



A fabulous breeding-plumaged Short-billed Dowitcher (Simon Cox)

SOUTHERN MANITOBA & CHURCHILL

31 MAY – 12 JUNE 2014

LEADER: CAL CUTHBERT

This was the ninth Birdquest tour to Manitoba and as has become standard course the birds and other wildlife, the habitats, the scenery and experiences all combined to make the tour a memorable one. There were no shortages of surprises following the coldest recorded winter in the province in 116 years with many species of birds arriving on time but with others “behind schedule”. Nevertheless the tour total of 227 species of birds (and 23 mammal species) can certainly be considered respectable.

Once the group had assembled at the James Richardson International Airport in Winnipeg from their various arrival points we loaded the van and we were off! A quick stop along Portage Avenue got their first Chimney Swifts, a species which is now in decline over much of Canada. The hour drive through the Red River Valley, some of the flattest but most agriculturally valuable land in the country, was uneventful with only the occasional Red-winged and Brewer's Blackbird seen and occasional small flock of Franklin's Gulls. After settling into our accommodations in Portage la Prairie and having a bite to eat we explored the nearby Crescent Lake and Island Park. Here we got our first Wood Ducks, arguably North America's most beautiful waterfowl, Canvasback, Redheads and Common Goldeneyes, including broods. It had been a long day for some so we packed it in early.

The following morning after packing up we headed towards St. Ambrose Provincial Park situated on the narrow, partially treed south shore of Lake Manitoba and separated from the agricultural lands to the south by the extensive and world famous Delta Marsh. En route we



Prairie landscape near Delta (Simon Cox)



Marbled Godwit (Simon Cox)

stopped at a Sharp-tailed Grouse dancing ground or lek where we watched in sheer delight as up to a dozen cocks "danced" about, occasionally jumping up and striking each other with their feet as they vied for the attention of a nearby hen. An immature Cooper's Hawk perched in a nearby aspen tree also seemed to watch the performance. The lek activity combined with the wonderfully calm morning was interrupted only by the songs of Clay-colored and Savannah Sparrows, Western Meadowlarks, Brewer's Blackbirds, fly by Upland Sandpipers and the antics of some nearby Wilson's Phalaropes. It was a great start to the day.



Delta Marsh near St. Ambrose (Simon Cox)



Curious Virginia Rail at St. Ambrose (Simon Cox)

Reaching the Provincial Park itself took a while as there always seemed to be something to see. No fewer than six Upland Sandpipers and 20 Wilson's Snipe were counted on fence posts beside the road as we drove north through pastureland towards the marsh. Before reaching the park we

stopped and viewed the extensive wet meadows and uplands. Here, we saw a Striped Skunk being harassed by an irate Marbled Godwit, a few fly by Northern Harriers and numerous close by flocks of Franklin's Gulls, many of which passed just over the van. Once at the park and lakeshore we experienced a real flurry of birding activity. A pair of stunning Virginia Rails right beside us put on a real show while Least Flycatchers, brightly colored Yellow Warblers, amazing



Song Sparrow (Simon Cox)

black and orange Baltimore Orioles and showy Yellow-headed Blackbirds seemed to be everywhere. Attractive Western Kingbirds, rather drab Warbling Vireos, Red-eyed Vireos, colorful Blue Jays, Grey Catbirds, Cedar Waxwings, Common Yellowthroats, Clay-colored Sparrows, Song Sparrows and incredibly eye catching American Goldfinches to name a few really kept us going. After hearing some calling birds our first view friendly American Bittern was a plus. The lake side itself offered some great water bird viewing opportunities. Here we saw our first Western Grebes and Black-crowned Night Heron. American White Pelicans and Double-crested Cormorants were everywhere with many seen nesting on a small offshore rocky island. Our first and only California Gulls of the tour were seen here. Dashing Caspian Terns with their blood red bills, abundant Forster's Terns and some Common Terns nicely rounded off our morning here. Following our leisurely field lunch by the lake we drove west to the village and beach site of Delta also located along the south side of Lake Manitoba. Here we birded some interesting sites including the former Delta Waterfowl Research Station grounds before finally heading off to Brandon, Manitoba's second largest city. This would be our home base for the next three nights as we explored the southwest corner of the province.



Forster's Tern at Delta Marsh (Simon Cox)



The ever graceful American White Pelican (Simon Cox)

Wet and windy weather plagued us through this part of the tour with itinerary changes required, especially on our first full day. We saw firsthand the excessively wet conditions which the farmers and ranchers have been contending with, in most cases since 2011. Wet road conditions made navigation interesting in some cases. Nevertheless when conditions improved somewhat near Whitewater Lake we were able to see our first up close Eared Grebes, more and even closer American Bitterns, a number of majestic Great Egrets, Great Blue Herons, Cattle Egrets in colorful high plumage, numerous Black-crowned Night Herons, White-faced Ibis's, unforgettable American Avocets, Willets with their striking wing patterns, our first Ruddy Turnstones, literally thousands of Franklin's Gulls, Black Terns and great looks at our first Semipalmated, White-rumped and Stilt Sandpipers. The colorful, eye catching Wilson's Phalarope was always a winner.



A pair of courting Wilson's Phalaropes (Simon Cox)

Later that afternoon we were able to catch up with both Le Conte's and Nelson's Sparrows. The following day on the Lyleton prairie Swainson's Hawks, a pair of regal Ferruginous Hawks at their nest site, more Sharp-tailed Grouse, noisy Marbled Godwits on territory, a hunting Short-eared Owl, Western Kingbirds, Loggerhead Shrike, Brown Thrasher, singing Sprague's Pipits high overhead, Vesper Sparrows, Western Meadowlarks, Bobolinks and displaying male Chestnut-collared Longspurs were seen among others. A very obliging singing Baird's Sparrow close to the van provided incredible views of this now endangered species and was definitely a trip highlight for all.

On day 4 of our tour and prior to our embarking to Riding Mountain National Park we checked out a parcel of the Shilo plains east of Brandon with both Eastern and Mountain Bluebirds in mind. The birds didn't disappoint; the indescribable blue coloration of the male Mountain Bluebirds in the morning sun was thoroughly enjoyed by all. A strikingly patterned Lark Sparrow was also easy to take. Following yet another rain storm we then left for Riding Mountain but not before first checking out the Minnedosa pothole region.



Minnedosa wetland (Cal Cuthbert)



Pair of Lesser Scaup with drake Ring-necked Duck (Simon Cox)

This beautiful area south of Riding Mountain is known for its rolling knob and kettle topography and many waterfowl producing wetlands. This scenic drive produced fantastic views of many waterfowl species including dapper road side Ring-necked Ducks and Buffleheads and such other species as very handsome Red-necked Grebes. Upon our arrival at the town site of Wasagaming in Riding Mountain we quickly settled in, did some introductory birding and called it a day.

The next few days spent in this wonderful national park which encompasses some 3000 sq km of primarily boreal forest passed all too quickly. We were treated to some fine birding in a variety of habitats spite of the late spring and there were many magical moments. The melancholy sounds of the Common Loon were always a treat as was seeing the bird in its spectacular breeding plumage. The close by overhead soaring of an adult Bald Eagle at Whirlpool Lake against a blue sky was a boreal moment. However, it wasn't so easy to see one the Spruce Grouse, of the park's more sought after birds. While the tour leader was in a nearby heavily wooded area checking out a known site for these often elusive birds a hen was spotted by the rest of the group flying into and landing in a roadside pine. Fortunately decent views were gotten by all! Another memorable moment was listening to an American Woodcock one evening at dusk giving his "peent" call prior to his aerial display flight which we watched in awe. While a pair of American Three-toed Woodpeckers were found on day and showed very well it seemed that the stunning Yellow-bellied

Sapsuckers really stole the woodpecker show with many photos taken. However even the tiny Ruby-crowned Kinglet was impressive as one was seen to repeatedly raise its fiery red crest in territorial display.



