BIRDING TOUR USA: OWLS AND WINTER BIRDING IN THE BOREAL FOREST OF MINNESOTA

26–31 JANUARY 2027
02–07 FEBRUARY 2027
26–31 JANUARY 2028



*One of several species of owl on this tour, the **Great Grey Owl** surveys from atop its perch.*

Overview

In true winter wonderland fashion, Minnesota offers picturesque scenes of snow-covered evergreens and iced-over lakes. This Minnesota birding tour focuses on a variety of birds that use Lake Superior and the boreal forest as their winter homes. We begin in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul area where we will target several key species like **Trumpeter Swan**, **American Tree Sparrow**, **Rough-legged Buzzard** (Hawk) and **Long-eared Owl**. From here we move north to Duluth, which will serve as our home-base for the remainder of the trip. The famous USA birding location, Sax-Zim Bog, offers an incredible variety of habitats and is undoubtably one of the best places for amazing owls like **Great Grey Owl**, **Northern Hawk-Owl** and in good irruption years, **Boreal Owl**. Of course, the bog features more than just owls with other incredible boreal bird species including **Evening Grosbeak**, **Pine Grosbeak**, **Ruffed Grouse** and **Black-backed Woodpecker**. After a few days focused at Sax-Zim Bog, the tour moves up the coast of the mighty Lake Superior where we will search for **Snowy Owl** in the Duluth-Superior harbor. As we continue north, we will get to the small town of Grand Marais, typically a great area for **Bohemian Waxwing**. A run through Superior National Forest, and other nearby parks on the way north, offers a chance at spotting **Spruce Grouse** and **Boreal Chickadee**.

Most trips can vary depending on the irruptive finch species like **Redpoll**, **Two-barred Crossbill**, **Red Crossbill** and **Purple Finch**. We will have plenty of time in the area to ensure our best chances for all of these great species. After scoring these fantastic winter denizens and many more, the tour concludes back in Minneapolis-Saint Paul where folks can thaw out and make their journeys home after another unforgettable experience.



*Another of our owl targets will be the beautiful **Snowy Owl**.*

Detailed Itinerary (6 days/5 nights)

Day 1. Arrival at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport

After arrival, if there is time, we will bird around the Minneapolis area until dinner. We'll bird Nicols Road Marsh and nearby parks along the river for **American Tree Sparrow**, **Trumpeter Swan**, **Dark-eyed Junco**, **Red-bellied Woodpecker** and more. Then as the sun begins to set, we will begin our search for the breathtaking **Snowy Owl** in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul Airport viewing area. Dinner will taste so much sweeter after a hopefully successful owl search. Then off to our hotel for a good night's rest before starting our first full day of birding.

Overnight: Minneapolis

Day 2. Minneapolis north to Duluth

This morning begins our first full day of birding in the winter weather of Minnesota. We will try several nearby areas for **American Tree Sparrow**, **Trumpeter Swan** and other potential waterfowl. Where we go exactly can vary year-by-year based on weather and the whereabouts of the open water. We will visit some local areas for a chance at **Long-eared Owl** before beginning the drive north. Along the way, there are several areas which host **Rough-legged Buzzard** so we will have our eyes peeled for this. Depending on how we faired the previous day and this morning with southern targets, we may have enough time to visit Canal Park and the local landfill for **Glaucous** and **Iceland Gulls** before dinner in Duluth.

Overnight: Duluth



*The delightful **Evening Grosbeak** is often seen in Sax-Zim Bog.*

Days 3–4. Birding the famous Sax-Zim Bog Important Bird Area (IBA)

These next two days will focus exclusively on birding the giant area of the Sax-Zim Bog IBA. With its combination of open meadows, aspen and thick evergreen stands, rivers, farmlands and more, it is no wonder so many boreal species call "the bog" home in the winter. Due to the extremely cold conditions of Minnesota in the winter, we will do most of our birding along the roadsides, never straying too far from the vehicle. We will cruise the roads in the mornings hopeful for a **Black-billed Magpie** mixed in with **American Crows** and **Common Ravens**.

The southern portion of the bog is home to a known **Sharp-tailed Grouse** lekking area. Using various feeder setups throughout the area will be key as several of our targets enjoy the free buffet including **Pine** and **Evening Grosbeaks**, **Black-capped Chickadee**, **Canada Jay** and even a hungry **Great Grey** (Northern) **Shrike**, from time to time. While driving around this vast area, we will keep our eyes peeled for silhouettes in the empty branches as **Ruffed Grouse** and **North American Porcupines** feed and rest. The open meadows play host to a nice variety of diurnal raptors including **Bald Eagle**, **Rough-legged Buzzard** and **Northern Hawk-Owl**. As day turns into evening, the anticipation builds for an appearance of the amazing **Great Grey Owl** silently hunting the roadsides and snowbanks. We will spend two full days exploring this amazing area which will certainly yield us some fantastic birding.

Overnight: Duluth



*The adorable and quizzical **Canada Jay** is always a fan favorite.*

Day 5. Lake Superior and Grand Marais

Today we will start our journey north to the small town of Grand Marais with a birding stop in Superior National Forest first. An early morning start will have us slowly patrolling the roadsides,

searching for **Spruce Grouse**, which feed on the roadside grit and salt. As the sun continues to rise, finch flocks of **American Goldfinches** and **Pine Siskins** begin their sporadic flights, searching for seed pods. We will continue our birding of the great forest listening and looking for **Boreal Chickadees** and **American Three-toed** and **Black-backed Woodpeckers**. After a nice morning of birding, we will arrive in Grand Marais for lunch. We will scan the harbor for a potential **Long-tailed Duck**, **Red-breasted Merganser** or **Common Goldeneye** and search the town and recreational vehicle (RV) park for **Bohemian Waxwing** before making the scenic drive back to Duluth and dinner.

Overnight: Duluth



Northern Hawk-Owl *will hopefully be another delight in Minnesota.*

Day 6. Back to Minneapolis and departure home.

On our final day, we will make the trip south back to Minneapolis, to catch our flights home. We recommend getting an afternoon or evening flight (11am or later), if possible. Depending on timing, we may be able to make one or two more birding stops along the way. The tour will conclude with a drop-off at the Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport.

Overnight: Not included

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides, and other factors. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling or other factors.

Tour Details

Duration:	6 days
Group size:	4–8
Dates:	26–31 January 2027 02–07 February 2027 26–31 January 2028
Start:	Minneapolis
End:	Minneapolis
Prices:	US$ 2,990 per person sharing (2027) US$ 3,169 per person sharing (2028)
Single supplements:	US$ 440 (2027) US$ 466 (2028)

Price includes:

Meals
Accommodation
Transport
Guiding fees

Price excludes:

Flights
Personal insurance
Alcoholic beverages
Gratuities – (please see our tipping guidelines blog)
Laundry service
Personal expenses such as gifts