



# BIRDING THE HIGH ARCTIC & NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

**JUNE 29 – JULY 9, 2017**

This unique High Arctic birding tour, a perennial favorite, takes in three different areas; the exquisite high Arctic tundra above the Arctic Circle and far north of the tree line, the boreal forest and lakes around Yellowknife, NT, and the aspen parkland and potholes of Central Alberta. We could encounter a diverse array of birds and mammals, from King Eiders to Pacific loons, snowy owls to northern saw-whet and great gray owls (depending on food supplies), long-tailed and parasitic jaegers to Sabine's and Thayer's gulls, and muskoxen to Arctic foxes.

At Cambridge Bay on Victoria Island, Yellow-billed Loons nest on remote lakes, Red-necked and sometimes Red Phalaropes in resplendent summer plumage inhabit ponds, Tundra Swans and Sandhill Cranes enliven the tundra, stilt and Baird's sandpipers give their strange songs, and a scarce nesting species such as buff-breasted or white-rumped sandpiper may show up. The area is steeped in history and culture, from explorers searching for the Northwest Passage to the Inuit of the western Arctic. The high quality and exciting wildlife viewing make for a long-remembered tour!

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Visit three wonderfully unique and diverse ecoregions - the high Arctic, boreal forest and aspen parkland and potholes
- Amazing wildlife, from muskox to jaegers and King eiders to yellow-billed loons, amidst fascinating tundra and taiga habitats
- Great breeding bird and flower photography opportunities

## DETAILS

**Duration:** 11 days

**Tour Starts & End:** Edmonton, Alberta

**Cost:** \$6,575 CAD + 5% HJ

**Credit Card Cost:** \$6,838 CAD L' . fSj

**Single Supplement Cost:** \$750 CAD + 5% HJ

**Credit Card Single Supplement Cost:** \$780 CAD L' . fSj

**Max:** 12 adventurers



## WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Flights from Edmonton to Yellowknife and to Victoria Island plus return
- A two hour boat trip in Yellowknife Bay
- Breakfasts and lunches included
- All accommodations
- Ground transportation
- All park, conservation and entrance fees
- Gratuities
- Guides

## WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- Return flights from your home to Edmonton
- Travel Insurance
- Evening meals
- Items of a personal nature

## FEATURED BIRDS & MAMMALS:

- Yellow-billed loon
- King rider
- Sabine's gull
- Red phalarope
- Long-tailed jaeger
- Snowy owl
- Thayer's gull
- Arctic tern
- Muskox
- Arctic fox

## DETAILED ITINERARY



This is our intended itinerary. Wildlife sightings and some activities depend on favourable conditions. As with all of our adventures, weather, sea, and road conditions are a determining factor and will dictate our itinerary.

### Day 1 — Arrival and Orientation

Our High Arctic birding tour begins in the evening in Leduc, just south of Edmonton, Alberta, and close to the airport. We meet for dinner at 6:30 pm for a meet-and-greet and for a brief introduction and orientation. Night in Leduc.

### Day 2 — Elk Island National Park

We first visit several local lakes for a first introduction to species of central Alberta. Eared and Red-necked Grebes, over 12 species of waterfowl including Ruddy Duck, Black Terns, American White Pelicans, American Avocets, Franklin's Gulls, Purple Martins and Yellow-

headed Blackbirds are usually present. Swainson's and red-tailed hawks hunt over pastures that are occupied by Richardson's ground-squirrels. We then head towards Beaverhill Lake; the lake has been shrinking in size and the shorelines are now grassy fields where Mountain Bluebirds, Vesper and clay-colored sparrows and sometimes short-eared owls breed. Next we head to Elk Island National Park; over two hundred species of birds have been identified in the park. Year-round residents include hairy and pileated woodpeckers and boreal chickadees. Migrant and nesting passerines include gray catbird, red-eyed and blue-headed vireos, Le Conte's and Nelson's (sharp-tailed) sparrows, ovenbird and mourning warbler. Marshes and ponds support a diverse array of waterbirds including trumpeter swan, Forster's tern and ring-necked duck. The park is also home to forty-four different species of mammals, including wapiti (elk), moose, white-tailed deer, coyote, muskrat and porcupine. The most noticeable of the park's mammals are the two different sub-species of bison. In mid-afternoon, depending upon reports from local naturalists, we may head north of Edmonton to the edge of the boreal forest. Our target species would be boreal forest owls such as great gray and northern saw-whet owls and we have the possibility of northern goshawk. We could also add to our tally of mammals with beaver and red fox. Night in Leduc.

