



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

WINTER IN NORTHERN MINNESOTA

FEBRUARY 12-17, 2026

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It may be cold, but Duluth is an exceptional place for winter birding. Although an average winter trip list may include around 40 species or so, it is not unusual for many of these to be life birds for many in the group. Ruffed Grouse, Snowy Owl, Great Gray Owl, Northern Hawk Owl, Northern Shrike, Boreal Chickadee, and Pine and Evening Grosbeaks are just a few of the birds we'll be actively looking for in each birds' home-sweet-home around the area. Smaller winter finches like crossbills, Redpolls, and Pine Siskins are high on the birding radar too as they move around. We'll be looking for Bohemian Waxwings in addition to the deep woods-dwelling Black-backed Woodpeckers. Typically, there is also a fair chance to see Spruce and Sharp-tailed grouse in the right habitat. Though not seen every year, such regularly occurring rarities as Gyrfalcon, Boreal Owl, and American Three-toed Woodpecker are other hoped-for possibilities. Specialties abound in this special part of the Upper Midwest.

While it would not be unusual for a midwinter day's "high" temperature to remain below zero and for the low to be minus 20 or even less, an average winter day's temperature reaches the upper teens. With sunshine and minimal winds, such conditions are surprisingly pleasant and even the coldest days are tolerable since much of our birding is along roadsides, either within or near the warmth of our van.

This unique tour offers not just the possibility of seeing northern owls, grouse, winter finches, and other boreal specialties, but also the memorable experience of spending a few days exploring remote bogs and vast coniferous forests during the depths of winter. The local beautiful scenery alone is often a memorable highlight for many on the tour.



February 12, Day 1: Arrival in Duluth. Participants should plan to arrive in Duluth this afternoon and make their way to our hotel where a room will be reserved in each person's name. At the time of this writing, the complimentary hotel shuttle has been suspended and participants should plan on taking a taxi/Uber/Lyft to the hotel. Your tour leader, who lives in Duluth, recommends using Dwarf King Taxi Service (218-434-5464). Don't let the branding throw you, they have a reputation for great customer service, reliability, and affordable pricing. Check-in time at the hotel is 3:00 p.m. We'll meet in the hotel lobby at 4:00 p.m. for a brief



Great Gray Owl © Erik Bruhnke

orientation session and birding, followed by dinner.

Those who arrive early enough in the day may want to scan the lake behind the hotel for ducks or gulls of interest. For those with transportation, a drive through the Duluth-Superior harbor area might turn up a Snowy Owl roosting on the bay ice or hunting in the outskirts of the town. An array of unique and locally owned shops can be found within a moment's walk of our lakeside hotel.

NIGHT: The Inn on Lake Superior, Duluth

February 13-16, Days 2-5: Duluth-Superior and Northeastern Minnesota. Within the city limits of Duluth and Superior, Duluth's neighbor across the bay in Wisconsin, one may find many of the specialties we seek without having to venture into more remote areas. At feeders and mountain ash trees in residential areas,

the highly nomadic Bohemian Waxwings may be possible, Pine Grosbeaks, and Redpolls are often around, and in some years, a rare Townsend's Solitaire or an even rarer Varied Thrush have been seen around town as well.

Waste grain around the grain elevators in the Duluth-Superior harbor area creates, in effect, a giant feeding station, one which attracts small mammals and Rock Pigeons. These, in turn, can attract raptors. A Snowy Owl may be possible around there or around the outer perimeter of the neighboring town of Superior where a local airport has created a tundra-like landscape. A few raptors overwinter in the harbor, and in some years Peregrines or even a rare Gyrfalcon have settled in for the season, subsisting on pigeons.

Duluth's water treatment plant can be home to wintering gulls such as the predominant Herring Gulls. At least a few Glaucous and Iceland gulls are usually present, along with the rarer Great Black-backed Gull. The vast shoreline of the North Shore of Lake Superior can be home to gulls and waterfowl in the winter as well (ice and open-water permitting).

