

Wise Birding Holidays

Bird and mammal watching tours



MINNESOTA: Canada Lynx & Owls

Sunday 25th February - Tuesday 6th March 2018

7 Wise Birding Clients

Leaders: Chris Townend / Andy Stanbury, David Johnson and Clinton Niehaus

HIGHLIGHTS OF TRIP

Canada Lynx: Exceptional views of at least 3 different animals with over 6 hours of viewing! - See checklist.

Bobcat: An unexpected sighting near Cotton as we left Sax Zim Bog. An animal crossed the road in front of us all and disappeared into the woodland.

Great Grey Owl: Two birds this year. One en route from Thunder Bay to Grand Marais and the other gave exceptional views at Sax Zim Bog as it caught a vole just metres from us. Quite incredible views!

Boreal Owl: Certainly a good owl year and great to see this bird near Sax Zim Bog as it sat perched in a tree close to the road giving great scope views.

Northern Flying Squirrel: Great views again this year with two animals seen at Gunflint Lodge bird feeders by torchlight.

Moose: Three animals on the Gunflint Trail on evening was a welcome sight particularly after the recent decline in numbers in the region.



The undoubted highlight of the tour was seeing at least 3 different Canada Lynx for a number of hours! (Photo by Andy Stanbury)

SUMMARY

The Superior National Forest in Minnesota has long been known as an area with a good population of Canada Lynx (sometimes referred to as Canadian Lynx). However, actually seeing the "Ghost of the Forest" is a big challenge and one that needs perseverance! This tour had a clear focus to maximise time in the field at a time of year when the Lynx mating season has just started, males regularly patrol territories and animals can be very vocal.

This was the third year in a row that Wise Birding Holidays have been running tours to see Canada Lynx in Minnesota and like the previous two tours it was successful. However, it is fair to say that this tour was exceptional for the number of sightings and the length of time spent watching Lynx!

In addition to Lynx, we saw another 10 mammals including Bobcat, Moose, American Marten, Stoat and Northern Flying Squirrel. Fisher was also recorded but sadly only on our trail camera!

The tour also coincided with a good owl year and we were very lucky to see four species of owl. Great Grey Owl and Snowy Owl are always targets species but Northern Hawk Owl and Boreal Owl are less predictable. Other bird highlights included Harlequin Duck, Bufflehead, Bald Eagle, three species of grouse, Black-backed Woodpecker, Pine Grosbeak and Evening Grosbeak!

This year we were also lucky with the weather as we hit it just right with slightly warmer temperatures allowing us to be out in the field for longer periods of time. The success of this tour certainly benefited from what had been learned from the 2016 and 2017 Wise Birding Tours to Minnesota (Trip Reports [HERE](#)). More importantly, the invaluable assistance and expert knowledge from our local guide, David Johnson is always crucial to success.

Sunday 25th February: Arrival

Most of the group arrived into the quiet airport at Thunder Bay on an early evening flight from Toronto followed by a very short transfer to our hotel.

Monday 26th February: Thunder Bay to Grand Marais

Daytime temp. +2 to -7 degrees C

A short journey time of around 90 minutes to Grand Marais with a surprise Great Grey Owl en route thanks to Colleen. Lunch at Grand Marais and a quick check of the harbour before meeting the rest of the group at our comfortable accommodation on the shores of Lake Superior.

We spent the afternoon with our local guide David who led us around the back roads of the Gunflint Trail and the Superior National Forest.

Tuesday 27th February: Gunflint Trail

Daytime temp. +5 to -7 degrees C

The whole day was spent around the Gunflint Trail. The clear highlight were two different Canada Lynx sightings, including an animal for over 2 hours! See checklist notes. Birds included Red-breasted Nuthatch, Black-capped Chickadee, Grey and Blue Jays and Ruffed Grouse for some of the group.

Wednesday 28th February: Gunflint Trail

Daytime temp. +3 to -11 degrees C

Another full day around the Gunflint Trail and associated back roads. Birds included Red-breasted Nuthatch, Black-capped Chickadee, Grey Jay, Blue Jay, Pileated Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker and Spruce Grouse. No Lynx today but a brief American Marten was the mammal highlight.

Thursday 1st March

Daytime temp. -6 to 0 degrees C

Full day around the Gunflint Trail and associated back roads. An incredible three different Lynx sightings today, including an animal watched for over 3 hours! See checklist notes. A visit to the Gunflint Lodge during the early evening produced the hoped for Northern Flying Squirrel and three Moose en route were a real bonus.

