



ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Canada

Manitoba – Northern Owls I

13th February to 19th February 2023 (7 days)



Snowy Owl by Lev Frid

Manitoba during winter may not sound much like a birding destination, but it is one of Canada's best-kept birding secrets. Every winter, sought-after northern owls – Snowy, Great Grey, Northern Hawk and Boreal Owls, emerge from their usual haunts in the depths of the woods to hunt along forest edges, roadsides and agricultural fields only a short distance from the capital city of Winnipeg. Manitoba's

location in the north means that every winter provides chances to see these birds, and in some years their numbers can be astronomical! Add this to a backdrop of flocks of colourful winter finches and a suite of boreal specialty birds and it becomes a fantastic winter escape!

Our Manitoba tour takes us through open agricultural land where we will search for Snowy Owls in addition to Snow Bunting, Lapland Longspur, Grey Partridge, Sharp-tailed Grouse and others, and seek species such as Eastern Screech Owl and Bohemian Waxwing in suburban parkland, and Bald and Golden Eagles and Northern Goshawk overhead. We will work our way northwards to the vast expanse of boreal forest, where we will look for Northern Hawk, Great Grey and Boreal Owl as well as Red and White-winged Crossbills, Common and Hoary Redpolls, Pine and Evening Grosbeaks, Pine Siskin, Spruce Grouse, Boreal Chickadee, Canada Jay and others.

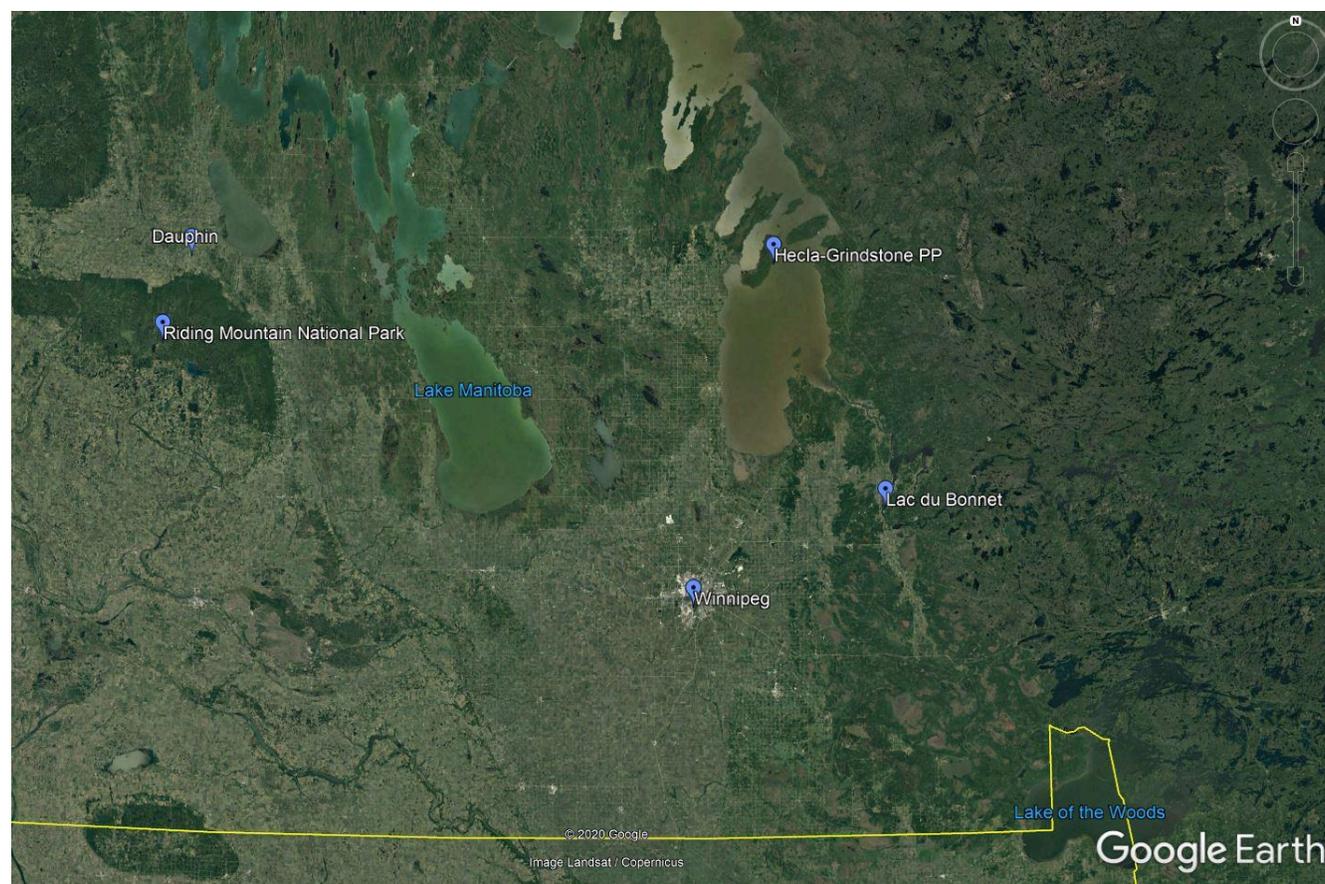
We visit two boreal forest parks – Riding Mountain National Park and Hecla-Grindstone Provincial Park, which offer unparalleled access into this landscape and its birds, as well as some excellent chances for elusive mammals - most notably Canada Lynx, as well as American Marten, North American Otter, Long-tailed Weasel, Gray Wolf, Red Fox, Moose and White-tailed Deer.