On at least one day, we usually head north out of town into the vast boreal forests of spruce, balsam fir, and pine in the Superior



Northern Hawk Owl © Michael O'Brien

National Forest. The best and most accessible examples of this habitat lie northeast of Duluth along Lake County Road 2 and Minnesota Highway 1. Spruce Grouse are sometimes spotted at dawn along these roadsides as they scratch for salt and grit. Ruffed Grouse, Black-backed Woodpecker (plus the rarer American Three-toed), Common Raven, Canada Jay, Boreal Chickadee, and winter finches are also regularly seen residents in these same forests. It is also possible to spot Moose, Porcupine, and Snowshoe Hare as we bird here, and, with a lot of luck, we might even glimpse a Gray Wolf or American Marten. In addition to exploring the Superior National Forest, the birding can often take us well up the North Shore into the area of Grand Marais, passing by an array of scenic vistas en route to this birding area.

But always at the top of visiting birders' expectations are the Great Gray and Northern Hawk Owls. The best place to search for these is the more open countryside of spruce-tamarack bogs, alder swamps, and sedge meadows. Such habitat is found in the Sax-Zim Bog area just northwest of Duluth, and sometimes in northern Aitkin County, a bit farther west. These species are incredible, each in their own way. While these two owls occur every winter in northern Minnesota, it is not a certainty that both will be seen on a given weekend if it is a poor owl winter. Among the wintering birds, there are resident Great Gray Owls that make their year-round homes in the area. On the other hand, over 100 individual Great Grays have been recorded during record winters. In fact, an amazing total of 70 Great Gray Owls was tallied on the 2004 Sax-Zim Bog Christmas Bird Count, while an equally incredible 42 Northern Hawk Owls were counted on this same Christmas Bird Count! While searching for these owls, we also have a chance to see Sharp-tailed Grouse,

Northern Goshawk, Rough-legged Hawk, an additional Snowy Owl, resident Barred Owl, Northern Shrike, Black-billed Magpie, and Snow Bunting.

Though a permanent resident in remote areas of extreme far Northern Minnesota, the Boreal Owl is not to be expected on a given winter tour, but does show up periodically when irruptions of this species occur and has been found on several VENT tours over the years.



Pine Grosbeak © Brian Gibbons

Brand new for the 2025 tour, this current itinerary now includes an additional full day of birding from the previous itinerary. This will let us capitalize on unexpected birding opportunities or allow us to venture well up the scenic North Shore of Lake Superior, trek into farther-reaching woodlands, and/or backtrack if certain species have proven challenging. In addition to the many earlier-mentioned bird species noted, throughout this day (depending on our travels) we may have a chance to see unique wintering species like Harlequin Duck, Long-tailed Duck, a rare Townsend's Solitaire, and a variety of wintering gulls among other uncommon possibilities.

NIGHTS: The Inn on Lake Superior, Duluth



Black-backed Woodpecker © Erik

February 17, Day 6: Departure for Home. Participants may plan to depart for home at any time today. Transfers to the airport will be provided for all flights departing before noon.

EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS: Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 12 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Erik Bruhnke and Kevin Burke.



Erik Bruhnke has loved birds since he was a child looking at chickadees. In 2008 he graduated from Northland College in Wisconsin with a Natural Resources degree. Erik taught field ornithology at Northland College for three semesters. Between 2009 and 2014, he spent his summers conducting field research focused on breeding bird transects in Upper Michigan, point counts for a breeding bird atlas in Minnesota and Wisconsin's Northwoods, vegetation and breeding bird surveys throughout wind farms in North Dakota's prairie potholes, and cavity-nesting surveys in the Cascade Mountains of Oregon. A devoted raptor nerd, he is drawn to hawkwatches. He worked as an interpreter for six seasons at Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory in Duluth, Minnesota; counted migrating raptors at the Corpus Christi HawkWatch in Texas in 2015; and

was the 2016, 2017, and 2018 hawk counter at the Cape May Hawkwatch in New Jersey. Erik's wildlife photography has won national awards, and he's written for the American Birding Association's *Birder's Guide*, *BirdWatching* magazine, and *Bird Watcher's Digest*. When not leading birding tours, Erik often leads field trips and speaks at birding festivals. He also enjoys hiking, kayaking, cross-country skiing, and just being out in the snow. In his free time, he loves to cook and bake.



