



SAX-ZIM BOG & NORTHEAST MINNESOTA IN WINTER

January 25-29 2020

Guide: Josh Engel
Maximum group size is 7 participants

\$1595 per person based on double occupancy
\$350 single supplement

See photos and reports from previous trips here: redhillbirding.com/tripreports
To register for this trip, go to: redhillbirding.com/bookingform

Only to a birder does a long weekend away in the middle of winter to northern Minnesota seem like a good idea. But this is a classic “quality over quantity” birding experience, where diversity is low but the quality of birds is through the roof. The boreal forests in winter are home to mouth-watering birds like Great Gray Owl, Northern Hawk Owl, Bohemian Waxwing, Evening Grosbeak, Boreal Chickadee, Black-backed Woodpecker, and Spruce Grouse. The northern woods at this time of year are a real winter wonderland—snow-covered, quiet, and peaceful, the silence occasionally punctuated by a noisy flock of crossbills or the tapping of a woodpecker on a tamarack.

This trip, run by Red Hill Birding on behalf of the Maryland Ornithological Society, is designed to take in the best birding that Northeast Minnesota offers in winter. We will visit the world-famous Sax-Zim Bog, the forests of Superior National Forest, and the North Shore of Lake Superior. We will be based in a single Duluth lakefront hotel for the duration of the trip. Because of the short nature of this trip and the short day length of the northern winter, we will

be eating early breakfasts and spending full days in the field to see as many of the specialty birds as possible. If we're lucky, we may even come across a Northwoods mammal like a wolf, moose, porcupine, or pine marten.

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Day 1, Sat, Jan 25: We will meet in the early afternoon in Duluth, load up the van, and set out. With limited time on our first day, we may head up the north shore just a short distance from the city, looking for our first northern birds, like Rough-legged Hawk, Northern Shrike, Bohemian Waxwing, and perhaps Ruffed Grouse or even a Great Gray Owl. If a Gyrfalcon is being seen along the Duluth waterfront, that would be a priority as well.

Days 2-4, Sun-Tue, Jan 26-28: We will have three full days to enjoy the boreal forests of Northeast Minnesota. Our first full day will be devoted to birding Sax-Zim Bog, the area's premier birding area. It's a patchwork of private and public land, with wonderful and welcoming feeder setups and an array of highly sought-after birds. Here we will look for Sharp-tailed Grouse around their leks; Gray Jay, Black-billed Magpie, and Northern Shrike along the roadsides; Ruffed Grouse feeding in alders; White-



Great Gray Owl is one of the region's most sought-after birds (Josh Engel)

winged and Red Crossbills at the tops of tamaracks and spruces. We will make special efforts to find some of the bog's more difficult-to-find specialties, like Boreal Chickadee, Black-backed Woodpecker, Northern Goshawk, and Great Gray and Northern Hawk Owl. We will visit the various feeder setups where birders are welcome, where we are likely to find Evening and Pine Grosbeaks and will search flocks of Common Redpolls for the rarer Hoary Redpoll.

On the second day, we head northeast from Duluth to Superior National Forest, arriving around dawn to look for Spruce Grouse along the road edges. Our main targets here are three of the area's most tricky-to-find specialties: Boreal Chickadee, Black-backed Woodpecker, and the aforementioned Spruce Grouse. The forests here are quiet in winter, but we are likely to come across other birds as well, like crossbills, Pine Grosbeak, Gray Jay, and Ruffed Grouse. We will head to a nearby town for lunch, after which we will bird our way back to Duluth along the North Shore of Lake Superior. Depending on the conditions at the time, we may check towns



Boreal Chickadee is a boreal forest specialty (Josh Engel)

for Bohemian Waxwings, harbors for gulls and ducks, or the forest edge for owls and Northern Shrike.

We will have one more day to enjoy the area. This is a “wild card” day, to ensure we have a chance to go after birds that have been reported in the area. This may mean heading farther afield to look for a Northern Hawk or Boreal Owl, or returning to Sax-Zim Bog to look for Great Gray or Snowy Owl or any other of the bog’s specialty birds that we haven’t seen yet. We will also bird in Duluth’s Canal Park if there is open water,

where the hotel is located, for ducks and gulls, including perhaps Glaucous or Iceland Gull; sometimes Gyrfalcon winters on the Duluth waterfront.

Day 5, Wed, January 29: We will have one final morning of birding before our departure. Depending on what we still want to see, we may cross into Wisconsin to stop in at the local dump to search for rare gulls and along the lakefront to look for Snowy Owl. Or we may bird around the town of Duluth to add a few more birds to our trip list.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Contact and registration information

The Red Hill Birding **tour manager** for this trip is Nathan Goldberg. To sign up, each participant should complete the [booking form](http://www.redhillbirding.com/bookingform) (www.redhillbirding.com/bookingform). Once we receive the form, we will send you information about paying the trip deposit. If you have any questions before registering, please contact Josh or Nathan at info@redhillbirding.com.

