

WILDSIDE NATURE TOURS
Greg Miller Big Year Series: WINTER OWLS
February 7–12, 2017
Guide: Tom Reed

WATERFOWL

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) – We encountered two rather resilient, long-staying individuals at the Grand Marais harbor on 10 Feb.

AMERICAN BLACK DUCK (*Anas rubripes*) – Our sole observation of this handsome species consisted of 10 near the lift bridge at Canal Park, Duluth on 10 Feb.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – We encountered multiple individuals at Canal Park, Duluth on 7 Feb and 12 Feb, plus two at the Grand Marais harbor on 10 Feb.

LONG-TAILED DUCK (*Clangula hyemalis*) – It was a delight to see a raft of ten at Two Harbors on 9 Feb, with a nice mix of males and females. This snazzy seaduck is always a crowd-pleaser.

COMMON GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala clangula*) – Our first encounter with this hardy diving duck occurred at the Grand Marais harbor 10 Feb, and we then enjoyed close views of a couple hundred at Canal Park, Duluth on 12 Feb.

COMMON MERGANSER (*Mergus merganser*) – A small congregation on Lake Superior made for a lovely study during our visit to Canal Park on 12 Feb.

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*) – A group of 60+ greeted us at Two Harbors on 9 Feb, with a few smart adult males in the mix.

GROUSE, QUAIL, and ALLIES

RUFFED GROUSE (*Bonasa umbellus*) – Good looks were had at multiple individuals in Sax-Zim Bog on 8 Feb and 11 Feb.

SPRUCE GROUSE (*Falcipennis canadensis*) – A male in the middle of Highway 2 stopped us in our tracks during an exploration of Lake County on 9 Feb. This was a top highlight for the whole tour!

SHARP-TAILED GROUSE (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*) – After coming up empty on two tries, we finally connected with a boisterous group of 8 that showed very well at Sax-Zim Bog on 11 Feb.

WILD TURKEY (*Meleagris gallopavo*) – Eagle-eyed Susan spotted our only Turkey of the trip as we drove into Two Harbors on 10 Feb.

DIURNAL RAPTORS

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*) – Uncommon in winter, we chanced upon a hatch-year bird being chased by American Crows at the Duluth wastewater treatment plant on 12 Feb.

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – Encountered on most days, particularly when closer to Lake Superior, with a majority of individuals being adults.

ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK (*Buteo lagopus*) – We were pleased to see a light-type bird at Sax-Zim Bog on 8 Feb and 11 Feb, as well as a stunning dark-type at Superior, Wisconsin on 12 Feb.

GULLS

HERRING GULL (*Larus argentatus*) – Seen every day we were along the Lake Superior shore, with a vast majority at Canal Park, Duluth.

THAYER'S GULL (*Larus thayeri*) – After some patience and effort, we were finally rewarded with close views of an adult at Canal Park, Duluth on 12 Feb.

GLAUCOUS GULL (*Larus hyperboreus*) – A guide-only bird, as an immature was seen briefly and at a distance at Canal Park, Duluth on 12 Feb. Gulls were not always kind to us on this trip!

PIGEONS and DOVES

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Encountered sparingly, with a few flocks in towns/cities such as Duluth, Two Harbors, and Grand Marais.

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*) – Just one for the whole tour, sitting in a Superior, Wisconsin front yard on 10 Feb.

OWLS

SNOWY OWL (*Bubo scandiacus*) – Superior, Wisconsin typically hosts at least a few each winter, and we were happy to see one there on 7 Feb and two on 10 Feb. A highly coveted life bird for Janet!

GREAT GRAY OWL (*Strix nebulosa*) – A primary target, we enjoyed superb looks and photo opps at Sax-Zim Bog on 8 Feb, before more Great Gray Fun in the Two Harbors area 9 Feb and 11 Feb.

WOODPECKERS

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes carolinus*) – Not guaranteed in winter, it was nice to see one at Grand Marais on 10 Feb.

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*) – Found most days, and in a variety of habitats.

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*) – Also found most days, and also in a variety of habitats. We enjoyed some rather nice looks at Sax-Zim Bog.

BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKER (*Picoides arcticus*) – A female put on quite the show for us in Superior National Forest, during our visit to Lake County on 10 Feb.

PILEATED WOODPECKER (*Dryocopus pileatus*) – We heard several, especially along the North Shore, but only caught a brief glimpse of one in flight while driving.

FALCONS

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – There were a few fleeting glimpses in the Duluth area early on, followed by an extended view of an adult flying with a Bald Eagle over Canal Park on 12 Feb.

SHRIKES

NORTHERN SHRIKE (*Lanius excubitor*) – All of our encounters with this fascinating species occurred in Sax-Zim Bog, with multiple individuals seen on 8 Feb and 11 Feb.

