



MINNESOTA

Feb 20 – 25, 2025

TRIP REPORT



Our wonderful Sunrise Birding group at the famous Sax Zim Bog in Minnesota.

Minnesota - 2025

20th – 25th February

TOUR SUMMARY:

Our winter getaway to Minnesota started in Minneapolis where we met up with Frank Nicoletti, our local expert guide. A short ride to our first stop had some ponds full of Trumpeter Swans. Moving on to another area we searched the scattered trees and shrubs, until eventually Steve found our target Long-eared Owl. We then stopped at a grassland where good numbers of Rough-legged Hawks entertained us. The weather was, as expected, very cold. We continued our journey north to the town of Duluth and settled into our hotel. Our visit to Sax Zim Bog the next day produced the hoped for birds. A Great Gray Owl performed well and then a dash to see a Boreal Owl was followed by another dash back to the bog for a Northern Hawk Owl. Other birds around the bog included Ruffed Grouse, Common Redpolls, and numerous Pine Siskins. We also added our first White-winged Crossbills and a couple of American Tree Sparrows. The finale was our 4th owl of the day, a smart looking Snowy Owl, spotted by Link near the Duluth Airport. On other days we search Superior National Forest and got amazing views of American Three-toed Woodpecker, plus several Black-backed Woodpeckers including a male excavating a nest hole. We visited the coast for our 2nd Great Gray Owl, which proved to be an amazing experience as this magnificent bird gave stunning close views and was completely at ease with the birders and photographers admiring it. Many roadside stops found us Pine Grosbeaks and more White-winged Crossbills, and after a bit of searching, Frank came up with brightly colored male Evening Grosbeak with a few females. We visited several bird feeding stations and enjoyed flocks of Pine Siskins and fabulous looks at many Common Redpolls. We tracked down Canada Jays and eventually got everyone on a Northern Shrike or two. More Snowy Owls were seen and finally on our last day as we returned to Minneapolis, we stopped at a 'Lek' of Sharp-tailed Grouse seeing 12 birds strutting around a field and then flying off to feed. It was a great trip with wonderful people, led by the fantastic Frank, and we even enjoyed a little jocularitry – if that's how you spell it!

HIGHLIGHTS

Either for rarity value, excellent views or simply a group favourite.

- **Great Gray Owl**
- **Rough-legged Hawks**
- **Snowy Owl**
- **Ruffed Grouse**
- **White-winged Crossbills**
- **Evening Grosbeak**
- **Northern Shrike**
- **Canada Jay**
- **American Three-toed Woodpecker**
- **175 Trumpeter Swans**
- **Hairy Woodpeckers**
- **Red-breasted Nuthatch**
- **Black-billed Magpie**
- **Peregrine Falcon**
- **Lots of Pine Siskins**
- **Red Crossbill (Fly over)**
- **North American Red Squirrel**
- **Long-eared Owl**
- **Boreal Owl**
- **Northern Hawk Owl**
- **Black-backed Woodpecker**
- **Pine Grosbeak**
- **Lots of Bald Eagles**
- **12 Sharp-tailed Grouse**
- **Barrow's Goldeneye**
- **Glaucous Gull**
- **Northern Pintail**
- **Lots of Common Redpolls**
- **Downy Woodpeckers**
- **White-breasted Nuthatch**
- **Purple Finch**
- **American Tree Sparrow**
- **Common Goldeneyes**
- **White-tailed Deer**

We started our tour at what was literally Swan Lake. 175 Trumpeter Swans graced 2 small pools.



Gleaming white and very photogenic Trumpeter Swans started the tour on a high.





And some more wonderful Trumpeter Swans



This beautiful Long-eared Owl, got our winter owl tour off to a great start

Today we went and checked out the famous Sax Zim Bog, and we were not disappointed. Fabulous close views of a Great Gray Owl and a Northern Hawk Owl.



This Great Gray Owl was spotted by Gina right beside the road. We quietly got out of our vehicles and enjoyed this huge bird in all its glory. The Northern Hawk Owl was seen later - in the early evening. After initially seeing it a distance, it flew off and low behind some trees. We hung around for a good 45 minutes and, as we were about to leave, we spotted it on top of a tall dead tree. The evening light was perfect and the owl gave stunning views through the telescopes.

A little further on we checked a coastal spot where a tired Boreal Owl was roosting in the sunlight. Later, near Duluth, we found a very wide awake Snowy Owl perched on a roof top.



This sleepy Boreal Owl had us drive a quick hour to secure seeing this often elusive and sought after species



Common Redpolls were in good numbers and we were seeing them every day

Our second Great Gray Owl was simply stunning in a nice dark green spruce.