Beautiful Riding Mountain National Park (Simon Cox)



American Three-toed Woodpecker (Simon Cox)



Common Loon (Simon Cox)

The Passerine birding in Riding Mountain was especially rewarding. While the boreal nesting Lincoln's, Swamp and White-throated Sparrows and finches such as the Purple Finch and Evening Grosbeak provided excitement it had to be the wood warblers who really stole the show. Here the often brightly colored species seen included Golden-winged, Tennessee, Orange-crowned, Nashville, Yellow, Chestnut-sided, Cape May, Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Black-and-white, Mourning and Canada warblers besides American Redstarts,

Ovenbirds, Northern Waterthrush and Common Yellowthroats. For some the Golden-winged Warbler, which was found only in specific oak habitat on the east escarpment of the park, was the top warbler while for others the Blackburnian was number one. Other east escarpment specialties included the Eastern Towhee and the colorful Indigo Bunting which showed well while others such as the Scarlet Tanager was a heard only.



Blackburnian Warbler (Simon Cox)



Chestnut-sided Warbler (Simon Cox)

Some of the mammals seen during our stay included exactly a dozen Black Bears in addition to numerous Snowshoe Hares, an Elk, a number of White-tailed Deer and even a Marten.

After reluctantly leaving Riding Mountain but filled with some good memories we headed to Portage la Prairie in anticipation of the next day's flight out of Winnipeg to Churchill. That evening in Portage we again checked out Island Park and were rewarded with great looks at a Downy Woodpecker, a late migrating Olive-sided Flycatcher, Black-capped Chickadee and White-breasted Nuthatches. Early the next morning we were on our flight to Churchill and as we descended we could see the effects of the late spring and saw that winter had not yet totally abandoned the region. The Churchill River appeared to be largely frozen over and a thin layer of snow still covering much of the ground away from the airport. Nevertheless we were here and there was lots of birding to be done. We quickly learned that two days prior to our arrival a late snowstorm had dumped up to 15cm of snow on the ground!

After checking into our rooms it was off to the Granary Ponds and the nearby Churchill River. The ponds held waterfowl such as American Wigeon, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal and Greater and Lesser Scaup. Shorebirds such as Semipalmated Plover, Lesser Yellowlegs, Hudsonian Godwit, Semipalmated, Least, White-rumped and Stilt Sandpipers, Dunlin and small rotating flocks of Red-necked Phalaropes all provided good scope views. Even a Sora showed! A number of large boulders in these ponds supported an American Herring Gull nest and Arctic Terns seemed to be everywhere as they wheeled about over the ponds and area. The nearby Churchill River offered very different birding. Late northern springs are good for "holding back" species which would generally be further north at this time and this was the case here. Red-throated Loons mixed with Pacific Loons were scattered across and down the river as far as we could see. A small flock of Snow Geese flew by. Dozens of Common Eiders were either swimming about or floating by on chunks of ice. Small flocks of very striking Surf Scoters would fly in only to take off again. As we were taking all of this in (or trying to) a local drove up in his pickup to ask us if we would be interested in seeing a polar bear with her two cubs out on the pack ice of the bay. In what seemed

an instant we were following him down the Cape Merry Road to a point where we quickly set up our scopes and sure enough were able to get onto the bears. This was THE highlight of the whole tour for some of us but there was still much to see. Cape Merry itself was a gem and always offered something to see no matter when we stopped by. There the presence of capelin with an incoming tide was always flagged by the wheeling flocks of Bonaparte's Gulls and Arctic Terns and who in turn were harassed by Parasitic Jaegers.



Ice break up on Hudson Bay off Cape Merry (Simon Cox)



Bonaparte's Gull (Simon Cox)



Long-tailed Jaeger (Simon Cox)

The moaning calls of Common Eiders, the sharp cracking of ice, the wheeling flocks of Surf, White-winged and Black Scoters, occasional wailing calls of Pacific Loons, large chunks of ice covered

with Ruddy Turnstones floating by, surfacing Beluga whales among the ice floes and even the sighting of a lone Gray Wolf watching us from across the river one evening combined with the sheer tranquility and solitude of the site all made Cape Merry so special for us.

Of course Churchill is more than the Churchill River and Cape Merry and we made sure the primary birding spots were checked daily, especially the Launch, Goose Creek and Hydro Roads. Many of the bird species seen close up were along or near these road ways including Akudlik, the Goose Creek cottage subdivision and The Weir. These species included Osprey, Northern Harriers, Merlins, a Peregrine Falcon, Sandhill Cranes, Black-bellied Plovers, stunningly beautiful American Golden Plovers, Hudsonian Whimbrels, Baird's and Pectoral Sandpipers, Short-billed Dowitchers, Long-tailed Jaeger, Palm Warbler, American Tree Sparrows, Fox Sparrows, Harris's Sparrow, numerous White-crowned Sparrows, Lapland Longspurs, Rusty Blackbirds, Pine Grosbeaks and both Common and Hoary Redpolls to name a few.

A day at Twin Lakes and area provided us with stunning male Willow Ptarmigans, Bohemian Waxwings and Blackpoll Warbler as additional species.

This was a truly memorable trip and great birding experience. Manitoba is a vast province but we were able to sample at least some of its amazing diversity of regions, habitats, birds and other wildlife. I'm sure the group members will have fond and lasting memories for many years to come.



Pacific Loon at nest (Simon Cox)



American Bittern (Simon Cox)

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Red-throated Loon (Red-throated Diver) *Gavia stellata*: Due to the late spring these birds were present in good numbers on the Churchill River when we first arrived on June 8. At that time 75-100 could be seen at any one time from any river vantage point. Predictably numbers dropped sharply within the next two days.

Pacific Loon (Pacific Diver) *Gavia arctica*: Early in our stay at Churchill up to 25/day could be seen among the Red-throated Loons on the Churchill River. A nesting bird just off of Launch Road provided an excellent roadside view of this beautiful loon.

Common Loon (Great Northern Diver) *Gavia immer*: A few of these large loons were seen and heard daily in Riding Mountain and infrequently at Churchill.

Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps*: Much more often heard than seen these vocal but often shy grebes were encountered on a number of small wetlands in the southwest corner and the Minnedosa potholes.

Horned Grebe (Slavonian Grebe) *Podiceps auritus*: Up to five of these handsome grebes were seen in the Minnedosa potholes region. A pair was also seen at West Twin Lake near Churchill.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*: These large, hard to miss grebes were noted in the Minnedosa potholes and on larger basins just south of Riding Mountain. Two sightings included birds on nests.

Eared Grebe (Black-necked Grebe) *Podiceps nigricollis*: At least a dozen were seen swimming in flooded wetlands along the west side of Whitewater Lake often allowing close approach.

Western Grebe *Aechmophorus occidentalis*: Eight of these elegant grebes were seen on Lake Manitoba at St. Ambrose. A few were also seen at Delta from the observation tower.



Red-necked Grebe (Simon Cox)



Western Grebes (Simon Cox)

American White Pelican *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*: Over 500 of these birds were seen at St. Ambrose where some breed on a small rocky offshore island and at Delta. About 40 were also noted at Whitewater Lake with a few at other scattered locations including the Minnedosa potholes.

Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus*: About 400 of these cormorants were seen both inhabiting a small rocky island off the shoreline at St. Ambrose PP and flying about over Lake Manitoba. Over 100 were also seen on the west side of Whitewater Lake nesting in dead trees.

American Bittern *Botaurus lentiginosus*: Three birds were seen in the St. Ambrose and Delta areas and up to seven birds were encountered along the west side of Whitewater Lake, some of which offered excellent views.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*: Up to ten of these attractive waders were along the west side of Whitewater Lake.

Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias*: Seen almost daily in the south with a maximum of nine in the St. Ambrose and Delta areas.

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*: A total of six birds were seen along the west side of Whitewater Lake and area where, in recent years, they have been an uncommon nester.

Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*: Over 50 of these striking herons were flying about the west side of Whitewater Lake in the vicinity of a rookery. A few scattered birds were seen elsewhere in the south.

White-faced Ibis *Plegadis chihi*: Up to six birds were along the west side of Whitewater Lake with great views of a few.

Turkey Vulture *Catharus aura*: Two birds were seen in the south including one near the Lyleton prairie.

Snow Goose *Chen caerulescens*: A few small flocks totaling 35 birds were seen at Churchill upon our arrival. Some, including four attractive dark morph birds, were seen a few days later north of the Churchill Northern Studies Centre.

Ross's Goose *Chen rossii*: Two of these small geese were with a flock of seven Snow geese that landed across the Churchill River at Cape Merry one evening. A few days later a single bird flew over Cape Merry.