JAYS, MAGPIES, CROWS, and RAVENS

GRAY JAY (*Perisoreus canadensis*) – Many great looks at Sax-Zim Bog on 8 Feb and 11 Feb.

BLUE JAY (*Cyanocitta cristata*) – Seen in small numbers most days, most often around bird feeders. Probably more Gray Jays than Blue Jays on this tour!

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE (*Pica hudsonia*) – Present in relatively small numbers at Sax-Zim Bog, where we eventually lucked into a brief view of one on 11 Feb.

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Perhaps the only species encountered on every single day of the tour.

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*) – Encountered with regularity and in numbers, especially along the North Shore where we easily saw 100+ on 10 Feb. The largest groups were found feeding on deer carcasses.

CHICKADEES

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE (*Poecile atricapillus*) – Widespread and numerous, especially at Sax-Zim Bog and Superior National Forest. We saw well over 100 at the Bog on 8 Feb without even trying!

BOREAL CHICKADEE (*Poecile hudsonicus*) – Another primary target, we tried hard but missed them in Superior National Forest, only to be redeemed with wonderful views of two at Sax-Zim Bog on 11 Feb. A very special life bird for Susan!

NUTHATCHES

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*) – We were pleased to find this spunky nuthatch at various feeding stations throughout our time in northeast Minnesota.

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta carolinensis*) – Scarcer than Red-breasted, we had just a couple brief encounters with this species.

THRUSHES

TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE (*Myadestes townsendi*) – This species is a rare but just about annual winterer along the North Shore, and it was nice to connect with a long-staying individual at Two Harbors on 9 Feb.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*) – Regular along the Lake Superior shoreline in small numbers during winter, we came across a few at Two Harbors on 9 Feb, Grand Marais on 10 Feb, and Duluth on 12 Feb.

STARLINGS

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Regular in towns and at feeding stations throughout, with a fairly impressive 1000+ at the Duluth wastewater treatment plant on 12 Feb.

WAXWINGS

BOHEMIAN WAXWING (*Bombycilla garrulus*) – Yet another main target, we enjoyed a few along the North Shore on 10 Feb, and then saw a flock of ca. 60 fly over at Sax-Zim Bog on 11 Feb.

LONGSPURS and SNOW BUNTINGS

SNOW BUNTING (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) – A flock of 15 along railroad tracks at Sax-Zim Bog were a beautiful sight and a pleasant surprise during our exploration there on 8 Feb.

SPARROWS and other EMBERIZIDS

DARK-EYED JUNCO (*Junco hyemalis*) – Scarce in winter, we found a couple of long-staying individuals wintering at Grand Marais on 10 Feb.

CARDINALS, GROSBEAKS, and ALLIES

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – Another surprisingly difficult species to locate in midwinter! We briefly encountered a male at Grand Marais on 10 Feb.

BLACKBIRDS

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – Rare in winter, we saw a long-staying male at the Duluth wastewater treatment plant on 12 Feb.

COMMON GRACKLE (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – Continuing the theme, this species is *also* rare in winter. We saw a single bird at Grand Marais on 10 Feb.

FINCHES and ALLIES

PINE GROSBEAK (*Pinicola enucleator*) – Delightfully common and widespread during our visit, we found this species almost every day, and enjoyed some spectacular views of hot-pink males at Sax-Zim Bog on 8 Feb.

PURPLE FINCH (*Haemorhous purpureus*) – We saw a few, including a bright adult male, at Grand Marais on 10 Feb.

WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL (*Loxia leucoptera*) – Sax-Zim Bog offered up a flock of 15 on 8 Feb, and we were able to enjoy scope-filling views in good light. A definite highlight!

COMMON REDPOLL (*Acanthis flammea*) – We came across a few scattered flocks, mostly at Sax-Zim Bog, where the Visitor Center provided us with point-blank looks on 8 Feb and 11 Feb.

PINE SISKIN (*Spinus pinus*) – These noisy, energetic finches are always a ton of fun to cross paths with, and we enjoyed prolonged encounters at Grand Marais on 10 Feb and at Sax-Zim Bog on 11 Feb.

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*Spinus tristis*) – Not numerous, but a few were at feeding stations in Sax-Zim Bog and Grand Marais.

EVENING GROSBEAK (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*) – The famous “Mary Lou’s” feeding station in Sax-Zim Bog hosted a flock of 30 on 8 Feb, with a fair proportion of flashy adult males.

OLD WORLD SPARROWS

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Seen in small numbers around urban centers and at feeding stations most days.

EURASIAN TREE SPARROW (*Passer montanus*) – A regional rarity, one was spending the winter with a flock of House Sparrows at Two Harbors. It took a few tries, but we eventually connected with this pretty passerine near “Do North Pizza” on 11 Feb.