We drove along the coast and then into the forest where we found a good selection of birds.



This lovely American Three-toed Woodpecker gave us great views.



One particular Mountain Ash held 4 female Pine Grosbeaks, with another across the road

On another swing around the coast and we couldn't resist another look at this magnificent Great Gray Owl.



Just a little more Great Gray Owl.



We then visited Superior National Forest, and drove the snowy roads in search of a few specialties.



This male Black-backed Woodpecker showed incredibly well as it excavated a nest hole!

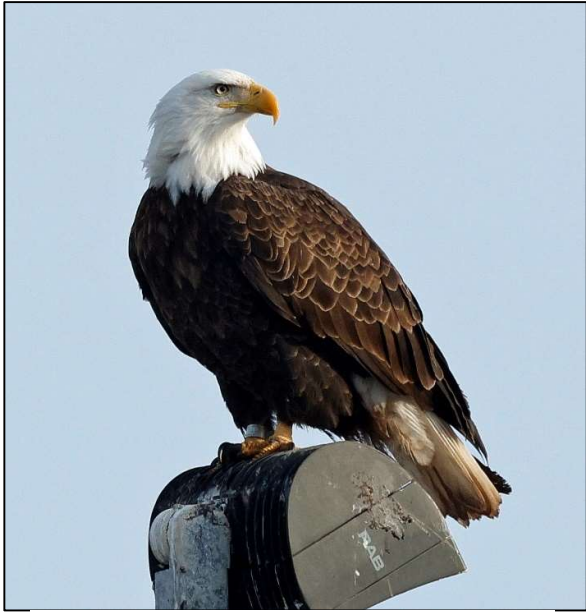


A single Canada Jay put in an appearance.



Among a group of Common Goldeneye was this lone immature Barrow's Goldeneye (middle back).

A search along the lake edge near Duluth found us 20 or more Bald Eagles plus 3 Snowy Owls (although it was getting towards dusk so photos are a little grainy).



Bald Eagles of all ages were seen easily every day.



We had 3 separate Snowy Owls on one day, although the light was fading when we found this one!



Red-breasted Nuthatch



Male Purple Finch



Hairy Woodpecker



Common Redpoll – so smart!

We were pleased to get this male Evening Grosbeak as there were very few around this year.



American Red Squirrels were not only cute, they came to many of the bird feeders.



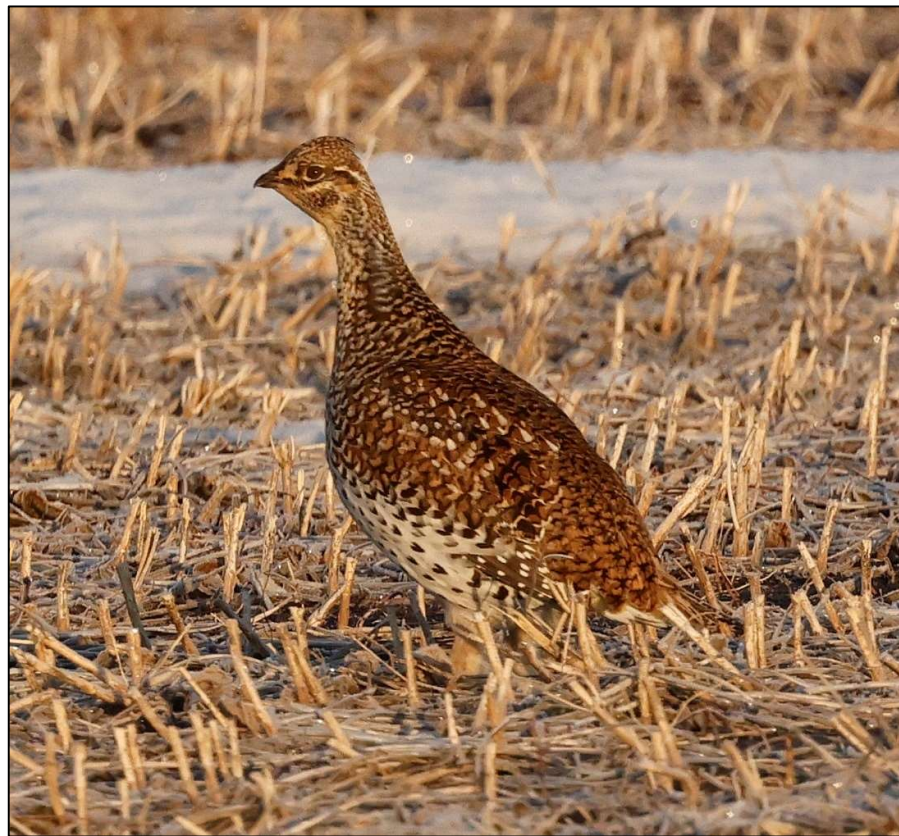
The Northern Shrike gave us the run around. Once spotted they would fly off!

