

High Arctic & Northwest Territories Itinerary

[Link: High Arctic & Northwest Territories](#)

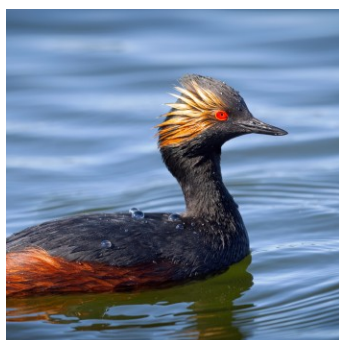
Tour Overview

This unique High Arctic birding tour, a perennial favorite, takes in three different areas; the exquisite high Arctic tundra above the Arctic Circle and far north of the tree line, the boreal forest and lakes around Yellowknife, NWT, and the aspen parkland and potholes of Central Alberta. We could encounter a diverse array of birds and mammals, from King Eiders to Pacific Loons, Arctic Tern to Swainson's and Rough-legged Hawks, Long-tailed and Parasitic Jaegers to Sabine's and Iceland Gulls, and American Bison to Arctic Foxes.

At Cambridge Bay on Victoria Island, Yellow-billed Loons nest on remote lakes, Red-necked and sometimes Red Phalaropes in resplendent summer plumage inhabit ponds, Tundra Swans and Sandhill Cranes enliven the tundra, Stilt and Baird's Sandpipers give their strange songs, and a scarce nesting species such as Buff-breasted or White-rumped Sandpiper may show up. The area is steeped in history and culture, from explorers searching for the Northwest Passage to the Inuit of the western Arctic. The high quality and exciting wildlife viewing make for a long-remembered tour!

Itinerary

Day 1 - Arrival in Leduc/Edmonton



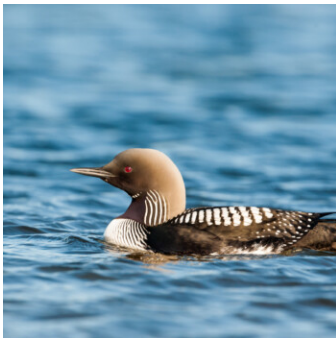
Our High Arctic & NWT birding tour begins in the evening in Leduc, just south of Edmonton, Alberta, and close to the airport. We meet for dinner at 6:30 pm for a meet-and-greet and for a brief introduction and orientation. Night in Leduc.

Day 2 - Elk Island National Park



We first visit several local lakes for a first introduction to species of central Alberta. Eared and Red-necked Grebes, over 12 species of waterfowl including Ruddy Duck, Black Tern, American White Pelican, American Avocet, Franklin's and California Gulls, Purple Martin and Yellow-headed Blackbird are usually present. Swainson's and Red-tailed Hawks hunt over pastures that are occupied by Richardson's Ground-squirrels. Wet meadows support Le Conte's Sparrows and Sedge Wrens, and occasionally Bobolinks. We then head towards Beaverhill Lake; the lake has been shrinking in size and the shorelines are now grassy fields where Mountain Bluebirds, Vesper and Clay-colored Sparrows and sometimes Short-eared Owls breed. Next we head to Elk Island National Park; over 200 species of birds have been identified in the park. Year-round residents include Hairy and Pileated Woodpeckers and Boreal Chickadees. Migrant and nesting passerines include Gray Catbird, Red-eyed and Blue-headed Vireos, Western Tanager, Le Conte's and Nelson's (Sharp-tailed) Sparrows, Ovenbird and Mourning Warbler. Marshes and ponds support a diverse array of waterbirds including Trumpeter Swan, Forster's Tern and Ring-necked Duck. The park is also home to 44 different species of mammals, including wapiti (elk), moose, white-tailed deer, coyote, muskrat and porcupine. The most noticeable of the park's mammals are the two different sub-species of bison. If we hear reports from local naturalists of northern species of owls, we may head north of Edmonton to the edge of the boreal forest where our target species would be boreal forest owls such as Great Gray and Northern Saw-whet Owls. We could also add to our tally of mammals with beaver and red fox. Night in Leduc.