Greater Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*: Arguably one of the more commonly encountered birds of the tour. While there were a number of pairs with goslings seen in the south further north in the Churchill region geese (*B. c. interior*) could be seen on nests everywhere across the wet and dry tundra. Large flocks of north bound pre-molting geese could be seen daily both in the south and at Churchill. Over 4000 could be seen on some days.

Tundra Swan (Whistling Swan) *Cygnus columbianus*: A few single birds were at Churchill as was one flock of six distant birds flying over the Churchill River. One very antagonistic bird was seen actively harassing a hapless Canada goose even engaging in lengthy chase flights lasting more than a few minutes, much to our astonishment.

Wood Duck *Aix sponsa*: A half dozen of these incredibly beautiful ducks were seen at Island Park in Portage la Prairie one evening. A hen was also later spotted on a tree limb near the same location.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*: This fairly common but late nesting duck was seen throughout the south and especially the Minnedosa potholes, generally in pairs. A pair was also seen at Churchill.

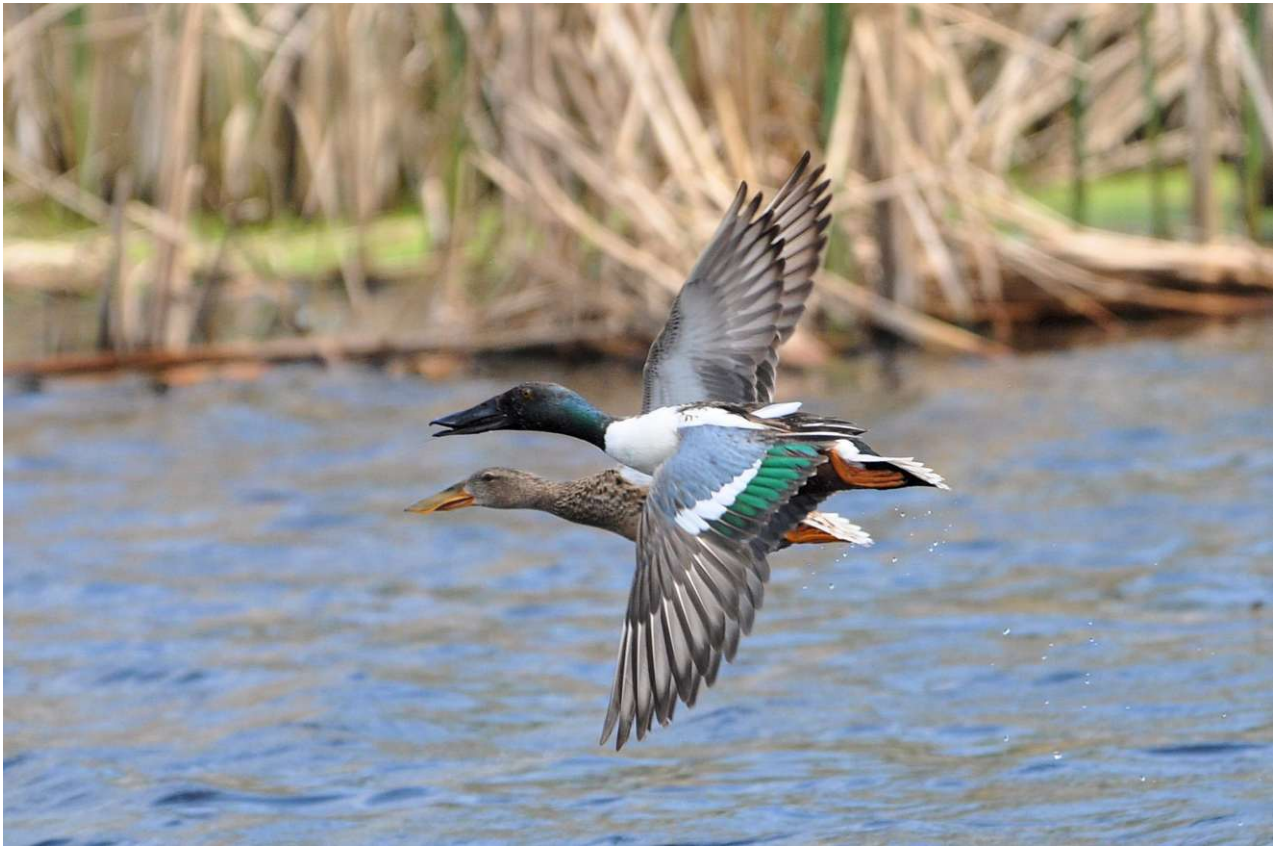
American Wigeon *Anas americana*: The best views of these attractive ducks were at Churchill in the general vicinity of the Granary Ponds where up to 20 were noted one day. Only a few were seen in the south.

American Black Duck *Anas rubripes*: A flock of eight accompanied by a lone drake Mallard was seen flying across the Churchill River one morning but a day later 11 were flushed from a pond near the grain terminal. The species occurs regularly at Churchill in small numbers.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*: Seen daily throughout the south and at Churchill. The most noted on any one day was 50 including drakes entering post eclipse plumage.

Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors*: One of the most commonly seen dabblers on the southern part of the tour some of these small ducks seemed to be everywhere there was water. Most sightings were of pairs and three bird courting groups. An apparent Blue-winged x Cinnamon teal cross accompanied by a female Blue-winged Teal was seen on a small pond near Melita.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*: Common throughout the south where the white breasted drakes were easy to spot among the emerging green marsh vegetation. Up to 10 birds a day were also seen at Churchill.



Northern Shovelers (Simon Cox)

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*: A few of these sleek and eloquent ducks were seen daily in the south, especially in the Whitewater Lake area. The best views by far were on the Granary Ponds at Churchill where up to 15 or more were seen daily.

Green-winged Teal *Anas carolinensis*: Like the pintail this species was most easily observed at Churchill where a dozen or more could be seen in the vicinity of the Granary Ponds.

Canvasback *Aythya valisineria*: These handsome ducks were easily viewed in the Minnedosa potholes on a number of small wetlands. Some post breeding bachelor flocks were also noted.

Redhead *Aythya americana*: Present in small numbers in the south, particularly in the Minnedosa potholes where there were frequent opportunities to compare it with Canvasbacks.

Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris*: Up to eight birds were seen in the Minnedosa potholes and a few in Riding Mountain. There were excellent views of the striking drakes.

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*: Seen daily at Churchill where it outnumbered Lesser Scaup. The highest daily count was 35 birds and almost always in pairs or three bird groups. The easiest place to see and identify this duck was at the Granary Ponds.

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*: Up to a dozen were seen in the Minnedosa potholes and a few elsewhere in the south. This duck could be easily overlooked in the Churchill area among the Greaters but some small flocks of up to several birds consisted entirely of this species.

Common Eider *Somateria mollissima*: We never tired of watching – or listening to these large, hardy ducks on the Churchill River as courting parties swam about or floated by on chunks of ice each day. The eerie moaning calls were very much a part of the Cape Merry scene. These birds belong to the distinctive Hudson Bay race *S. m. sedentaria* and are the largest and heaviest diving ducks in North America.

Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata*: Commonly seen on the Churchill River where rafts of these ducks, mainly drakes numbering up to 150 birds or more could be seen at or near the mouth of the Churchill River. These drakes very striking head pattern made these birds a delight to see.



Common Eider pair (Simon Cox)



Surf and Black Scoters (Simon Cox)

White-winged Scoter *Melanitta deglandi*: Up to 15 of these scoters were seen on the Churchill River upon our arrival with smaller numbers seen during the remainder of our stay. A flying pair was at Twin Lakes where they have been known to nest.

Black Scoter *Melanitta americana*: These scoters increased in numbers on the Churchill River during our stay at Churchill. It is thought that the late spring was responsible for the later than usual staging numbers. Over 200 could be seen at Cape Merry among the ice floes.

Oldsquaw (Long-tailed Duck) *Clangula hyemalis*: Remarkably few of these attractive ducks were seen. The most seen on any one day was twelve, mostly on the Churchill River. We had excellent views of some pairs on small wetlands.

Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola*: Notwithstanding their small size the conspicuous drakes were seen on several wetlands in the south, including some beaver ponds in Riding Mountain. Three were also seen at Churchill.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*: Up to ten were on Crescent Lake in Portage la Prairie on our first evening out of the tour. Goldeneyes were seen daily in Riding Mountain with sightings generally consisting of hens flying about looking for nest sites. These ducks were fairly common on the Churchill River where rafts of up to 75 or more/day were seen.