Our final departure day had us leave early to get to the Lek (display ground) of the Sharp-tailed Grouse. We arrived as the sun was rising and enjoyed watching 12 birds walking around a field. After about 25 minutes, the birds all took off and flew to their feeding grounds. What a wonderful finale to our tour! Here are some different flight shots showing all different views of the wings.



Sharp-tailed Grouse in flight

And the grouse on the ground, showing the intricate plumage details.



A great end to our tour – Gina & Steve – with utmost thanks to Frank Nicoletti.

WILDLIFE LIST for Minnesota 2025

A = Number of species recorded on tour

B = Number of days out of 6 recorded C = Highest daily count

H = Heard Only with highest number heard in () N/C = No Count C=Common

This list is in line with IOC WORLD BIRD LIST v(13.2) and as such names may be different than some of the field guides and other taxonomy's – any additional notes see appendix *

A	BIRD SPECIES	SCIENTIFIC NAME	B	C
1	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	2	15
2	Trumpeter Swan	<i>Cygnus buccinator</i>	1	175
3	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	4	200+
4	American Black Duck	<i>Anas rubripes</i>	2	2
5	Northern Pintail	<i>Anus acuta</i>	1	1
6	Bufflehead	<i>Bucephala albeola</i>	1	1
7	Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	4	120
8	Barrow's Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala islandica</i>	2	1
9	Hooded Merganser	<i>Lophodytes cucullatus</i>	1	3
10	Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	2	4
11	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	1	2
12	Wild Turkey	<i>Meleagris gallopavo</i>	3	6
13	Ruffed Grouse	<i>Bonasa umbellus</i>	1	1
14	Sharp-tailed Grouse	<i>Tympanuchus phasianellus</i>	1	12
15	Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon)	<i>Colomba livia</i>	6	N/C
16	American Herring Gull	<i>Larus smithsonianus</i>	3	75
17	Glaucous Gull	<i>Larus hyperboreus</i>	1	1
18	Cooper's Hawk	<i>Astur cooperii</i>	1	1
19	Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	6	25
20	Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	4	4
21	Rough-legged Hawk	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>	2	6
22	Snowy Owl	<i>Bubo scandiacus</i>	2	3
23	Northern Hawk Owl	<i>Surnia ulula</i>	1	1
24	Great Gray Owl	<i>Strix nebulosa</i>	3	2
25	Boreal Owl	<i>Aegolius funereus</i>	1	1
26	Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>	1	1
27	American Three-toed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides dorsalis</i>	1	1
28	Black-backed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides arcticus</i>	2	4
29	Downy Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates pubescens</i>	5	3
30	Hairy Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates villosus</i>	5	4
31	Pileated Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>	3	2
32	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1	1
33	Northern Shrike	<i>Lanius borealis</i>	2	2
34	Canada Jay	<i>Perisoreus canadensis</i>	2	4
35	Blue Jay	<i>Cyanocitta cristata</i>	5	4
36	Black-billed Magpie	<i>Pica hudsonia</i>	1	2
37	American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	6	N/C
38	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	5	12
39	Black-capped Chickadee	<i>Poecile atricapillus</i>	6	12
40	White-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta carolinensis</i>	4	1 2(H)
41	Red-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta canadensis</i>	4	3
42	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	5	750
43	American Robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>	3	20
44	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	4	10

45	Evening Grosbeak	<i>Coccothraustes vespertinus</i>	1	8
46	Pine Grosbeak	<i>Pinicola enucleator</i>	2	5
47	Purple Finch	<i>Haemorhous purpureus</i>	2	8
48	Common Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>	5	25
49	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	1	1
50	White-winged Crossbill	<i>Loxia leucoptera</i>	4	20
51	Pine Siskin	<i>Spinus pinus</i>	4	120
52	American Tree Sparrow	<i>Spizelloides arborea</i>	1	2
53	Northern Cardinal	<i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>	1	1

A	OTHER SPECIES	SCIENTIFIC NAME	B	C
1	Eastern Cottontail	<i>Sylvilagus floridanus</i>	2	1
2	Snowshoe Hare	<i>Lepus americanus</i>	1	Tracks
3	Eastern Gray Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	1	2
4	North American Red Squirrel	<i>Tamiasciurus hudsonicus</i>	4	2
5	Canadian Lynx	<i>Lynx canadensis</i>	1	Tracks
6	White-tailed Deer	<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>	6	6

OK then, just one more Great Gray Owl!