Days 3 and 4 - Yellowknife



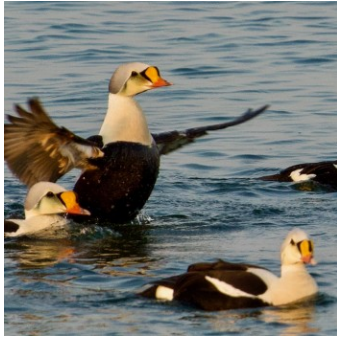
We leave Leduc, head to the airport and board our plane to Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. In the Yellowknife region we explore boreal habitats in the Great Slave Lake area, looking for specialties such as Mew and Bonaparte's Gulls, Rusty Blackbird, Sandhill Crane, Northern Shrike and Bohemian Waxwing. We may encounter several boreal forest species such as Tennessee, Wilson's, Blackpoll and Orange-crowned Warblers, Alder and Olive-sided Flycatchers, Canada Jay, Western Tanager, and White-crowned, White-throated, Swamp, Fox and Lincoln's Sparrows. Lesser Yellowlegs perch on the tops of trees, Horned and Red-necked Grebes are widespread, and Pacific Loons nest on some of the larger lakes. We scan Great Slave Lake, the second largest lake in Canada, for lake species such as Surf Scoters, Red-breasted and Common Mergansers, Osprey, Bald Eagle, and Arctic, Caspian and Common Terns. Yellowknife has several interesting stores and we'll take in a couple during our stay. Nights in Yellowknife.

Day 5 - Flight to Cambridge Bay



We spend the morning birding around the Yellowknife area before taking an afternoon flight to Cambridge Bay. We spend the rest of the day getting our bearings about town, noticing that the common town birds are Snow Buntings and Lapland Longspurs - quite a change from House Sparrows and Starlings! Night in Cambridge Bay.

Days 6 to 10 - Cambridge Bay



From Cambridge Bay we make daily excursions to various birding locations around town. One day we travel by vehicle on one of the few roads in the area to the base of Mount Pelly, (providing the road is passable) where we should encounter species such as American Golden, Black-bellied and Semipalmated Plovers, Semipalmated, Baird's and Stilt Sandpipers, Red-necked Phalarope, Long-tailed Jaeger, Arctic Tern, Horned Lark, Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting. American Pipits breed on the slopes of the mountain. The impressive Yellow-billed Loon breeds in this area so we will look for nesting pairs. We also look for groups of Muskox, although they have become very scarce in recent years. Arctic fox and Arctic hares are here, and if it is a year of high lemming numbers, then Snowy Owls will be nesting, as well as Pomarine Jaegers; if not, then both species can be absent. On another day, we travel along the West Arm to Dease and Simpson Straits which overlook the Northwest Passage. Throughout the day we hike out onto the tundra looking for signs of lemmings, and watch for all three species of jaegers, Short-eared Owl and Rough-legged Hawk. As well, we will enjoy the abundant waterfowl, loons and shorebirds, perhaps with their broods. Greater White-fronted and Cackling Geese, Tundra Swans, King and Common Eiders and Long-tailed Ducks might have flotillas of young, Pacific Loons will be on just about every medium-sized pond, Red-throated Loons forage close to shore, and many shorebirds that may include Buff-breasted, Pectoral and White-rumped Sandpipers will be scattered over the tundra. Our eyes will be constantly searching the chilly frozen waters of the Northwest Passage for ringed seals hauled up on the ice. On a third day, we take a track into the interior of the island, looking for nesting birds such as Red Phalarope, Sabine's Gull and Parasitic Jaeger. We will attempt to drive along an inlet of Dease Strait to view where Roald Amundsen's ship, the Maud, was until recently when it was taken back to Norway. We also visit an ancient traditional Inuit hunting site marked by stone tent rings and seal caches on the tundra. We take in the town dump and sewage lagoons, where Glaucous and Iceland Gulls gather and in the past we have found Bonaparte's, Slaty-backed and Glaucous-winged Gulls, and sometimes several Sandhill Cranes. Redpolls are here, and sorting Hoary from Common is a challenge. Furthermore, there is always the possibility of a southern vagrant; over the years we have found such unlikely species as American Robin, Hermit Thrush, Bald Eagle and Harris's Sparrow. We will also experience the beautiful flora and butterflies of the tundra. The information centre is worth a visit, perhaps for some souvenir shopping. Nights in Cambridge Bay. On Day 10, we board our plane for Yellowknife and on to Edmonton. Last night near the Edmonton airport.