Hooded Merganser *Lophodytes cucullatus*: A small flock of five including four attractive drakes were on a wetland adjacent to the west side of Whitewater Lake. A hen was also noted along the Souris River south of Melita.

Common Merganser (Goosander) *Mergus merganser*: A hen was spotted near Wasagaming in Riding Mountain but not until we reached Churchill and the Churchill River did we see large numbers of these ducks. Up to 100 were seen/day in small to large flocks mainly consisting of drakes.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*: These shaggy headed ducks were a mainstay on the Churchill River generally scattered among other waterfowl species. Their comical courtship activities were hard to miss.

Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*: Seen daily in the south on wetlands of varying size but always with an open water zone. Some of the best sightings of displaying drakes were in the Minnedosa potholes.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*: Our first Osprey was seen in Riding Mountain. At least two birds were seen almost daily in the vicinity of the Churchill River just south of Churchill where they were observed carrying fish on a few occasions.

Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*: A few sightings of these majestic birds were seen in both the north and south legs of the tour. An adult fly over at Whirlpool Lake in Riding Mountain was spectacular.

Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonicus*: A few of these hawks were seen almost daily both in the south and at Churchill coursing low fields and wet meadows. Up to four were seen one day including some good views of males.

Cooper's Hawk *Accipiter cooperii*: An immature bird was seen perched in a small tree across from a Sharp-tailed Grouse lek near St. Ambrose providing good scope views.

Swainson's Hawk *Buteo swainsoni*: Up to four of these attractive prairie Buteos were seen in one day in the southwest corner.



A striking Swainson's Hawk in flight (Simon Cox)

Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis*: A few were seen daily in the south, especially in the Minnedosa potholes where they are a common nester. A few of them even had reddish tails!

Ferruginous Hawk *Buteo regalis*: Scope views were obtained of a pair at their nest site on the Lyleton prairie one morning. One of the birds was later seen in flight carrying a food item and was watched as it dove towards the nest site.

American Kestrel *Falco sparverius*: Only a few of these small, elegant falcons were seen in the south generally in the vicinity of roadside power poles. One was seen flying over the Goose Creek Road at Churchill on our final morning there.

Merlin *Falco columbarius*: Fly by single birds (nearly all hunting males) were seen on five different days including three sightings at Churchill.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*: The male of a pair nesting in downtown Brandon was seen near the nest site one rainy morning. Two additional birds were seen at Churchill including one repeatedly diving at a Red-necked Phalarope on the Churchill River. The doomed phalarope was able to avoid the repeated dives of the falcon only to be snatched and swallowed whole by an adult Herring Gull which glided in during the commotion!

- Ring-necked Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*:** (H): A cock was heard crowing near the farm site of Ralph and Mary Wang south of Pierson.
- Ruffed Grouse *Bonasa umbellus*:** (H): Up to three distant drumming males were heard one day within Riding Mountain. One reasonably close bird proved frustratingly difficult and successfully evaded the group.
- Spruce Grouse *Falcipennis canadensis*:** An obliging hen was spotted by the group flying into a jack pine tree and perching adjacent to #19 in Riding Mountain as the tour leader checked out territorial male sites. Fortunately everyone got to see it.



Willow Ptarmigan in spring attire (Simon Cox)

- Willow Ptarmigan *Lagopus lagopus*:** Up to four outstanding cocks were seen one day at Churchill with one particularly cooperative bird near Twin Lakes offering excellent photographic opportunities.
- Sharp-tailed Grouse *Tympanuchus phasianellus*:** A trip highlight for some was watching a lek one morning south of St. Ambrose where a dozen actively displaying cocks competed for the attention of a hen which had just visited the site. More birds were in the southwest corner.
- Virginia Rail *Rallus limicola*:** A very cooperative pair of these attractive and vocal rails allowed for some up close and personal views at St. Ambrose.
- Sora *Porzana carolina*:** These rails proved elusive and hard to spot in the south being heard infrequently and only briefly seen in abundant wetland habitat. At Churchill one was finally seen by all as it walked along one of the Granary Ponds by the road edge.
- American Coot *Fulica americana*:** Fairly common in most wetlands in the south. A group of five were spotted by Dave Haigh at Churchill where they are considered rare.
- Sandhill Crane *Grus canadensis*:** Heard near the Lyleton prairie. However, over 50 of these magnificent birds were seen at The Flats just south of the town site of Churchill one evening, some of which were involved in courtship displays. Due to the iron content in the water some of these birds' colors consisted of varying shades of orange-brown.
- Black-bellied Plover (Grey P) *Pluvialis squatarola*:** Three were seen just off Hydro Road at Churchill one morning including a bird in non-breeding plumage.



An attractive American Golden-Plover (Simon Cox) Semipalmated Plover (Simon Cox)

American Golden-Plover *Pluvialis dominica*: These dazzling plovers were seen almost daily at Churchill on both wet and dry tundra. There were many photographic moments!

Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*: Most of the group saw one along the west side of Whitewater Lake while three were seen in the vicinity of the Granary Ponds at Churchill.

Killdeer *Charadrius vociferous*: These generally conspicuous and noisy plovers were seen daily in the south mainly when they flew up from gravel road edges. A few were also noted at Churchill.

American Avocet *Recurvirostra americana*: A group favorite up to 18 of these long legged delights were seen in partially flooded farm land along the west side of Whitewater Lake. One pair was seen (and photographed!) in copulation.



American Avocet (Simon Cox)

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*: Not seen until we reached Churchill where up to eight were seen in one day. Perhaps due to the late spring nesting territories by these aptly named birds did not yet appear to be established.

Willet *Tringa semipalmata*: The highest daily number of these large, gray shorebirds with the striking wing patterns was only three seen in the Melita and Whitewater Lake areas.

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*: Seen in a variety of habitats but always adjacent to water. The constant “body bobbing”, large conspicuous round black breast spots combined with bright yellow-orange made this a group favorite. One individual at Churchill was still in winter plumage.

Upland Sandpiper *Bartramia longicauda*: Over six of these graceful long necked but small headed prairie loving shorebirds were seen on fence posts along the road to St. Ambrose. A few were also on the Lyleton prairie.



Hudsonian Whimbrel (Simon Cox)

Hudsonian Whimbrel (H Curlew) *Numenius hudsonicus*: Seen only at Churchill where we had great views of an individual both walking about on wet tundra and in flight past the van. Also seen en route to Twin Lakes in a Northern Churchill Studies Centre area.

Hudsonian Godwit *Limosa haemastica*: Good views of both the large, drab females and smaller but much more brightly colored males were obtained at Churchill both at the Granary Ponds and on open wet tundra. It was always interesting to watch one of these long legged waders delicately balancing itself on top of a spindly spruce or larch tree.

Marbled Godwit *Limosa fedoa*: These loud waders were seen daily in the south, either on fence posts or flying about in pairs calling. Certainly no morning on the prairie would be complete without one or two of these birds about!

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*: Three of these incredibly colorful shorebirds were seen on a mudflat near Whitewater Lake in the south but it was not until we got to Churchill that large numbers were seen. At Cape Merry and elsewhere along the Churchill River there never seemed to be a time when at least one chunk of ice would drift by literally covered with these birds! No fewer than 400 were seen on some days.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*: A single bird was seen in the south at St. Ambroise. Much more common at Churchill where up to 100 were seen one day. There just about any concentration of Ruddy Turnstones would also harbor some Sanderlings.

Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*: Fifty five of these shorebirds were noted on a wetland east of Whitewater Lake. However up to 400 were seen on The Flats just south of the Churchill town site on evening, another indication of the late spring.

Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla*: Surprisingly only a handful of these small peeps were seen on the tour. One was seen side by side with a Semipalmated Sandpiper at Churchill.

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*: About 15 of these intricately marked shorebirds were viewed in the south on a wetland east of Whitewater Lake. Less than six were noted on any one day at Churchill generally along the Goose Creek Road and The Flats.

Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii*: Seen only at Churchill when a pair allowed close approach by the van along a road through dry tundra north of the Churchill Northern Studies Centre. The two birds were ultimately flushed by a passing Merlin.

