

# 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 the 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](http://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](mailto:dbernard@sevenponds.org).

## **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