Day 11 - Departure

Our High Arctic & NWT birding tour concludes today. You can transfer to the airport for your flights home anytime today.

What to Expect

Overview

The High Arctic & Northwest Territories tour is primarily a birding tour, although we will also enjoy other wildlife, the arctic landscape, and the northern culture. Experiencing familiar birds in their unfamiliar breeding range is a privilege to enjoy.

Our daily travel schedule will vary to account for weather, bird species and habitat, but it is a fairly relaxed-paced tour. In Yellowknife, we mainly bird from two roads, and in Cambridge Bay, all birding happens from 3 unpaved roads and casual walks in the tundra.

Most mornings we are out very early, possibly around 5 – 6 am, for early morning birding. We aim to have breakfast around 8, and then will continue to bird until lunchtime. Given the early start times, we tend to have a longer afternoon break (especially so in the arctic), and skip the slowest part of the day (when it's often too bright/hot out anyways).

Most lunches will be had in the field or in a takeaway place. Most evenings will be spent resting and recharging, but in Cambridge Bay we will conduct at least one evening drive after dinner, to have a chance to find species such as Arctic Fox and Arctic Hare.

Food

Breakfast is usually at the hotel or nearby, but occasionally we will have a field breakfast. Lunch will sometimes be a picnic lunch in the field and other times it will be at a restaurant. Dinner will be at the hotel's restaurant or a good restaurant in town. Especially in Yellowknife, there is the opportunity to explore some ethnic foods if wished. After dinner we usually discuss the day's activities and review the list of birds seen and heard. Please note that in Arctic locations such as Cambridge Bay, the availability of fresh fruit and vegetables is limited compared to what you might expect in urban areas. While we strive to provide well-balanced meals during the tour, we encourage participants to adjust expectations accordingly.

Accommodation

All accommodations during the tour are good quality and provide a comfortable stay while visiting Canada's wild boreal and arctic.

Walking

This tour involves mostly easy walking, with some uneven terrain when we explore on the tundra. While all walking takes place close to the vehicle, it's important to note that even short distances across the tundra can be challenging due to the uneven and unstable ground. The walk to Cameron Falls is not long but includes uneven terrain and stairs. There is also an option to climb Mount Pelly, which involves a gradual 200-meter ascent on an easy trail. The longest walk is approximately 5 kilometres at Mount Pelly. While no special equipment is required, this tour may not be suitable for those with mobility challenges.

Driving

We will not be covering large distances, in fact the longest drive will be barely 45 minutes (Elk Island NP), however given that we only bird along roads, we will spend a large amount of time in the vehicle.

Climate

The tour will take place during the arctic summer, with long days with a lot of light. We are likely to experience wind and possible chilly temperatures in the north. Rain is also a possibility, so dress appropriately. Bring layers that are easy to take off.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes

- Flights from Edmonton to Yellowknife and to Victoria Island plus return included
- All meals
- All accommodations
- Ground transportation
- 4 - 8 Participants will be guided by one guide. 9 - 12 participants will be guided by two guides in two vehicles.
- All park, conservation and entrance fees

Tour Price Does Not Include

- Flights to and from Edmonton
 - Travel Insurance
 - Items of a personal nature
 - Taxes (5% GST)
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