our itinerary includes two internal flights between Winnipeg and Churchill that are included in the price of the tour. These flights will be booked by Eagle-Eye Tours for you.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes

- All accommodation
- All meals and soft drinks
- Ground transportation
- Guides (4 - 8 participants with one guide, 9 - 12 with two)
- All park, conservation and entrance fees
- Flights between Winnipeg and Churchill

Tour Price Does Not Include

- Travel Insurance
 - Items of a personal nature
 - Taxes (5% GST)
 - Alcoholic Beverages
-