We have many chances to find our targets in a variety of locations, and we will be at the start of the breeding season for many of these birds, which will be singing and easier to find.



THE TOUR AT A GLANCE...**THE ITINERARY**

Day 1	Arrival in Winnipeg
Day 2	Lac du Bonnet and surrounds
Day 3	Oak Hammock Marsh to Hecla
Day 4	Hecla-Grindstone Provincial Park
Day 5	Hecla to Riding Mountain National Park
Day 6	Riding Mountain National Park to Winnipeg
Day 7	Final departures

TOUR ROUTE MAP...

THE TOUR IN DETAIL...

Day 1: Arrival in Winnipeg. Today is set aside as an arrival day in Winnipeg. This evening we shall meet for a welcome dinner to discuss our plans for the forthcoming days.

Day 2: Lac du Bonnet and surrounds. This morning we will head east of Winnipeg to scour the vast boreal forest for our first northern owls. We will drive along quiet backroads through spruce bogs and marshes, looking for Northern Hawk-Owl and Great Grey Owl in particular, which in some winters can be found very close to the city! Every year is different, and these boreal wanderers concentrate in different parts of the province each winter. This will be our first of many opportunities to see these fantastic birds, and both species are unafraid of humans and often offer amazing, close-up views. We will also be keeping an eye out for Two-barred and Red Crossbill, Common and Arctic Redpoll, Evening and Pine Grosbeak, Northern Shrike, Ruffed and Spruce Grouse, Bohemian Waxwing and others. If we are lucky, we may spot the mighty Gyrfalcon, as there's almost always one wintering nearby, or even a day-roosting Boreal Owl in one of Winnipeg's city parks.



Great Grey Owl by Lev Frid

Day 3: Winnipeg to Hecla-Grindstone Provincial Park via Oak Hammock Marsh. We will start the day at one of Manitoba's most famous parks, Oak Hammock Marsh. Driving slowly through a grid of marshes and agricultural fields, our target here is the incomparable Snowy Owl. In some years, these regal owls are very common, and in others less so. However, no matter the winter, there are always a few wintering in this area and our chances of encountering one are excellent. Often, we are able to find several birds, from pure white males to dark, speckled females – in some years one can see a dozen or more!



Northern Hawk Owl by Lev Frid





Boreal Owl by Lev Frid

After lunch, we will continue to Hecla-Grindstone National Park, situated in the heart of the boreal forest along the shores of Lake Winnipeg., perhaps stopping in a small town nearby to search for Bohemian Waxwings feeding on ornamental crabapples. We will go for an evening drive, seeking Great Grey and perhaps Barred Owls along the main park road, and keeping an eye out for mammals.

Day 4: Hecla-Grindstone National Park and surrounds. This park is a hotspot for both Great Grey and Northern Hawk-Owls, with both species breeding in the vast spruce bogs and poplar woods, which are bisected by a long and quiet road, which we will be spending lots of time cruising! Sometimes the owls can be found right in the hotel grounds! We will drive the road early in the morning, keeping an eye out for owls,

and boreal species such as Spruce Grouse, Pileated, Black-backed and American Three-toed Woodpeckers, Boreal Chickadee, Canada Jay, and a full suite of finches including Red and Two-barred Crossbills. Ice fishermen on the lake provide a great bounty of fish guts for numerous Bald Eagles. Spending a lot of time on the road means that some fantastic mammal-watching including a very real chance of seeing the ghost-like Canada Lynx as well as Gray Wolf, American Marten, North American Otter, North American Porcupine, Moose and White-tailed Deer. At night, we will try our first chance for the secretive and difficult Boreal Owl, which breeds in tall spruce woods.

