Eagle-Eye Tours

Saskatchewan Whooping Cranes with Canadian Geographic Itinerary

Link: Saskatchewan Whooping Cranes with Canadian Geographic

Tour Overview

In mid-October, Sandhill Cranes migrate by the thousands south across southern Saskatchewan, stopping at various localities to refuel before continuing their journey. With them are a handful of Whooping Cranes, coming south from breeding grounds in Wood Buffalo National Park in the Northwest Territories.

We have a good chance of finding Whooping Cranes on our birding tour as there is a fine network of field observers scouting the area for these legendary birds. Along with cranes, tens of thousands of Snow Geese and Canada Geese, with lesser numbers of Ross's, Greater White-fronted and Cackling Geese, are pouring through, as well as other waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors and passerines, especially large flocks of Lapland Longspurs with Snow Buntings and possibly Northern Shrikes.

We will also visit Prince Albert National Park and the boreal forest, where we will have chances for boreal specialties like Spruce Grouse, Pileated, Black-backed & American Three-toed Woodpecker, Canada Jay, Boreal Chickadee, Bohemain Waxwing, and occasionally Pine or Evening Grosbeak, or White-winged Crossbill. We also have the possibility to see Moose, Elk & sometimes River Otter.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Saskatchewan

Our Saskatchewan Whooping Cranes birding tour starts in Saskatoon with supper and an opportunity to discuss the upcoming adventure. Night in Saskatoon.

Day 2: Whooping Crane Search

Today, we travel to Blaine Lake and Marcelin. It is almost guaranteed that one or more groups of Whooping Cranes will appear in the Saskatoon area during the tour period. Our schedule is flexible such that we can alter our itinerary to visit an area where the cranes have touched down. Night in Saskatoon.

Days 3-4: Prince Albert National Park

After some morning birding around Saskatoon, we will make our way north to Prince Albert National Park. Here we will experience the boreal forest, and will have chances for boreal specialties like Spruce Grouse, Pileated, Black-backed & American Tree-toed Woodpecker, Canada Jay, Boreal Chickadee, Bohemain Waxwing, and occasionally Pine or Evening Grosbeak, or White-winged Crossbill. We also have the possibility to see Moose, Elk & sometimes River Otter. We will spend the next 2 nights in Prince Albert National Park.

Day 5: Prince Albert National Park

We will spend the day enjoying Prince Albert National Park. In the late afternoon, we will drive back to Saskatoon.

Day 6: Blackstrap Reservoir & Potholes

The habitat here is a mixture of grassland with potholes, saline wetland complexes and fresh water lakes. Lakes and potholes in the area are teeming with ducks and some lingering shorebirds can still be found. These areas also support thousands of Snow Geese each year; the actual fields that the birds occupy shifts from one year to the next, depending upon the type of crop grown the previous summer, but we should have little difficulty in locating the foraging areas for the flocks. Snow Geese will be the most abundant species in these flocks, but there are also groups of Greater White-fronted Geese, Ross's Geese and several species of ducks. Sandhill Cranes will also be gathering. Raptors of several species will be present, and we will scan for Lapland Longspurs and Snow Buntings as they are migrating south. Finally, both Sharp-tailed Grouse and Gray Partridge may be encountered in our travels. Night in Saskatoon.

Day 7: Departure

Our Saskatchewan Whooping Cranes birding tour ends today. You can depart anytime for flights home.

What to Expect

Overview

The Saskatchewan Whooping Cranes tour is a moderately paced birding tour. We focus on finding amazing flocks of cranes, but will be on the lookout for other species, too. You can expect early mornings (6:30-7am) and long days in the field.

Food

We generally have an early breakfast at the hotel before we head out for the day. We often take a picnic lunch in the field, but will occasionally stop at a restaurant for lunch. Dinner is usually at the hotel or a nearby restaurant. Each evening after dinner we compile the day's checklist, review the day's activities, birds, mammals and other observations, and plan the next day's activities.

Accommodation

We stay at two hotels on this tour, one in Saskatoon and the other in Waskesiu Lake. Both are comfortable accommodations and a great base for our daily birding excursions.

Walking

The walking on this tour is rated as easy, mainly consisting of short forays from the van. All of the walks are less than 2km (1.2 miles) in length, although when combined, some days can total up to 5km.

Driving

Driving times will be mostly short in duration, going from our hotel to the birding sites, except on the days we travel to and from Prince Albert National Park, which is about 2.5 hours north of Saskatoon.

Climate

We could have fairly warm days with sunshine, but we could also have cold windy days with snow. Bring warm layers including sweaters, jackets, hats and gloves, which can be added or removed as circumstances dictate. We will not be on extended walks unless the weather is sunny and calm.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes	**Tour Price Does Not Include**
• All accommodation • All meals & soft drinks • Ground transportation • One EET guide and a Canadian Geographic Ambassador with 5 - 7 participants and 2 EET guides plus an Ambassador with 8 - 12 participants • All park, conservation and entrance fees	• Flights to and from Saskatoon • Travel Insurance • Items of a personal nature • Taxes (5% GST) • Alcoholic beverages

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