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*: Four of these popular shorebirds were watched at close range as they foraged below us in a wet meadow adjacent to the Hydro Road south of Churchill.



White-rumped Sandpiper (Simon Cox)



Pectoral Sandpiper (Simon Cox)

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*: Two were present on the Granary Ponds upon our arrival at Churchill. Another bird was seen two days later.

Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus*: Three of these handsome shorebirds were seen on a wetland east of Whitewater Lake. Up to 10/day were noted at Churchill, particularly the Granary Ponds and along the Goose Creek Road.

Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus*: Seen daily in small numbers at Churchill in wet tundra with sedge and other grass growth. A few were also at the Granary Ponds.

American Woodcock *Scolopax minor*: At Riding Mountain one evening a single bird was heard giving its distinctive pre flight "peenting" call. We waited in anticipation until at last it took to the evening sky performing its territorial flight before finally plummeting to earth seemingly at neck breaking speed. A trip highlight for some!

Wilson's Snipe *Gallinago delicata*: A common species in wet brushy habitat. Over 20 were seen either in flight or on fence posts along the road to St. Ambroise. They were also heard and occasionally seen at Churchill.

Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor*: This large prairie phalarope was a group hit for sure and especially for Simon. There were numerous opportunities to study the size and plumage differences between the sexes with the much larger and more colorful females stealing the show of course. The maximum number seen on any one day was 20 birds.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*: A couple were seen in the south but up to 100 were seen one day at Churchill. Initially many of these phalaropes were sighted in small scattered rafts on the Churchill River. However the closest viewing opportunities were on the Granary Ponds where we could almost get dizzy watching their energetic spinning feeding methods.

Pomarine Jaeger (Pomarine Skua) *Stercorarius pomarinus*: To our delight one of these powerful Jaegers was seen flying close by along the Churchill River near the grain terminal buildings. Presumably the same bird was again seen the following day this time at Cape Merry.

Parasitic Jaeger (Arctic Skua) *Stercorarius parasiticus*: Cape Merry was certainly the best place to watch these graceful marauders giving chase to Arctic Terns and less commonly Bonaparte's Gulls. They were also frequently seen sitting on ice floes as they drifted by. A pair on territory was also seen south of Launch Road.

Long-tailed Jaeger (Long-tailed Skua) *Stercorarius longicaudus*: One of these sleek, graceful Jaegers literally soared about over top of us along the Churchill River late one afternoon – a truly fantastic sighting! If that wasn't enough we watched in awe as another was seen flying low over the tundra one morning landing at a Canada goose nest and helping itself to an egg.

Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixcan*: While small flocks of these attractive prairie gulls were seen daily in the south as they traveled to and from foraging sites certainly the most impressive numbers were at Whitewater Lake where up to at least 5000 could be seen soaring and wheeling about over a colony.



The Franklin's Gull, a prairie gem (Simon Cox)

Bonaparte's Gull *Larus philadelphia*: Two first summer birds were seen at St. Ambrose among Ring-billed and Herring Gulls. At Churchill however the species was seen daily. The greatest concentrations there were consistently at Cape Merry and just up river where at least 150 were seen one day.

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*: Certainly the most commonly encountered white-headed gull of the tour. Most numerous in the south, especially along the south end of Lake Manitoba where over 100 birds, including many non-breeders, were seen. There were fewer than 40 seen/day at Churchill, most often at Cape Merry.

California Gull *Larus californicus*: Two sub adults were among the Herring and Ring-billed Gulls at St. Ambrose.

American Herring Gull *Larus smithsonianus*: These large gulls were most common at Churchill where numerous individuals could be seen flying over the Churchill River and resting on floating ice. Elsewhere almost any large bolder located within a tundra pond would support a nesting pair.

Thayer's Gull *Larus thayeri*: One adult bird on an ice floe was briefly seen by the group leader at Cape Merry but flew off before the rest of the group could get onto it. The bird was not seen again.

Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*: A sub adult was seen flying over the Churchill River near the grain terminal while two days later one, presumably the same bird, was watched as it flew south over Cape Merry.

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*: Forty of these large, attractive terns were on a small rock outcrop off shore on Lake Manitoba at St. Ambroise.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*: At least five of these fairly "uncommon" terns were seen flying over Lake Manitoba at St. Ambroise.

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*: These graceful terns were commonly seen at Churchill and especially at Cape Merry where concentrations of them would reveal schools of capelin. The Granary Ponds provided great viewing opportunities.



Arctic Tern (Simon Cox)

Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri*: The most commonly seen terns at Delta and St. Ambroise where their flashing white primaries and grating calls were very much a part of the marsh scene. Smaller numbers were also seen at Whitewater Lake.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*: Widespread through the south but due to the abundance of flooded fields and wetlands were quite dispersed. The most seen in any one day was 24 birds.

Rock Dove *Columba livia*: Seen in and around most towns in small numbers, also large farms, stockyards and the like. Not seen at Churchill.

Mourning Dove *Zenaidura macroura*: Generally seen flushing from roadsides, perched on power lines or flying by singly or in three bird groups throughout the south.

Great Horned Owl *Bubo virginianus*: We saw one close to the road side within a small aspen bluff near Boissevain. The dominant subspecies in this region is the very pale *B. v. subarcticus*.

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*: One was seen fluttering about like a giant moth over low wet pasture on the Lyleton prairie as we searched for Baird's Sparrows.

Chimney Swift *Chaetura pelagica*: At least eight were counted as they soared over Portage Avenue in Winnipeg as we began the tour. At Riding Mountain up to six birds were seen daily as they soared over the town site of Wasagaming with some of them showing interest in a small brick chimney behind the group's accommodations.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird *Archilochus colubris*: Two of these small hummers were seen during the tour. The best views were of one at Ralph and Mary Wangs farm site south of Pierson as it visited a feeder.

Belted Kingfisher *Ceryle alcyon*: A confiding pair were along the Souris River at Coulter Park south of Melita. Two additional birds were seen north of Brandon near Riding Mountain.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius*: Our first bird was at St. Ambroise and while up to six were seen elsewhere in the south the best views were of a pair in Riding Mountain at a small roadside stop. Numerous photos were obtained of those birds!



Male and female Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (Simon Cox)

Downy Woodpecker *Picoides pubescens*: A quiet female was spotted foraging among the mature trees on Island Park at Portage la Prairie one evening.

Hairy Woodpecker *Picoides villosus*: One or two of these striking woodpeckers were encountered almost daily in the south, including Riding Mountain.

American Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides dorsalis*: Thanks to Patricia who heard some light tapping behind us in a stand of spruce a pair of these sought after woodpeckers showed well beside Clear Lake in RMNP.

Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus*: These large, spectacularly marked woodpeckers were seen and or heard on five different days. Near Churchill one was flushed out of a small building along the Goose Creek Road through a hole in a wall. We could not determine whether it required the whole building for its nest site!

Olive-sided Flycatcher *Contopus cooperi*: A quietly perched bird was spotted in a basswood tree on Island Park, Portage la Prairie. This bird was still obviously in migration as it would be more expected in Riding Mountain than at this location at this time.

Eastern Wood-Pewee *Contopus virens*: Single birds were heard and seen at St. Ambroise , Coulter Park and at Riding Mountain.

Alder Flycatcher *Empidonax alnorum*: One was seen briefly at St. Ambroise by some while another was heard at Douglas Marsh. It was not until Riding Mountain where we had good looks at one in an area of heavy alder growth at Moon Lake.

Least Flycatcher *Empidonax minimus*: Easily the most commonly encountered flycatcher in the south. These small flycatchers with their distinct calls were either heard or seen in a variety of wooded habitats from near Lyleton to Riding Mountain.

Eastern Phoebe *Sayornis phoebe*: In the south at least one of these shy, tail flicking flycatchers was spotted each day and always near water. This species is particularly dependent upon manmade structures for its nesting purposes.



Eastern Phoebe (Simon Cox)



Western Kingbird (Simon Cox)

Western Kingbird *Tyrannus verticalis*: These beautiful flycatchers were seen daily in the south and especially the Lyleton prairie where they commonly perched on roadside power lines and fences.

Eastern Kingbird *Tyrannus tyrannus*: More common than the Western Kingbird these conspicuous and often noisy flycatchers were hard to miss in the south and often in the vicinity of fence lines and shelter belts.