Friday 2nd March

Daytime temp. -19 to +1 degrees C

An early visit to Gunflint Lodge and a much colder morning! Pine Grosbeaks, Common Redpoll and Arctic Redpoll were the bird highlights. Two separate Lynx sightings were the clear mammal highlight - See checklist notes. A Stoat was also new for the mammal trip list.

Saturday 3rd March

Daytime temp. -6 to +2 degrees C

An early morning check of the usual roads produced a couple of brief Lynx sightings - See checklist notes. A Ruffed Grouse was flushed from the road.

We then headed SW along Lake Superior to Duluth where we met our local bird guide Clinton. Highlights during the afternoon were a female Harlequin Duck at Two Harbours and a grand finale of no less than four Snowy Owls!

Sunday 4th March

Daytime temp. +1 to 0 degrees C

A full day exploring Sax Zim Bog produced some exceptional birding. Highlights included a Great Grey Owl catching a vole just metres from us, Northern Hawk Owl, Boreal Owl, Rough-legged Buzzard, Black-backed Woodpecker, a small group of "dancing" Sharp-tailed grouse and a flock of Evening Grosbeak! The clear mammal highlight was a Bobcat strolling across the road in front of us and a Common Muskrat narrowly avoiding the talons of a Great Grey Owl!

Monday 5th March

Daytime temp. -6 to -2 degrees C

A final day exploring the Gunflint Trail on our first windy day of the tour. No new birds and no Lynx, but a Grey Fox was a surprise find after lunch whilst on the Gunflint Trail road.

Tuesday 6th March

Daytime temp. -2 to +2 degrees C

A visit to Grand Marais harbour and some of the garden feeders produced a number of new birds for the trip. Highlights included Bufflehead, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Dark-eyed Junco and a Common Grackle.

We then took the short journey to Thunder Bay where the tour ended.

Conservation Donation: Following this tour to Minnesota a donation of £180 (\$250) was donated to Sax Zim Bog Acres for Owls Project.

This is a Land Preservation Project which go directly to bog land purchase within the Sax-Zim Bog Important Bird Area (IBA).

The mix of spongy peat land and spruce forest that make up the Sax-Zim Bog in northern Minnesota is one of the most important birding sites in North America. You can find out more about Sax Zim Bog on the following link:

www.saxzim.org



One of our first views of a Canada Lynx (Andy Stanbury)



This Great Grey Owl at Sax Zim Bog performed incredibly well





**One of four Snowy Owls seen on one evening
In flight by Andy Stanbury**





Northern Hawk Owl (above) and Boreal Owl (below)





Male Pine Grosbeak (above) and male Spruce Grouse (below)





Rough-legged Buzzard (above) and Arctic Redpoll (below)





The hunting Great Grey Owl caught a vole just metres from us all!





Evening Grosbeaks at Mary Lou's feeders, Sax Zim Bog





**Two quality Cats!
Bobcat (Cheryl Antonucci) and Canada Lynx**





**Northern Flying Squirrel (above) and American Red Squirrel (below)
By Cheryl Antonucci**





**Moose (above) and Common Muskrat (below)
By Cheryl Antonucci and Andy Stanbury**





Snowshoe Hare (above) and Stoat (below)





The Canada Lynx views this year were exceptional!





More Canada Lynx! Bottom photo by Andy Stanbury





Male Black-backed Woodpecker (above) and Great Grey Owl (below)





Watching Lynx! (above) and sunset over the Gunflint Trail (below)





Wolf tracks (above) and Snowshoe Hare tracks (below)





Red-breasted Nuthatch (above) and Black-capped Chickadee (below)





Common Grackle (above) and another Canada Lynx! (below)





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More photos from our tours can be viewed on our Flickr site:
www.flickr.com/photos/129663578@N06/albums

MINNESOTA: Wise Birding Holidays Bird and Mammal Checklist for 25th Feb - 6th March 2018

This bird checklist follows the nomenclature and classification from HBW and BirdLife International Illustrated Checklist of the Birds of the World and the associated online resource HBW Alive.