Kevin Burke is originally from the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia. He grew up running around in the woods and trails of Shenandoah National Park. His family spent many summers camping and hiking in the park. One of Kevin's favorite activities was jumping in the river and turning over every rock to see what was underneath. This eventually earned him the nickname "Hellgrammite Kid." This early exposure to the natural world has vaulted into a lifelong obsession with the outdoors. Kevin was introduced to birding while spending summers in Rhode Island at his grandmother's house. She would point out all the feeder birds and help him identify them. These early encounters helped foster a love for birds. An early Ornithology class at

Hocking College in Ohio rekindled his love for birds. He has been birding every day since. He went on to get a Bachelor of Science in Ecotourism and Conservation Ecology from the University of Idaho. Kevin has been involved with leading bird trips in some capacity for almost 20 years. He has led birding trips all throughout the United States, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and the Dominican Republic. His birding journeys have also taken him to some spectacular locations such as Portugal, Colombia, The Bahamas, and Canada. This is truly a lifelong obsession. He currently resides with his family in Hendersonville, North Carolina. Kevin's wife and two kids also enjoy birding. They have fun kayaking, hiking, and camping in the mountains that surround their home. One of their favorite activities is jumping on the paddle board and kayaks and leisurely floating the French Broad River near their house.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$2,595** per person in double occupancy from Duluth, Minnesota. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 5, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leader/s. It does not include transportation from your home to Duluth and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$500**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at <https://ventbird.com>) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days (September 15, 2025) prior to the tour departure date.

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS:

Cancellation by Participant:

Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 180 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$250** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months from the date of participant tour cancellation, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre- and post-tour extensions. **For participants' protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

<u>If participant cancels:</u>	<u>Participant's refund will be:</u>
180 days or more before departure date	Participant's deposit minus \$250*
179-151 days before departure date	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded
150 days or less before departure date	No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months from the date of participant tour cancellation, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

Cancellation by VENT:

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant;

provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A **“Force Majeure”** event means any act beyond VENT’s control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TRAVEL INSURANCE/TRAVEL PROTECTION: To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with Redpoint Travel Protection as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend its comprehensive Ripcord plan, which includes a medical evacuation benefit. With this in mind, it is important to note that medical evacuation is not offered by Redpoint as a stand-alone policy or benefit. For travelers not interested in comprehensive travel insurance, VENT recommends **Medjet** and its **MedjetAssist®** plan. Medjet is not an insurance company, and Medjet Assist is not an insurance product; rather, Medjet is a membership-based air-medical transport company specializing in moving hospitalized travelers from an admitting hospital to a medical facility of choice. Medjet does not provide medical evacuation service from the point of injury or illness; yet, the MedjetAssist plan offers robust enough travel protection to satisfy the medical evacuation insurance requirement in place for many VENT tours.

About Ripcord

Ripcord is a completely integrated travel insurance program with single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims. Critical benefits include comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption, **medical evacuation from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice**; medical expense coverage, death of pet, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or political or security reasons, waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.*

For a price quote or to purchase travel insurance, please visit:

<https://ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird>

or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help and Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 15 days of making your first trip payment. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, second deposit, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 15 days, and insure all non-refundable trip costs in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

Coronavirus (COVID-19):

Redpoint considers COVID-19 illness as any other seasonal respiratory illness. Providing only a positive Covid-19 test result will likely not be considered a covered event per the terms and conditions of the company's policy. Redpoint maintains a [Coronavirus FAQ page](#) on its website that addresses questions and concerns travelers may have regarding COVID-19 and Redpoint's policy. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of relevant topics.

About MedjetAssist

MedjetAssist is a membership program that functions like AAA for motorists. The company's primary service is air medical transport. Critical benefits of MedjetAssist include a staff on call and ready to provide assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; all-expenses-paid air medical transport in the United States and internationally to medical facility of choice, regardless of medical necessity; repatriation of remains; and no exclusions for pre-existing conditions.

For travelers under 75, MedjetAssist may be purchased as Short-Term Memberships of 8, 15, 21, and 30 days, or Regular Annual Memberships from 1 to 5 years. For travelers 75–84, Medjet offers a Diamond Membership that is the same program but with a few additional conditions.

For a price quote or to purchase MedjetAssist, please visit: [Medjet.com/VentBird](https://www.medjet.com/VentBird) or call 1-800-527-7478. Pricing is based on type and term of membership.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Per-person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler's consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.
change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

CLIMATE: As previously described, an average high temperature in Duluth during the tour is in the upper teens, with the normal low a few degrees below zero. Unless it's windy, most participants should be able to handle such days without too much difficulty. However, cold fronts with brisk winds are also possible, and days with lows in the minus 20s or even lower and “highs” remaining below zero do occur. Wind-chills in the minus 30s and minus 40s are similarly not unusual. While Northern Minnesota does get its share of snow, storms serious enough to preclude birding activity are rare, with even the back roads promptly and efficiently plowed.