Loggerhead Shrike *Lanius ludovicianus*: A single bird was seen briefly by some near the Lyleton prairie as it darted behind the van. The population of these shrikes continues to decline in this region.

Yellow-throated Vireo *Vireo flavifrons* (H): One unresponsive bird was heard singing briefly near the Shilo plains as we searched for bluebirds while another was heard along the east escarpment of Riding Mountain.

Blue-headed Vireo *Vireo solitaries*: These attractive vireos were heard daily in the right habitat at Riding Mountain with great views of a few.

Warbling Vireo *Vireo gilvus*: The best views of these rather drab vireos were at St. Ambroise where at least three were singing and a couple seen. A few were heard elsewhere in the southwest.

Philadelphia Vireo *Vireo philadelphicus*: (H): An uncooperative bird was heard singing but not seen along the Mount Agassiz Ski Road in Riding Mountain.

Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus*: As Dave Howell put it "Manitoba is really a Red-eyed Vireo kind of place". It seemed there weren't many wooded places in the south where at least one of these appropriately named vireos couldn't be seen or heard singing.

Grey Jay *Perisoreus canadensis*: A few adults were seen in Riding Mountain. Three very inquisitive birds "shared" lunch with us at East Twin Lakes near Churchill creating a lot of photographic activity in the process.

Blue Jay *Cyanocitta cristata*: A few of these strikingly colorful jays were seen and heard throughout the south on five different days.

Black-billed Magpie (American Magpie) *Pica hudsonia*: Up to three of these flashy birds were seen daily in the south seldom far from farm sites or small prairie wooded bluffs. Locally known as "Holstein Pheasants".

American Crow *Corvus brachyrhynchos*: This species was so common it was hard to keep track of numbers. Widespread throughout the south. Up to three/day were seen at Churchill.

Common Raven *Corvus corax*: These birds, North America's largest "songbird" were seen daily throughout the whole tour with the most being eight in one day at Churchill.

Horned Lark (Shore Lark) *Eremophila alpestris*: Generally fewer than six/day were seen locally in the south where their tickling songs delivered both while perched on the ground or in the air were part of a prairie morning experience.

Purple Martin *Progne subis*: These large attractive swallows, no doubt a group favorite, were hard to miss in some small towns like Deloraine, Boissevain and Neepawa where very large Purple Martin "complex's" were installed for them. The largest number noted at any one location was fifteen.

Tree Swallow *Tachycineta bicolor*: These swallows were commonly seen in the vicinity of road side blue bird nest boxes throughout the south. Up to seven were seen one day at Churchill where they also nest.



Purple Martins (Simon Cox)



Tree Swallow (Simon Cox)

Bank Swallow (Sand Martin) *Riparia riparia*: Four of these small, sleek swallows were spotted by some in a mixed species flock of swallows at Delta.

Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*: Colonies of varying sizes were noted throughout the south where bridges provide suitable nesting habitat. A colony of no fewer than 400 birds was also at Delta where they were seen busily constructing their mud nests under the eaves of an abandoned building.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*: Seen regularly in the south and just about anywhere old buildings were present. The typical and distinct deep buff breast and belly combination was commented on by some of the group as so different from their “home” birds.

Black-capped Chickadee *Poecile atricapillus*: Heard near Lyleton and near the Shilo plains but it was not until the group birded Island Park in Portage la Prairie that good views were obtained of a foraging bird.

Boreal Chickadee *Poecile hudsonicus* (H): At Riding Mountain a very difficult bird refused to let itself be seen in thick spruce but it’s distinct calls were heard by all.

Red-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta canadensis*: A very pale female of this small species was finally lured into view for the group at Wasagaming in Riding Mountain.

White-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta carolinensis*: Four of these handsome nuthatches were seen among mature trees at Island Park in Portage la Prairie.

Brown Creeper *Certhia americana*: One was seen and heard by most of us near Lake Katherine in Riding Mountain but it was at the Boreal Trail south of Moon Lake where everyone was able to “get on” one of these interesting birds.

Northern House Wren *Troglodytes aedon*: These active wrens were heard more often than seen but we did get good looks at some, including one at its bird house at Ralph and Mary Wang’s farm site.

Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* (H): Heard singing at two locations within Riding Mountain.

Sedge Wren *Cistothorus platensis*: A few distant birds were heard at St. Ambroise and again at Whitewater Lake in wet sedge. However, good views of these small elusive wrens were eventually had in a wet meadow east of Whitewater Lake.

Marsh Wren *Cistothorus palustris*: Fairly commonly heard in stands of cattail both at St. Ambroise, Delta and Whitewater Lake. Also at least two were seen well near Boissevain east of Whitewater Lake.



Marsh Wren (Simon Cox)



House Wren (Simon Cox)

Golden-crowned Kinglet *Regulus satrapa*: One was heard then seen briefly by the tour leader and at least one other group member at the Boreal Trail in Riding Mountain.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet *Regulus calendula*: Common in Riding Mountain in mixed woods. Their distinctively busy songs, in whole or in part, were frequently heard. One bird at the Boreal Island trail repeatedly raised his fiery red crest to show us whose territory we were on!

Eastern Bluebird *Sialia sialis*: At least three birds were seen in the Shilo plains area with one bird providing decent albeit quick looks for most.

Mountain Bluebird *Sialia currucoides*: No fewer than 10 birds, mainly pairs were seen utilizing nest boxes along a road in the Shilo plains. The stunningly blue males made quite an impression with us.

Veery *Catharus fuscescens*: One was heard singing and seen briefly by the group leader as he searched for a Ruffed Grouse along the Mount Agassiz Ski Road at Riding Mountain.

Swainson's Thrush *Catharus ustulatus*: (H): Two singing but unresponsive birds were heard along Provincial Road #19 in Riding Mountain one morning.

Hermit Thrush *Catharus guttatus* (H): One very distant, briefly singing bird was heard by the group leader in an area of jack pine regeneration along Provincial Road #19 in Riding Mountain.

American Robin *Turdus migratorius*: Seemingly everywhere from the Lyleton prairie to the stunted taiga "forest" at Churchill. A very adaptable species indeed.

Grey Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis*: The best viewing of these birds was at St. Ambroise where at least five were seen. Elsewhere two were in woods near the Shilo plains.

Brown Thrasher *Toxostoma rufum*: One was watched by us from within the van as it perched along the edge of a small aspen bluff preening itself. It was the only one for the trip.

European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*: Very small numbers of these undesirables were encountered in the south and even at Churchill where up to seven were seen one day.

American Pipit (Buff-bellied P) *Anthus rubescens*: Predictably more conspicuous at Cape Merry where two birds appeared on territory. Elsewhere only a few were seen in the Churchill area.

Sprague's Pipit *Anthus spragueii* (H): A briefly singing bird was heard high overhead on the Lyleton prairie and closer to Brandon on the Shilo plains two distant birds were also heard, albeit briefly as well.

Bohemian Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulous*: Three birds did a quick fly by in the cottage sub-division of Goose Creek at Churchill but were only seen by the group leader. However, the following day after some perseverance a pair at Twin Lakes provided good views for all.

Cedar Waxwing *Bombycilla cedrorum*: Small flocks of these sleek and beautiful birds were seen daily in the south and were always a delight to the eye.

Golden-winged Warbler *Vermivora chrysoptera*: Four were heard singing in their specific oak habitat along the east escarpment of Riding Mountain with no fewer than three seen. It was a trip high light for us as we watched one of these splendid warblers singing his buzzy song at close range in the top of a stunted burr oak.

Tennessee Warbler *Vermivora peregrina*: Only two birds were heard singing in Riding Mountain with one showing well at Lake Katherine.

Orange-crowned Warbler *Vermivora celata*: A few were heard singing in Riding Mountain with one successfully brought into view. Superb looks of one were also obtained at Churchill near Twin Lakes with the orange crown being readily apparent.

Nashville Warbler *Vermivora ruficapilla*: Heard at Riding Mountain on several occasions with one of these attractive birds being very cooperative.

Yellow Warbler *Dendroica petechia*: For sheer numbers of any warbler seen on the tour this adaptable and delightful species would definitely take the prize. Its bright yellow colors were definitely hard to miss!

Chestnut-sided Warbler *Dendroica pensylvanica*: This strikingly patterned warbler was a group hit for sure in Riding Mountain where it was seen in small numbers in appropriate habitat.

