BLACK HILLS & BADLANDS BIRDING TOUR

South Dakota and Wyoming
May 24-30, 2024

A birding tour organized by Seven Ponds Nature Center and Rocky Mountain Birding

South Dakota’s incredible geology and scenic landscape will provide a fantastic backdrop to our week of birding the Black Hills and Badlands (and beyond!). A wide diversity of habitats awaits, from the deep canyon rivers and forested rolling topography of the Black Hills to the windswept shortgrass prairie of northwestern South Dakota; from the stark rocky landscape of the Badlands to the impressive butte called Devils Tower. These varied habitats will give us a chance to see a large variety of birds during our tour of this scenic region.

Located in the heart of the continent, this region contains some of the most scenic landscapes of the west. The rugged Black Hills span more than 8,000 square miles of undulating terrain forested with Ponderosa Pine and rocky outcrops, with bird life similar to that of mountains further west. In northeastern Wyoming, Devils Tower rises more than 800 feet from base to summit, all that remains of an ancient volcano. North of the Black Hills we’ll find a seemingly endless sprawl of shortgrass prairie, home to birds that seek the wide-open spaces that prairies provide. Dramatic and harsh, Badlands National Park is a landscape unlike any other on the continent, at once inviting and yet foreboding. Our tour will be based in Rapid City, South Dakota, which will provide a pleasant home base with all the amenities we require as well as a convenient launching point as we venture forth each day. Join us as we explore these regions and seek out the birds that make this amazing region their home.
TOUR ITINERARY

Our daily activities will be flexible based on species we’ve seen to date and recent bird reports, but the following outline provides a preliminary plan of how we will spend our days. Our plans are subject to change based on rare bird sightings, weather conditions, and road closures. Note: the birds listed are not intended to be an exhaustive list – just a sampling of what may be found at each location.

DAY 1 – Friday, May 24 – Arrival in Rapid City Plan your arrival in Rapid City by early afternoon and call for a ride to our hotel. We’ll enjoy our first dinner together; birding starts first thing tomorrow morning.

DAY 2 – Saturday, May 25 – Black Hills–Custer State Park & Wind Cave National Park We’ll kick off our birding adventure by traveling into the heart of the Black Hills. Custer State Park spans 71,000 acres and is home to a wide array of wildlife, including Bison, Elk, Mule Deer, Pronghorn, Bighorn Sheep, and Mountain Goats. The bird life is equally impressive, and here we will look for American Three-toed Woodpecker, Pinyon Jay, White-throated Swift, Red-naped Sapsucker, and Mountain Bluebird, just to name a few. Nearby Wind Cave National Park will provide additional opportunities for wildlife and birds. A visiting birder could spend several days exploring these two parks, but we’ll do our best to experience as much as possible in just one day.

DAY 3 – Sunday, May 26 – Black Hills–Spearfish Canyon This beautiful area in the northern Black Hills includes majestic waterfalls, hidden caves, steep canyons, and ponderosa pine forests. Here American Dippers nest along Spearfish Creek, Canyon Wrens seek out the rocky bluffs, and MacGillivray’s Warblers can be found in the shady undergrowth. In this area we’ll also be on the lookout for Clark’s Nutcracker, Western Tanager, Lazuli Bunting, Cordilleran Flycatcher, and many more. The Spearfish Canyon Scenic Byway is about 20 miles long and would only take about a half-hour to drive, but we’ll be traveling at birder pace, stopping often to search for birds and take in the views.

DAY 4 – Monday, May 27 – Shortgrass Prairie Birding Today we’ll venture north of the Black Hills to the shortgrass prairie. Leaving the forested hills behind, we’ll encounter a completely different slate of birds – those that make the wide-open country their home. Key target species today are Baird’s Sparrow and Chestnut-collared Longspur. Some of the additional prairie birds we hope to see include Lark Bunting, Upland Sandpiper, Western Kingbird, Dickcissel, Sprague’s Pipit, and Western Meadowlark. The vast and seemingly endless vista, where trees are few and far between, will offer a striking contrast to the heavily forested Black Hills, adding new flavor to our tour.
DAY 5 – Tuesday, May 28 – Devils Tower National Monument
We’ll still be ten miles from Devils Tower when we see it rising above the surrounding landscape. As we approach, it will loom larger in our view, standing 867 feet above its base. We’ll enjoy a leisurely circuit around the 1.3 mile trail that encircles the tower. Though it will be difficult to keep our eyes off that imposing geologic structure, we’ll be on the lookout for the many birds that inhabit the area, including Golden Eagle, Western Wood-Pewee, Rock Wren, Townsend’s Solitaire, Black-headed Grosbeak, Red Crossbill, and Plumbeous Vireo, among many more. Our visit to the out-of-the-way national monument will be one of the highlights of the tour.

DAY 6 – Wednesday, May 29 – Badlands National Park
Maybe we saved the best for last! Badlands National Park protects a landscape unlike anything else in North America. The rugged rock formations that make up the park are the result of millions of years of geologic activity, where erosion carved valleys, canyons, buttes, pinnacles, spires, and other shapes into the landscape to create the Badlands as they are today. In addition to the stark geologic beauty, we’ll see more habitats, including cottonwood and juniper stands, woodlands, and grasslands, resulting in a surprisingly diverse birdlife. Black-billed Magpies can be seen near the visitor center and nearby campground. Blue Grosbeaks and Spotted Towhees inhabit the tangled shrubs. A wide array of sparrows can be found in the grassy areas, including Vesper, Grasshopper, Lark, and Clay-colored. And raptors such as Ferruginous Hawk and Prairie Falcon patrol the spacious skies. A Bison herd 1,200 strong roams the open country and Black-tailed Prairie Dogs chatter and scamper throughout their dogtowns. The Badlands will be a perfect exclamation point to conclude our tour in South Dakota and Wyoming.