#	Common Name	Scientific Name	#	Species Notes
1	Ruffed Grouse	<i>Bonasa umbellus</i>	1	Two birds were seen on backroads on the 27th Feb by some of the group and a single bird on the Gunflint Trail early on 3rd March.
2	Spruce Grouse	<i>Falcipennis canadensis</i>	2	A cracking male posed in the sunshine on a low branch of a tree on the morning of the 28th Feb.
3	Sharp-tailed Grouse	<i>Tympanuchus phasianellus</i>	3	Great to see a group of 7 birds at Sax Zim Bog some of which were performing their dancing displays.
4	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	4	Two birds were present in Grand Marais harbour on our last morning. One bird seemed smaller reminiscent of a Cackling-type but possibly an intermediate.
5	Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	5	A small group passed Grand Marais harbour wall on the 26th Feb.
6	Bufflehead	<i>Bucephala albeola</i>	6	A female/immature bird was seen in the harbour at Grand Marais on our last morning.
7	Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	7	Small groups recorded on three days. Twice in Grand Marais harbour and once at Two Harbours with the Harlequin Duck.
8	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	8	A single bird along the shore of Lake Superior whilst travelling to Two Harbours on the 3rd March.
9	Harlequin Duck	<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>	9	Great to see this uncommon and highly sought after duck. A female showed very well at Two Harbours on the 3rd March.
10	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	10	A couple of birds seen along the shore of Lake Superior on the 3rd March.
11	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	11	Recorded around Duluth on the 3rd March.
12	Arctic Herring Gull	<i>Larus smithsonianus</i>	12	The commonest gull species recorded on three days around the shores of Lake Superior.
13	Northern Hawk-owl	<i>Surnia ulula</i>	13	Great to see perched and in flight around the Sax Zim Bog complex on the 3rd March.
14	Boreal Owl	<i>Aegolius funereus</i>	14	Excellent scope views of a perched bird on the edge of the Sax Zim Bog complex on the 3rd March.
15	Great Grey Owl	<i>Strix nebulosa</i>	15	A surprise find beside the road whilst travelling from Thunder Bay to Grand Marais on the 26th Feb. thanks to Colleen. We were also treated to incredible views at Sax Zim Bog on the 3rd March as a bird caught a vole just a few meters from us all!
16	Snowy Owl	<i>Bubo scandiacus</i>	16	A total of four different birds seen around Duluth / Winsonsin on the evening of the 3rd March. All birds were 1st year females and wing-tagged. Green tags with white numbers 48, 54, 55 and 59.
17	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	17	A single bird was seen on the 4th March whilst travelling.
18	Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	18	Some great views with birds recorded on the 26th Feb at Grand Marais and again on the 3rd and 4th March around Sax Zim Bog.
19	Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	19	A single bird seen near Thunder Bay on the 26th Feb.
20	Rough-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>	20	Nice views of a soaring bird around the Sax Zim Bog complex on the 4th March.
21	Pileated Woodpecker	<i>Hylatomus pileatus</i>	21	Seen in flight whilst patrolling for Lynx on the 28th Feb and again on the 3rd March whilst travelling to Duluth.
22	Red-bellied Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes carolinus</i>	22	A surprise find at Grand Marais on our last morning and unusual for the region during the winter.
23	Black-backed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides arcticus</i>	23	Superb views of a male searching for food amongst the pines at Sax Zim Bog on the 4th March.
24	Downy Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates pubescens</i>	24	Recorded on the 28th Feb and 4th March. Best views at Sax Zim Bog in close proximity to its larger cousin the Hairy Woodpecker.
25	Hairy Woodpecker	<i>Leuconotopicus villosus</i>	25	Recorded on three days during the tour with sightings from both the Gunflint Trail and Sax Zim Bog.
26	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	26	A single bird seen whilst travelling to Duluth on the 3rd March.
27	Black-capped Chickadee	<i>Poecile atricapillus</i>	27	A very common species recorded daily.
28	Red-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta canadensis</i>	28	A very common species recorded daily.
29	Northern Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius borealis</i>	29	Two birds seen around Sax Zim Bog on the 4th March. This was previously lumped with Great Grey Shrike <i>L. excubitor</i> but is now considered a full species under HBW taxonomy.
30	Blue Jay	<i>Cyanocitta cristata</i>	30	A very common but nonetheless beautiful species recorded daily.
31	Grey Jay	<i>Perisoreus canadensis</i>	31	A speciality of the region and seen very well. Recorded on four days.
32	Black-billed Magpie	<i>Pica hudsonia</i>	32	A single bird seen whilst travelling around the Sax Zim Bog complex on the 4th March.
33	American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	33	Small numbers recorded on three days with sightings from Thnder Bay and Sax Zim Bog.
34	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	34	Counts of 1-3 birds on three days with sightings from the Gunflint Trail and Sax Zim Bog.
35	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	35	This introduced species was recorded around Duluth on the 3rd March.
36	Common Redpoll	<i>Carduelis flammea</i>	36	Small groups on three days around the Gunflint Trail and Sax Zim Bog mostly at bird feeders. Max. count of 30+ birds at Sax Zim Bog.
37	Arctic Redpoll	<i>Carduelis hornemanni</i>	37	A single bird in a flock of around 20+ Common Redpolls gave excellent views at the feeders at Gunflint Lodge on the 2nd March.
38	Pine Grosbeak	<i>Pinicola enucleator</i>	38	Smaller numbers this year but great views of males & females. Counts of 4+ birds at the Gunflint Lodge feeders on the 2nd and a single male at Mary Lou's feeders at Sax Zim Bog on the 4th March.
39	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	39	Some excellent views of 2 birds on different days collecting grit from the road around the Gunflint Trail on the 27th Feb. and 1st March. Also heard only on the 26th Feb.
40	Evening Grosbeak	<i>Hesperiphona vespertina</i>	40	Excellent views of males and females at Mary Lou's feeders at Sax Zim Bog on the 4th March with a max. count of 25+ birds.