Cape May Warbler *Dendroica tigrina*: These stunning warblers can be common in Riding Mountain in years of spruce budworm infestations. However, this was not one of those years. Nevertheless a pair were seen foraging in spruce in the Wasagaming town site one morning much to our delight.

Yellow-rumped Warbler *Dendroica coronata*: A common warbler in Riding Mountain where its pleasant warbling song was frequently heard. The brightly colored males were always a treat to see. Also present at Churchill where up to eight were seen in the Twin Lakes area.

Black-throated Green Warbler *Dendroica virens*: A pair were seen near Whirlpool Lake in Riding Mountain one morning in a patch of mixed woods which had escaped a devastating fire in 1980. The stunning male was another trip highlight for some of us. One was also heard singing along the east escarpment of the park.

Blackburnian Warbler *Dendroica fusca*: Fairly common throughout mixed woods in Riding Mountain. The incredible fiery orange breast coloration of the male was a show stealer and favorite for some; we never tired of seeing these warblers.



Yellow-rumped Warbler (Simon Cox)



Palm Warbler (Simon Cox)

Palm Warbler *Dendroica palmarum*: One was seen by the group but not the group leader along the Goose Creek Road at Churchill one morning. However, a few days later one singing in an area of wet spruce showed well. Interestingly the intermediate birds in this region show traits of both the yellowish eastern form and the much drabber western form.

Blackpoll Warbler *Dendroica striata*: A female was seen at West Twin Lake near Churchill but males were not yet apparently on their territories, much to the frustration of the tour leader!

Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia*: The high pitched “see-sawing” song of this uniquely patterned warbler was heard throughout our stay in Riding Mountain in suitable habitat. We were able to watch its interesting nuthatch-like feeding behavior.

American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla*: A few of these attractive and colorful warblers were seen in the south but were much common in Riding Mountain. The males' flashes of black and orange in the aspen understory were a part of the Riding Mountain experience.

Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapillus*: These fairly common but often difficult to see well warblers were noted daily in Riding Mountain where their loud songs resonated through the woods.

Northern Waterthrush *Seiurus noveboracensis*: Heard daily in the right wet, wooded habitat at Riding Mountain with a few seen. These warblers were common along the Churchill River off of the Goose Creek Road in alder and willow thickets.

Mourning Warbler *Oporornis philadelphia*: A splendid male was seen well by the group at the Boreal Trail in Riding Mountain. Also heard singing near Whirlpool Lake and the east escarpment.

Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*: Fairly common at many locations in the south where some nice views of these handsome masked warblers were obtained.

Canada Warbler *Wilsonia canadensis*: While one was heard singing briefly at Moon Lake a gorgeous male showed well for us along the Mount Agassiz Road in RMNP. A favorite with Gareth.

Eastern Towhee *Pipilo erythrophthalmus*: With none heard singing it was a matter of going deep into known towhee habitat off of Mount Agassiz Ski Road in Riding Mountain. There persistence paid off with a couple of brief but good looks of this large, striking sparrow.

American Tree Sparrow *Spizella arborea*: Fairly common at Churchill where their distinctive sweet songs were heard daily in a variety of habitats. This was a definite "like to see" bird for some and the birds didn't disappoint.

Chipping Sparrow *Spizella passerina*: Seen on most days of the trip from the south to Churchill this small adaptable sparrow was sometimes hard to miss. Over 100 were seen for sure.

Clay-colored Sparrow *Spizella pallida*: The easily identified buzzing song of this small drab sparrow was frequently heard in the south particularly along shrubby road edges in the southwest corner. A frequently seen sparrow.

Vesper Sparrow *Pooecetes gramineus*: Up to six of these large, light brown sparrows with the strikingly white outer tail feathers were seen/day in the south and especially the southwest corner. Their pleasant songs were duly noted.



Vesper and Clay-colored Sparrow (Simon Cox)

Lark Sparrow *Chondestes grammacus*: One bird near the Shilo plains eventually showed well for us. A very striking sparrow indeed.

Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis*: A common bird of pastures and hayfields in the south and wet, grassy tundra at Churchill. The distinct yellowish line over the eyes and yellowish lores were especially evident at Churchill where many were closely seen.

Baird's Sparrow *Ammodramus bairdii*: Terrific up close views of this lovely grassland sparrow were achieved on the Lyleton prairie much to our delight. This was a top five bird for many of the group.

Grasshopper Sparrow *Ammodramus savannarum*: Three were heard including two seen on the Lyleton prairie. The very high pitched and rapid song was not easily heard by some. This subspecies is referable to *A. s. perpallidus*.

Le Conte's Sparrow *Ammodramus leconteii*: While a few were heard, including at the Douglas Marsh, these attractive wet meadow sparrows proved to be quite difficult to get on. Eventually one did show briefly at close range for some of us near Boissevain.

Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow *Ammodramus nelson*: A distant bird was heard singing briefly at St. Ambrose. However, it was not until near Boissevain when we finally got a briefly perched bird in a wet meadow site. Gareth was able to obtain a nice photo.

Red Fox Sparrow *Passerella iliaca*: Up to four/day of these very handsome sparrows were seen and/or heard at Churchill. These birds are referable to the red taiga form.

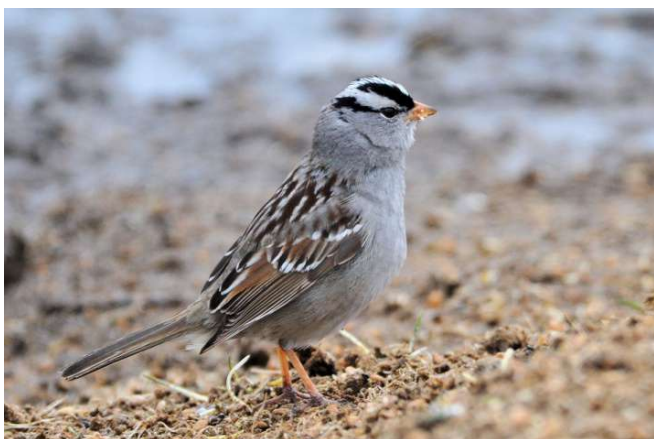
Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia*: Confined to the south where the pleasant songs of these large, heavily streaked sparrows were often heard along waterways and other wet wooded sites. An attractive sparrow.

Lincoln's Sparrow *Melospiza lincolni*: The rapid, buzzy songs of these active sparrows were infrequently heard in or near wet brushy sites at Riding Mountain. A few showed well for the group. One was also at Churchill.

Swamp Sparrow *Melospiza georgiana*: A few were seen and heard singing at Riding Mountain in their preferred wet, brushy habitat.

White-throated Sparrow *Zonotrichia albicollis*: While listening to the haunting whistling song of these large beautiful sparrows was in itself memorable for us seeing them was a delight. The white-striped morph prevalent in Riding Mountain was a trip highlight for some. The species was also occasional at Churchill.

Harris's Sparrow *Zonotrichia querula*: No trip to Churchill is complete without seeing one of these strikingly handsome sparrows, North America's largest. One was watched foraging on the ground at close range below a feeder in the Goose Creek cottage subdivision.



White-crowned Sparrow (Simon Cox)



American Tree Sparrow (Simon Cox)

White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys*: Very common at Churchill where its rather melancholy song seemed so appropriate. The majority of the birds seen were of the primary subspecies *Z. q. gambelii*.

Dark-eyed Junco *Junco hyemalis*: Seen in small numbers at Riding Mountain and Churchill. The group had great looks at some of the local summer resident birds in the Wasagaming town site.

Lapland Longspur (Lapland Bunting) *Calcarius lapponicus*: At Churchill a female was seen near the town site but it was Dave Haigh's good spotting that enabled us all to see a stunning male walking about quietly along the edge of a willow swale along the Goose Creek Road.

Chestnut-collared Longspur *Calcarius ornatus*: Up to a half dozen of these prairie jewels were seen on the Lyleton prairie one morning. Their beautiful songs and aerial displays were enjoyed by all. A few distant birds were also at the Shilo plains.

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*: In spite of the late spring and cool conditions at Churchill few of these more northern birds were seen. A small flyby flock of about 20 were noted by some of the group near Churchill while two were seen at Cape Merry.