### **Days 3-5 — Yellowknife**

We leave Leduc, head to the airport and board our plane to Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. In the Yellowknife region we explore boreal habitats in the Great Slave Lake area, looking for

specialties such as red-necked grebe, mew and Bonaparte's gulls, rusty blackbird, sandhill crane, northern shrike and bohemian waxwing. We may encounter several boreal forest species such as Tennessee, Wilson's, Blackpoll and orange-crowned warblers, alder and olive-sided flycatchers, gray jay, western tanager, and white-crowned, white-throated, fox and Lincoln's sparrows. Lesser yellowlegs perch on the tops of trees, horned grebes are widespread, and Pacific loons nest on some of the larger lakes. A highlight, weather permitting, will be a boat ride in Yellowknife Bay, an arm of Great Slave Lake, the second largest in Canada, and up the Yellowknife River; we tour among the house boats and islands of the bay and have a chance at lake species such as surf and black scoters, osprey, bald eagle, and Arctic, caspian and common terns. Yellowknife has several interesting stores and we'll take in a couple during our stay. Nights in Yellowknife.

### **Day 6 — Flight to Cambridge Bay**

We spend the morning birding around the Yellowknife area before taking an afternoon flight to Cambridge Bay. We spend the rest of the day getting our bearings about town, noticing that the common town birds are snow buntings and Lapland longspurs—quite a change from house sparrows and starlings! Night in Cambridge Bay.

### **Days 7-10 — Cambridge Bay**

From Cambridge Bay we make daily excursions to various birding locations around town. One day we travel by vehicle on one of the few roads in the area to the base of Mount Pelly, (providing the road is passable) where we should encounter

usually common bird species such as American golden and semipalmated plovers, semipalmated, Baird's and stilt sandpipers, red-necked phalarope, long-tailed jaeger, Arctic tern, horned lark, Lapland longspur, and snow bunting. American pipits breed on the slopes of the mountain. The impressive yellow-billed loon breeds in this area so we will look for nesting pairs. We will look for groups of muskox, Arctic foxes and Arctic hares. If it is a year of high lemming numbers, then snowy owls will be nesting, as well as pomarine Jaegers; if not, then both species can be scarce.

On another day, we travel along the West Arm to Dease and Simpson Straits which overlook the Northwest Passage. Throughout the trip we hike out onto the tundra looking for signs of those famous arctic rodents: lemmings. If their numbers are high, we should see many of the predators that depend on lemming populations, such as all three species of jaegers, snowy owl and rough-legged hawk. As well, we will enjoy the abundant waterfowl, loons and shorebirds, perhaps with their broods. Greater white-fronted geese, tundra swans, King and common eiders and long-tailed ducks might have flotillas of young, Pacific loons will be on just about every medium-sized pond, and many shorebirds that may include black-bellied plover, pectoral and white-rumped sandpipers will be scattered over the tundra. Our eyes will be constantly searching the chilly frozen waters of the Northwest Passage for ringed seals hauled up on the ice.

We drive along an inlet of Dease Strait to view the remains of Roald Amundsen's ship, the

*Maud*. We also visit an ancient traditional Inuit hunting site marked by stone tent rings and seal caches on the tundra. We take a track into the interior of the island to look for nesting birds such as red phalarope, Sabine's gull and parasitic jaeger. We will experience the beautiful flora and butterflies of the tundra and revisit areas for a second try as well. Some species, such as rock ptarmigan, will require persistence, luck and patience. We also visit the town dump and sewage lagoons, where glaucous and Thayer's gulls gather and in the past we have found slaty-backed and glaucous-winged gulls. There is always the possibility of a southern vagrant; over the years we have found such unlikely species as hermit thrush and Harris's sparrow, usually close to town. We will visit the information centre, perhaps for some souvenir shopping. Nights in Cambridge Bay. On Day 10, we board our plane for Yellowknife and on to Edmonton. Last night in Leduc.

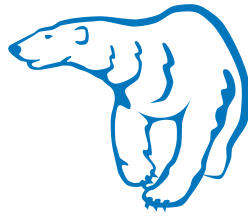
### **Day 11 – Departure**

Our High Arctic birding tour concludes today and you are depart anytime.

## WHAT TO EXPECT

Because Victoria Island has a relatively small road network, meals will be slotted in around bird activity and weather patterns. We are never more than an hour's drive from the Hotel. There will be no need for early morning risings as we will witness twenty-four hours of daylight! Bird activity often peaks at mid-day! Polar Bears are unlikely to be encountered; however we should see muskox, Arctic fox, ringed seal, Arctic hare, and lemmings. We can expect a high diversity of land and water birds during our visit to central Alberta and the Yellowknife area.

The daily itinerary on our High Arctic birding tour will be responsive to weather conditions. Driving will be limited to either small or moderate stretches. Lunch will be variable in time and location depending on the day and the level of birding. The weather can vary from a sweltering 25°C to around freezing in the day, with frequent night-time frosts. It may snow, and participants should layer their clothing as conditions can change quickly while we are in the field. Participants should include bug repellent and perhaps a head net in their luggage, as there will be some mosquitoes, especially in Yellowknife! Sturdy footwear that will keep your feet dry is recommended, as we will be doing some tundra hiking. Each evening a log-call follows the evening meal. We review the day's events, birds, mammals and other observations and look forward to the next day's activity.



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