DAY 7 – Thursday, May 30 – Departure from Rapid City
Plan your departure for anytime today. Enjoy breakfast at the hotel and hire a ride to the airport to catch your flight home. Hotel check-out is 11:00 AM.
**TOUR LEADERS**

**Peter Burke** is a lifelong birder raised in central New Jersey. Currently based in Boulder, Colorado, he is editor of *Colorado Birds* and a long-serving board member of Colorado Field Ornithologists. Peter is the owner and lead guide for *Rocky Mountain Birding*, leading customized birding adventures to domestic and international destinations. In 2019 he formed a partnership with a Quito-based birding tour company to help indigenous Ecuadorian communities participate in, and benefit from, ecotourism on their lands. An accomplished photographer, Peter’s images have been published in numerous magazines and field guides including *Birding, The Peterson Field Guide of Bird Sounds in Western North America, Cotingas and Manakins* and a forthcoming Field Identification app.

**Daryl Bernard** is a long-time birder and amateur naturalist who loves being outdoors and embraces every opportunity to share nature with others. He enjoys organizing trips and tours and strives to ensure that every participant has a thoroughly enjoyable experience. Daryl has organized and led numerous birding field tours throughout North America, many local birding trips in Michigan, and bird walks for Seven Ponds as well as birding festivals. Daryl is the Executive Director at Seven Ponds Nature Center in southeast Michigan, and regularly presents birding programs at Audubon clubs, libraries, and birding festivals.
ACCOMMODATIONS

Lodging for this tour will be in a single location, centrally located in Rapid City, South Dakota, providing us with convenient access to our birding destinations each day.

FEE and REGISTRATION INFORMATION

- Tour Fee: $2,150 per person in double occupancy from Rapid City, South Dakota
- Deposit: $300 (due upon online registration)
- Single Supplement: $450 (subject to availability)
- Final Payment Due ($1,850): April 1, 2024
- Group size is limited to 8 individuals and early registration is encouraged

WHAT THE TOUR FEE INCLUDES:

- full guide service – Peter will be with us every birding step of the way
- hotel accommodations for six nights
- all meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 7
- van transportation in a single 12-passenger van
- all park entrance fees, parking fees, and highway tolls
- pre-trip information and a post-trip mailing with a list of all species observed by the group
- eBird checklist sharing (for those using eBird)

WHAT THE TOUR FEE DOES NOT INCLUDE:

- your airfare to and from Rapid City
- alcoholic beverages, laundry, and other items of a personal nature
- gratuity for local birding guide services (optional)

ONLINE REGISTRATION WILL OPEN FOR SEVEN PONDS MEMBERS ON
TUESDAY, JANUARY 2, 2024, at 9:00 AM

ONLINE REGISTRATION WILL OPEN FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC ON
TUESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2024, at 9:00 AM

Registration for this tour will take place online at www.sevenponds.org with a $300 deposit due at the time of registration. At the Seven Ponds home page, go to Programs then Seven Ponds Field Tours and select the South Dakota Birding Field Tour registration button. You should receive an email confirmation upon successfully completing your online registration. Registered participants will be sent a registration form to complete and return.

For more information, contact Daryl Bernard at (810) 796-3200 or (989) 513-5195 (cell) or via e-mail at dbernard@sevenponds.org.

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TARGET BIRD SPECIES FOR SOUTH DAKOTA & WYOMING

Cinnamon Teal
Sharp-tailed Grouse
Eared Grebe
Western Grebe
Clark's Grebe
Eurasian Collared-Dove
Common Poorwill
White-throated Swift
Black-necked Stilt
American Avocet
Upland Sandpiper
Long-billed Curlew
Marbled Godwit
Wilson's Phalarope
California Gull
American White Pelican
Golden Eagle
Swainson's Hawk
Ferruginous Hawk
Burrowing Owl
Red-naped Sapsucker
Lewis's Woodpecker
American Three-toed Woodpecker
Black-backed Woodpecker
Prairie Falcon
Western Wood-Pewee
Dusky Flycatcher
Cordilleran Flycatcher
Say's Phoebe
Western Kingbird
Bell's Vireo

Plumbeous Vireo
Loggerhead Shrike
Pinyon Jay
Black-billed Magpie
Clark's Nutcracker
Violet-green Swallow
Pygmy Nuthatch
Rock Wren
Canyon Wren
American Dipper
Mountain Bluebird
Townsend's Solitaire
Cassin's Finch
Red Crossbill
Chestnut-collared Longspur
Brewer's Sparrow
Lark Sparrow
Lark Bunting
Baird's Sparrow
Spotted Towhee
Yellow-breasted Chat
Yellow-headed Blackbird
Western Meadowlark
Bullock's Oriole
Virginia's Warbler
MacGillivray's Warbler
Western Tanager
Black-headed Grosbeak
Blue Grosbeak
Lazuli Bunting
Dickcissel