#	Common Name	Scientific Name	#	Species Notes
41	Dark-eyed Junco	<i>Junco hyemalis</i>	41	A single bird around Grand Marais bird feeders on our last morning showed very well.
42	Common Grackle	<i>Quiscalus quiscula</i>	42	Another surprise find in Grand Marais on our last morning and was an unusual record for the winter.
# MAMMALS				
1	Snowshoe Hare	<i>Lepus americanus</i>	1	Some excellent views this year with at least a couple of animals sitting stationary beside the road allowing prolonged views. Recorded on at least four days.
2	Common Muskrat	<i>Ondatra zibethicus</i>	2	An animal narrowly escaped being hunted by a Great Grey Owl at Sax Zim Bog on the 4th March!
3	Northern Flying Squirrel	<i>Glaucomys sabrinus</i>	3	Two animals watched at the Gunflint Lodge bird feeders on the 1st March just before 9pm. Seen very well in torchlight at close range and seen flying too!
4	American Red Squirrel	<i>Tamiasciurus hudsonicus</i>	4	Great views most often at bird feeders or dashing across the road. Recorded on at least six days.
5	Bobcat	<i>Lynx rufus</i>	5	A great spot by Andy of an animal beside the road near Cotton on the afternoon of the 4th March. It then proceeded to cross the road in front of both our vehicles and into the brush the other side.
6	Canada Lynx	<i>Lynx canadensis</i>	6	Simply incredible views of at least three different cats with a combined viewing time of over six hours!! Sighting 1: Male Seen on the morning of the 27th Feb at 07.34hrs briefly in forest and then walking along the road. Later watched feeding on a carcass from 08.30 - 09.30hrs. Sighting 2: Male Watched in the forest feeding and resting from 14.30hrs - 16.45hrs on the afternoon of 27th Feb. Sighting 3: Male Seen close to road at 07.20hrs on 1st March for 10 minutes and confirmed as same animal as sighting 1. Sighting 4: Unsexed Crossed road briefly during mid afternoon on 1st March near sighting earlier in morning. Sighting 5: Male Watched in the forest feeding & resting from 14.00hrs - 17.00hrs and left in situ on 2nd March. Presumed the same animal as during sighting 2. Sighting 6: Male Notably smaller & presumably a young male seen feeding close to road for 10 minutes from 17.30hrs on 2nd March. Sighting 7: Unsexed Seen briefly by Andy's vehicle early on the 3rd March before 07.00hrs. Sighting 8: Unsexed Seen by Chris whilst walking to trail camera at 07.30hrs on 3rd March.
7	Grey Fox	<i>Urocyon cinereoargenteus</i>	7	A single animal on the side of the Gunflint Trail whilst travelling back from the Trail Centre on the afternoon of the 5th March.
8	American Marten	<i>Martes americana</i>	8	A brief sighting by Chris and Linden as an animal crossed the road near the Gunflint Trail on the morning of the 28th February.
9	Fisher	<i>Martes pennanti</i>	9	Sadly, the only sighting was from a trail camera . An animal visited a feeding station between 01.10hrs and 2.20hrs on the 5th March.
10	Stoat (Ermine)	<i>Mustela erminea</i>	10	Some excellent views of a beautiful animal complete with winter coat on the 2nd and 5th March.
11	Moose	<i>Alces americanus</i>	11	Numbers have recently declined in the region, so to see three animals on the Gunflint Trail on the evening of the 1st March was a real treat thanks to Justin's sharp eyes.
12	White-tailed Deer	<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>	12	Small numbers recorded on at least five days mostly close to the main road and around Sax Zim Bog.

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