



Golden Gate Bird Alliance

Minnesota: Owls and Winter Wonderland Birding

27 January - 01 February 2025



Great Grey Owl is always a top target on this winter birding adventure.

Winter birding in Minnesota is an extremely rewarding experience with both amazing birds and breathtaking scenery. This six-day itinerary focuses on owls as well as a variety of other species that call the boreal forest and Lake Superior home for the winter. Starting in Minneapolis, the tour will target **Long-eared, Northern Saw-Whet, and Great Horned Owls**, all of which occur in this area but are not found further north. From there we'll head up to Duluth for the next four nights. The incredible Sax-Zim Bog will be the focus for the next few days with loads of target species such as **Great Grey and Barred Owls, Northern Hawk-Owl, Pine and Evening Grosbeaks, Boreal Chickadee, Ruffed Grouse, Common Redpoll, and Canada Jay**. In addition to this well-known USA birding site, the tour will explore the Duluth/Superior harbor for species such as **Iceland and Glaucous Gulls, Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, and Long-tailed Duck**. This is also the best location to find the coveted **Snowy Owl** to round out the owl targets for this trip. The bog and the lake are not the only birding destinations; we'll venture into Superior National Forest in search of both **Black-backed and American Three-toed Woodpeckers** and with some luck, **Spruce Grouse**. After three full days exploring the area, we'll pack up and leave Duluth to head back to the airport in Minneapolis. Extra birding may be possible on the final day depending on flight times.



The Northern Hawk Owl is another top target and boreal specialist.

Itinerary (6 days/5 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Minneapolis

Our tour begins at the Minneapolis/St. Paul airport (airport code MSP). After arrival, you will be transferred to our hotel for the evening before we all meet up and have our first dinner together as a group. We will discuss our upcoming adventure and get to know each other. If there are early arrivals, there may be some time for birding before dinner.

Overnight: Minneapolis



Minneapolis offers us the best chance for a Long-eared Owl sighting.

Day 2. Birding Minneapolis and head north to Duluth

This morning will have us exploring local parks near Minneapolis to target a few species more likely to be encountered further south such as **Trumpeter Swan**, **American Tree Sparrow**, **Northern Cardinal**, and **Rough-legged Hawk**. We also hope to find a few owl species that don't typically make it further north such as **Long-eared**, **Great Horned**, and **Northern Saw-Whet Owls**. We'll bird our way north, depending on recent reports, and then after lunch we'll make the two and half hours trek north to Duluth. We should arrive at Duluth/Superior harbor in the early evening hours and hopefully add another great species to our list, **Snowy Owl**. We'll bird around the harbor area which can yield **Iceland** and **Glaucous Gulls**, **Common Goldeneye**, and **Long-tailed Duck**. From here we'll head to our hotel in Duluth (which will be home for the next four nights) and get ready for more winter birding.

Overnight: Duluth



We'll search for **Bohemian Waxwings** feasting on berries along the lake shore.

Days 3-5. Sax-Zim Bog, Lake Superior, and Boreal Forest birding

Using Duluth as our home base, we'll spend the next three days birding the variety of habitats in the area. These include the Lake Superior shoreline, the Boreal Forest, and the bogs of Sax-Zim Bog, where we'll spend at least two of these days. Most mornings will have us up early, leaving our hotels after breakfast and about 45-60 minutes before sunrise to get us to "the bog" in time to hopefully catch a **Great Grey Owl** before it decides to head off to sleep for the day. The remainder of the day will be spent exploring the area by vehicle and targeting other northern special species like **Pine** and **Evening Grosbeaks**, **Common Redpoll**, **Canada Jay**, **Boreal Chickadee**, and **Northern Shrike**. Of course, we will always have our eyes peeled for the diurnal **Northern Hawk Owl** to hopefully add another owl species to our list. By early evening, we will be back on **Great Grey Owl** patrol, especially if we didn't connect with it in the morning. Having several days in this area offers us flexibility and increased odds of a great encounter with this majestic presence of the bog.

In addition to birding Sax-Zim, we will venture into the Boreal Forest of Superior National Forest in search of both **Black-backed** and **American Three-toed Woodpeckers**. Habitat and locations can vary year to year, but we will make special effort for both species. Depending on how we fair and the weather conditions, a drive along the shores of Lake Superior may be in order where we will scan the waters for **Long-tailed Duck**, **Common** and **Red-breasted Mergansers** and any other waterfowl we can find. This area is also good for mountain ash berries, a favorite for the **Bohemian Waxwing**.

These three full days of birding in this area will give us the flexibility needed to target all species in the area accordingly. These include **Red** and **Two-barred** (White-winged) **Crossbills**, **Red-breasted Nuthatch**, **Ruffed** and **Spruce Grouse**, **Northern Goshawk**, and others. We will also have time for multiple attempts at the special owls on offer here.

Overnight: Duluth



*The impressive **Black-backed Woodpecker** calls the Boreal Forest home.*

Day 6. Back to Minneapolis and tour conclusion

After our final breakfast it will be time to pack out things and make the two and half-hour drive back to Minneapolis to connect with our flights home, thus concluding the tour. We ask that you please book afternoon flights if possible. Depending on flight times, there may be some time for more birding around Minneapolis before departure.



*We will search for **Boreal Chickadee** at Sax-Zim Bog.*

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. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration: 6 days
Limit: 5 - 8
Dates: 27 January – 01 February 2025

Start: Minneapolis
End: Minneapolis

Prices: US\$2,780 per person sharing

Single supplements: US\$400

Price includes:

Meals
Accommodation
Transport
Guiding fees
Entrance fees

Price excludes:

Flights
Personal insurance
Alcoholic beverages
Gratuities
Laundry service
Personal expenses such as gifts