Timing

The trip will begin at a 2:30pm in the lobby group’s hotel on January 25, 2020, and will end at 11am at the same location on January 29. We will let you know well ahead of the trip which hotel we will be using—we are also happy to book you an extra night if you will be arriving early or staying late. We will be birding in a single van with the guide driving. If you prefer to drive to Duluth, there is plenty of parking in the hotel parking lot.

Physical difficulty

This trip is **physically easy**. Almost all of the birding will be done from roads or other easily accessible locations. Because of the cold weather and snow cover, we will be doing little birding away from such areas and will not be taking long walks. However, even roads can be slippery to

walk on when they are icy or covered in a thin layer of snow. We may take short walks on snowy trails to get away from the road in some areas.

Pace

The **pace** of the trip is **moderate**. Because of the short day-length of the northern winter and the short duration of the trip, we will be spending full days in the field. A typical day will start with eating an early breakfast at the hotel, setting out before first light to arrive at our birding destination in the early morning, birding until lunch, eating in a local restaurant, birding for the afternoon, returning to the hotel for a break before dinner, then eating dinner in a local restaurant. We will compile our daily checklist (bound checklist provided) in the evening. Because of the cold weather, eating meals in the field is impractical. We will be staying in a single hotel for the duration of the trip.

Price

The price of the trip \$1595 and the single supplement is \$350; the trip is only open to members of the Maryland Ornithological Society. This price **includes** all meals (excluding alcoholic beverages) from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 5; all transportation and accommodation during that period; an expert Red Hill Birding guide; all park entrance fees; a bound checklist to keep track of sightings during the trip; and a donation to the MOS. It **does not include** alcoholic beverages, optional activities, snacks, laundry, tips (apart from meals), or other items of a personal nature.

A deposit of \$450 per person and the submission of the [booking form](#) will secure your place on the trip. Upon receiving your booking form, we will send you deposit details. Final payment is due by October 25, 2019. Our trips are priced with a discount for paying by check or via the apps Venmo or Zelle. We also payment by credit card with a 3.1% processing fee.

Hotels

We will be staying in one hotel for the duration of the trip. It will be a high-quality hotel on the Lake Superior shore in Duluth that has wireless internet and a decent breakfast.

Photography

The **photographic opportunities** are **very good**. The birds here tend to be fairly tame and photographable, including owls. We will be visiting several feeder setups that offer excellent photo opportunities. That said, this is primarily a birdwatching tour, so while there will be ample opportunities for photography along the way, we will not be making special considerations for photographers. We will not be using mice to “bait” owls for better photos.

Weather

Northeast Minnesota in winter is cold. Very cold. Average temperatures for Duluth at this time of year are 5°-24°F and are even colder inland, where we will be spending time birding. In the areas where we will be birding, expect early morning temperatures (and sometimes daytime

highs) below 0°F. The ground will be covered in snow and we can expect snow to fall during the trip. We will never be far from the vehicle, so you can always get into the vehicle to warm up.

Packing considerations

You will generally want to wear **very warm clothing in layers**. A heavy jacket, warm gloves or mittens, a winter hat, scarf, heavy socks, and winter boots are essential. Layers are very helpful in case the daytime temperatures are much higher than the early morning temps. In the evenings we will be eating in delicious local restaurants where the dress is entirely casual.

In terms of gear, apart from the usual binoculars, field guide, warm weather clothing, etc., most people will appreciate having hand warmers to put inside their gloves or mittens and foot warmers for their boots. Most people appreciate having a camera along. A reusable water bottle and, for some people, a travel coffee mug, are useful to have along in the car during the day. Some people may appreciate having a trekking pole to help with walking if the roads or trails are icy or uneven. We are unlikely to be birding in the dark.

Tipping

We aim to provide **exceptional service**, using guides that are knowledgeable, interesting, personable, and experienced. While tipping is never expected, if you feel that your guides went above and beyond, you are welcome to leave them a gratuity. Tips at restaurants are included in the cost of the tour.

Travel insurance

We do not require travel insurance for trips in the US. However, we highly recommend buying it as it is relatively inexpensive and can protect you from unforeseen costs associated with missed, delayed, or canceled flights, sudden illness, medical evacuation, damaged equipment, or other unexpected issues. Red Hill Birding is not responsible for such costs, as laid out in our [Terms & Conditions](#). Note that in some circumstances, such as if you have preexisting medical conditions, travel insurance must be purchased within 1-2 weeks of paying the trip deposit.