Day 5: Hecla to Riding Mountain National Park. In the morning, we will once again be on the lookout for owls along the various roads nearby, and seeking any species we may have missed to this point. After breakfast, we may head to some nearby spruce woods to try for Black-backed and American Three-toed Woodpeckers, and begin our journey west, driving through some agricultural land where flocks of Sharp-tailed Grouse forage in the fields and the possibility of a Gyrfalcon or Snowy Owl always exists. After lunch, we will drive the main road through Riding Mountain National Park towards our hotel. This is Manitoba's keystone park – a huge section of wilderness that plays home to healthy populations of Grey Wolf, Canada Lynx, Moose, White-tailed Deer, Elk, Fisher, American Marten and others. All of the boreal bird species we have been seeking prior can be found here, and in some years Great Grey and Northern Hawk-Owls can be common. In all years, however, it is an excellent place to look for Northern Goshawk, Spruce Grouse and three-toed woodpeckers. This will be our best chance to try for the Boreal Owl, which can be common in some years in the park's vast spruce forests.



Pine Grosbeak by Lev Frid

Day 6: Riding Mountain National Park to Winnipeg. We have the full morning today to explore Riding Mountain National Park, concentrating on any species we may have missed so far. We will spend our time cruising a quiet back





Evening Grosbeak by Lev Frid

road, stopping at various good-looking stretches of habitat that we encounter. Any of the northern owls are possible here, and indeed in years when owls are absent from eastern Manitoba, they can be found here. Mammal-watching can be unparalleled, and the chance of encountering a Canada Lynx here is probably one of the best in the world. We will be keeping a sharp eye out for this pointy-eared cat on the roadside. Feeders around the small towns often provide great studies of Common and Hoary Redpoll, Pine Siskin, Evening Grosbeak and Pine Grosbeak. After lunch, we will begin our long journey to Winnipeg, potentially stopping on the way if there are any Snowy Owls in the agricultural fields west of the city.

Day 7: Final departures. This morning our tours comes to an end at Winnipeg Airport.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:

Tour dates, prices, single supplement rates, approximate flight costs and spaces available for this tour are displayed on our website. Please see under IMPORTANT NOTES below.

This includes:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on 7;
- All lodgings;
- Ground transportation;
- Extra activities mentioned in the itinerary;
- Reserve entrance fees; and
- All guiding services (including tips for local guides and services.)

The tour fee does not include:

- Visa fees;
- **ANY** flights (see above);
- Any additional beverages;
- Special gratuities; and
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

a) Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually



4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency.

b) Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient participants, a small party supplement will have to be charged.

c) Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.

d) Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and / or the designated Rockjumper leader/s at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.

Tiping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If, therefore, you feel that he/they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them.

Special notes:

- Be prepared for some long drives. While there are fantastic birds sought on this tour, they tend to be quite spread out. In order to find our targets, we must cover a lot of ground which means significant time on the road. We expect all guests to rotate seating each day to ensure fairness.
- Accommodations are good throughout, and we expect most days to return to hotel rooms by 18:00 each evening. We may spend a little time out at night on just one or two evenings after dinner, to see what we can find in nocturnal hours.
- At this time of year expect it to be cold, close to or below 0°C (32°F), and there is a good possibility of snow and/or rain. Wind can be a factor as well. Please dress appropriately.
- Strong, warm, waterproof footwear that is good in snow and ice is required. Nearly all birding is roadside but occasionally we may walk on trails just off the road. Long underwear, and wind/rain proof outer layers are recommended.

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE DETAILS:

This tour **does not** include ANY airfares. The tour will depart from Winnipeg Airport (IATA: YWG). As day 1 has been set aside as an arrival day, you are free to arrive at any time. The tour will conclude at Winnipeg Airport (IATA: YWG) on day 7 after breakfast.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your **Tour Confirmation** package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

FLIGHTS:

Winnipeg James Armstrong Richardson International Airport (IATA: YWG) is the main port of entry into Canada for this tour. **Please DO NOT book any flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**

