

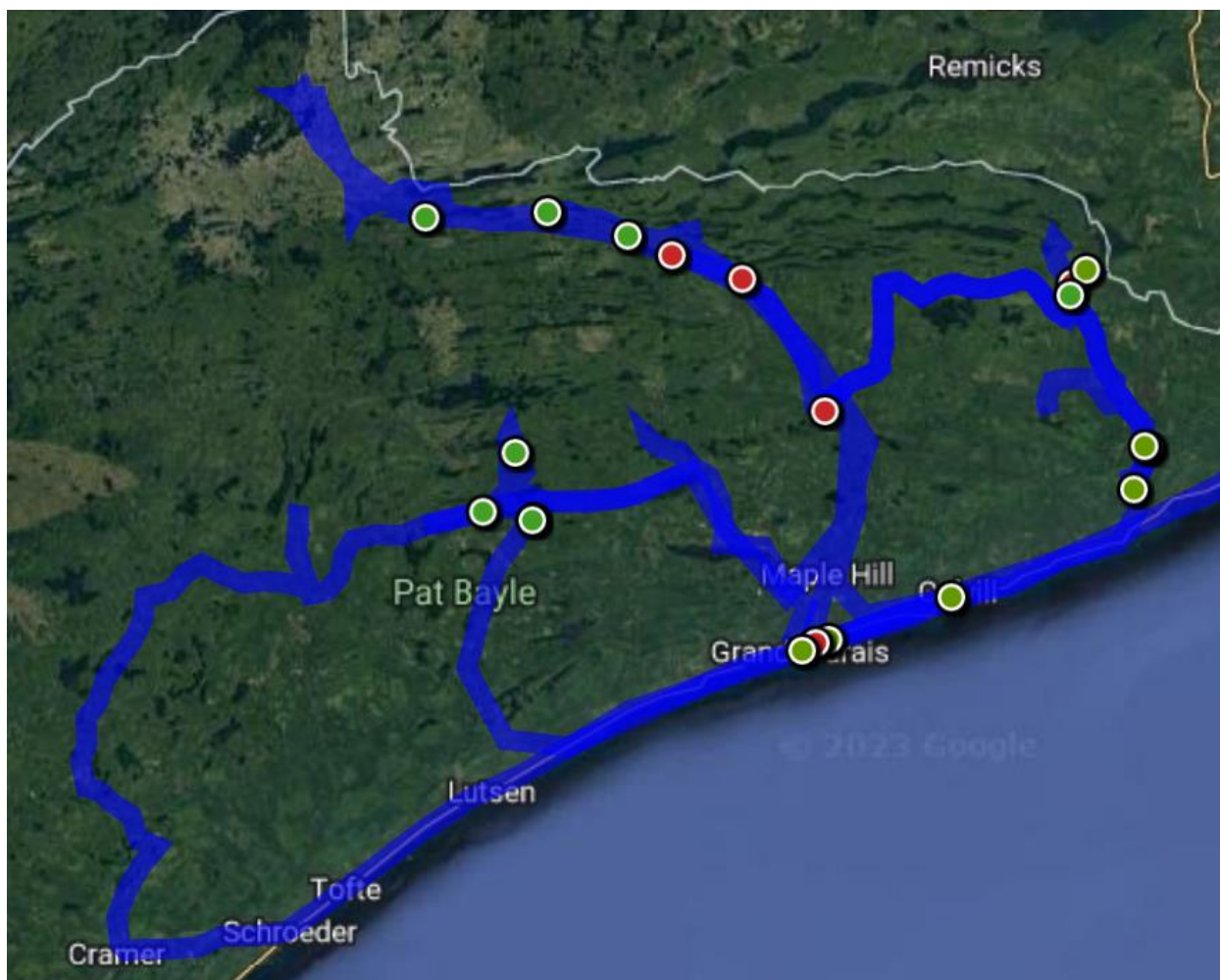
Minnesota

The Gunflint Trail and Sax-Zim Bog

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January 11th through 20th 2024

At the last minute we had some time free time, so we decided to drive up to northern Minnesota. We ended up spending 5 nights at the Outpost Motel outside Grand Marais and an additional 4 nights at the Holiday Inn Express in Superior WI to commute to Sax-Zim Bog. We chose our locations mainly based on cost. The Outpost was significantly cheaper than the options we found up the Gunflint Trail and we have Holiday Inn points. The long commute every day did get a bit old.



The Gunflint Trail was much like many others described, endless hours of driving day and night with little to show for it. The forest was snow-covered and beautiful. I didn't find anything with the thermal scope, even after hours of looking. Maybe we were driving too fast. Unlike most other trip reports, we did not find a Lynx at the last second. The only mammals we saw were four White-tailed Deer and six Red Foxes.

One of the Red Foxes had a Snowshoe Hare in its mouth. We did see a lot of tracks, but no obvious Lynx tracks. We did see Moose, Red Fox, Wolf, and Squirrel tracks. We only saw two sets of Snowshoe Hare tracks, which may partly explain the lack of luck with Lynx. We drove a lot of different roads trying to find tracks to narrow in on an area. Even bird numbers were low. We normally only had 4 or so bird sightings a day. Pine Grosbeak, Common Redpoll, American Tree Sparrow, Black-capped Chickadee, Downy Woodpecker, Ruffed Grouse, Sooty Grouse, and Ravens were basically all we saw inland. The feeders did not seem to be out at the Gunflint Lodge.



Sax-Zim Bog is a famous birding area for owls and other boreal birds. There is a lot of info online about the area as well as a Telegram group for live sighting info. Great Gray Owl was our main bird target, and we found it before sunrise the first morning. By found it, I mean drove 'til we found someone else that had found it. The bog was very busy and there were normally several cars at each sighting. One of the guides told us the typical times for mammal sightings and we headed straight to the Admiral Road feeders and an American Marten appeared within a half hour. It posed nicely and fed on peanut butter for over 20 minutes.





There were Red Squirrels and the occasional small mammals at the feeder. The only small mammal I saw well enough to ID was a Northern Short-tailed Shrew. We then headed to the Sax-Zim Bog Welcome Center, as an Ermine had been regular there. We missed it the first and second day. The third day I arrived at 8:30 am and waited until it came. It was coming to a brush pile with a deer rib cage on it. There was a North American Porcupine sleeping in sight of the road near the welcome center. White-tailed Deer were common in the evening throughout the bog.





Species List

Snowshoe Hare: One towards the northern end of Sax-Zim Bog. Two sets of tracks around the Gunflint Trail and one in a Foxes mouth.

North American Porcupine: One sleeping up a tree north of the Sax-Zim Bog Welcome Center.

Red Squirrel: Common at Admiral Road and Welcome Center feeders.

Northern Short-tailed Shrew: One at the Admiral Road feeders.

Red Fox: Six individuals widely distributed around the Gunflint Trail area.

American Marten: Three sightings of three or four individuals at the Admiral Road feeders. They were reported daily while we were there, but we only saw them the first day.

Ermine: One coming to feed on deer ribs at the Sax-Zim Bog Welcome Center.

White-tailed Deer: Two sightings along Highway 61 North of Grand Marais. Several throughout Sax-Zim Bog in the evening.



What we missed

Canada Lynx was our big miss, as well as Timber Wolf. There were Wolf sightings in both areas while we were there.