Scarlet Tanager *Piranga olivacea* (H): Frustratingly, a distant and unresponsive male was only heard singing along the Mount Agassiz Ski Road in Riding Mountain.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus*: A female was spotted at Coulter Park south of Melita while two fly by males were near the Mount Agassiz Ski Road at Riding Mountain. These beautiful birds just did not seem to be “settled in” on territory yet.

Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea*: Up to three singing males were along the Mount Agassiz Road at Riding Mountain with one of these beauties showing well on top of a small oak tree. This was a very appreciated bird and a trip high light for some.

Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*: It was not until we birded the west side of Whitewater Lake that these attractive birds began showing – much to Gudrun’s delight. The aerial displays and busy, bubbling songs were enjoyed by all.

Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus*: This species was almost seen anywhere there was water supporting some marsh vegetation throughout the south, including road side ditches. Singing males displaying their conspicuous red wing patches were hard to miss!

Western Meadowlark *Sturnella neglecta*: These striking birds were fairly common in the south and especially the southwest corner with up to 15 seen/day. The cheery song was a memorable part of the prairie experience.



Yellow-headed Blackbird (Simon Cox)

Yellow-headed Blackbird *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*: Encountered along the large marshes such as at St. Ambroise, Delta and Whitewater Lake but not in the numbers seen in some years.

Rusty Blackbird *Euphagus carolinus*: Up to four were seen/day at Churchill with some being seen still at feeders.

Brewer’s Blackbird *Euphagus cyanocephalus*: Seen in small numbers from just outside Winnipeg to the Lyleton prairie. The most noted on any one day was 40.

Common Grackle *Quiscalus quiscula*: These birds were almost regularly seen throughout the south, generally not far from feedlots and other farm sites besides towns and villages where they prefer to nest in conifers.

Brown-headed Cowbird *Molothrus ater*: Commonly encountered in small numbers in many wooded or partially wooded sites visited including open edges within the boreal forest at Riding Mountain.

Orchard Oriole *Icterus spurius*: The best views we got of this small attractive oriole was at the farm site of Ralph and Mary Wang south of Pierson. There an adult male, first year male and a female were seen. A few were heard elsewhere.



Baltimore Oriole

(Simon Cox)

Baltimore Oriole *Icterus galbula*: St. Ambrose was the “hotspot” for this gorgeous oriole where up to at least eight were seen, some of which were evidently establishing their nesting territories. A few were also seen in the southwest corner.

Pine Grosbeak *Pinicola enucleator*: At Churchill we were treated to some great looks at these large dazzling finches both at feeders and within wooded areas such as Twin Lakes. The mature males were very impressive and added some color to the stunted taiga forest.

Purple Finch *Carpodacus purpureus*: Three were seen one morning as we walked along a quiet road in RMNP. Surprisingly, a sub adult male was seen to copulate with a female.

Common Redpoll *Carduelis flammea*: Small numbers (up to five/day) were at Churchill. The best views were of a few birds at feeders.

Hoary Redpoll (Arctic Redpoll) *Carduelis hornemanni*: No fewer than three of these always sought after birds were seen by us at Churchill. Two of these birds showed well at a feeder in the Goose Creek Sub Division and were of the nominate subspecies *C. h. exilipes*.

American Goldfinch *Carduelis tristis*: These spectacular small finches with their sweet musical songs were a favorite with the whole group. Seen daily in the south with 15-20/day.

Evening Grosbeak *Coccothraustes vespertinus*: This large attractive grosbeak was almost a heard only bird. A fly over was seen by most of us in Riding Mountain one morning.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*: Some were seen daily in the south in the vicinity of farm sites and towns. Up to 6 at Churchill where they frequented spoil piles of grain near the terminal there.

MAMMALS

Black Bear (American B B) *Ursus americanus*: No fewer than 12 of these magnificent animals were seen in Riding Mountain including a sow with three cubs. A cinnamon colored individual at Moon Lake was unique.



Black Bears in Riding Mountain National Park (Simon Cox)

Polar Bear *Ursus maritimus*: A distant sow with two cubs was seen on the pack ice of Hudson Bay near Cape Merry on our first day at Churchill.

Marten *Martes americana*: A Birdquest first, one of these agile mammals was seen crossing the Mount Agassiz Ski Road in Riding Mountain in front of the van then seen closer still as it crouched just off of the road side.

Short-tail Weasel or Ermine *Mustela ermine*: One was seen by a group member crossing a trail near the Churchill Northern Studies Centre east of Churchill.

Striped Skunk *Mephitis mephitis*: One individual was seen foraging about in a hayfield just south of St. Ambroise and was dive bombed by a Marbled Godwit. Another was seen at uncomfortably close quarters along the wooded beach ridge of the park.

Grey Wolf *Canis lupus*: One of these beautiful animals was spotted trotting along the opposite side of the Churchill River at Cape Merry one calm evening. It would periodically stop and look at us. This was definitely one of the trip's "mammal moments".

Red Fox *Vulpes fulva*: An obliging fox was seen hunting in a wet field south of Melita one rainy day before deciding our van was too close for comfort and ran off.

Harbour Seal (Common S) *Phoca vitulina*: Often seen in the Churchill River and especially at Cape Merry where they would often surface and curiously watch anyone who ventured to the water's edge.

Ringed Seal *Pusa hispida*: These seals were mainly seen resting some distance out on the Hudson Bay ice pack.

Woodchuck *Marmota monax*: A large individual was seen on a woodpile at St. Ambroise as we birded there.

Richardson's Ground Squirrel *Citellus richardsoni*: A few of these ground dwellers were on and near the hotel grounds where we stayed at Portage la Prairie. A few were also noted on the Lyleton prairie.

Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel *Citellus tridecemlineatus*: Generally not seen well by the group as they would scurry across the roads ahead of the van.

Franklin's Ground Squirrel *Citellus franklini*: One showed well at St. Ambroise while another was near Lyleton.

Least Chipmunk *Eutamias minimus*: One was near the Shilo plains at a wooded location while another very obliging individual was seen at Riding Mountain on a boulder.

Eastern Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*: One was seen at Coulter Park south of Melita.

Red Squirrel (American Red S) *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*: Seen or heard almost daily in a variety of habitats throughout the tour. Most easily seen and encountered at Riding Mountain.

Beaver (American B) *Castor canadensis*: At least two animals were heard "tail slapping" the water at close range along highway #10 in Riding Mountain with at least one of them seen by some of the group. Evidence of their presence within the park was everywhere in the form a small dams, felled trees and stick lodges within ponds.

Muskrat *Ondatra zibethica*: Three were seen in wetlands at different locations in the south.



Harbour Seal at Cape Merry (Simon Cox)

Arctic Hare (American Arctic H) *Lepus arcticus*: These very large hares are always impressive. One was seen crouched near a building at the Churchill Northern Studies Centre on our way to Twin Lakes one morning while another more photo friendly animal was later found near the grain terminals.

Whitetail Jackrabbit (White-tailed Jack R) *Lepus townsendi*: One of these large prairie hares was near the Sharp-tailed Grouse lek south of st. Ambroise while another was seen days later on our way to Portage la Prairie.



White-tailed Jackrabbit in "hiding" (Simon Cox)



Arctic Hare (Simon Cox)

Snowshoe Hare *Lepus americanus*: Common at Riding Mountain in areas of thick jack pine growth where up to 12/day were seen running across the road in front of the van. A few were also noted at Churchill.

Elk (Red Deer, Wapiti) *Cervus canadensis*: A cow was seen briefly at close range just off of the Mount Agassiz Ski Road in Riding Mountain.

Whitetail Deer (White-tailed D) *Odocoileus virginianus*: Seen almost daily in the south but it was in Riding Mountain where the best viewings of these graceful deer occurred along road edges.

White Whale (Beluga) *Delphinapterus leucas*: In spite of the cold spring and late Churchill River breakup at least four of these impressive and beautiful whales were seen at Cape Merry on our second last day there, including at least one calf.

AMPHIBIANS & REPTILES (The Amphibians and Reptiles of Manitoba, Preston 1982)

Canadian Toad *Bufo americanus hemiophrys*

Gray Treefrog *Hyla versicolor*

Boreal Chorus Frog *Pseudacris triseriata maculate*

Northern Leopard Frog *Rana pipiens*

Western Plains Garter Snake *Thamnophis radix haydeni*