CLOTHING: Although almost all our birding will be from the warmth of the van, be sure to pack the warmest clothing you can find. Bring thermal underwear, heavy sweaters, and a warm coat, and you'll find the best strategy is to dress in layers. Wool works like a charm with keeping yourself warm and dry. Try merino wool if you are prone to the itchiness of traditional wool. Layering materials is a good strategy for keeping warm. Of course, bring a warm hat and scarf or neck gaiter to cover the ears and neck. Fingers and toes will be the most vulnerable to the cold. Mittens generally work better than gloves, and insulated boots and warm socks are a must—those with felt liners are especially recommended. Disposable hand warmers were widely used in 2018 when we experienced -27° F as a natural air temperature.

CONDITIONS: As noted above, temperatures can be frigid; please pack accordingly. Due to the climate we will be spending an extraordinary amount of time birding and driving in the vans. Proper restroom facilities are rare in the rural north woods, often only available at breakfast and lunch cafes. Outdoor facilities (latrines or port-a-potties) are available at a few of the birding locations in Sax-Zim Bog. We often have early starts to provide our best chances to see select species like Great Gray Owls, grouse, etc.

INTERNET: Wi-Fi is available at the hotel and even some restaurants where we will dine.

EQUIPMENT: You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good condition, along with a belt pack or day pack (for carrying books, sunscreen, , etc.). As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Your leader will have a spotting scope, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

HEALTH: VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

COVID-19: We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying “Up to Date” with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19.

Insect Repellents – There are insect repellents for the skin and an insect repellent used to treat clothing that should not be applied to the skin.

Insect repellents for the skin are commonly available in three forms:

- DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF!®, Cutter™, Ultrathon™, etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The formulations will state a percentage of the active ingredient DEET on the packaging. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.
- Picaridin: A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.
- Herbal insect repellents: Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

An insect repellent for clothing is marketed in one approved formulation:

- Permanone® (Permethrin) is an odorless spray-on repellent that may be used for **pre-treatment** of clothing, gear, and tents. It should not be used directly on the skin or sprayed on clothing while it is being worn. The pre-treatment process requires a number of hours to complete and must be done outdoors, so is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment has to be repeated more often than commercial treatment using Insect Shield® technology. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online.
- Insect Shield® apparel: Clothing pre-treated with Permanone is made by a variety of manufacturers. It is available for purchase from some sporting goods suppliers. The clothing is advertised as retaining its repellency for up to 70 washings.

The US EPA offers a search tool to help choose a repellent that is best for a particular situation. For example, some repellents work for mosquitoes, but not for ticks.

<https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/which-insect-repellent-right-you>

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (800) CDC-INFO (800-232-4636). You can check the CDC website at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html> (click on Travel Health).

SUGGESTED READING: A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend www.amazon.com which has a wide selection; www.buteobooks.com and www.nhbs.com which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and www.abebooks.com for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

Dunn, Jon L. and Jonathan Alderfer. *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America*, 7th Edition.

Washington, D.C. 2017.

Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Guide to Birds* (Second Edition). New York: Knopf, 2014. For those who prefer the smaller Sibley regional guides (2003), note that the Eastern Sibley covers Minnesota.

Eckert, Kim. *A Birder's Guide to Minnesota, 5th edition. A County-by-County Guide to Over 1400 Birding Locations*. Duluth, MN: Stone Ridge Press, 2023.

TIPPING: An important part of the value of a VENT tour is knowing that tips for local service providers at our destinations—restaurant staff, hotel staff, drivers, local guides, and various other support staff—are included in your tour fee. If you would like to offer any of your local guides an additional tip, \$5 to \$10 a day is a common amount.

Tips for your VENT tour leader(s) are **not** included, but it is customary to tip one or both if you feel that you have received exceptional service. To assist in your planning, we recommend tipping your VENT tour leader(s) \$15 to \$20 per day, or the equivalent of approximately 2–4% of the tour fee.

If you plan to give tips by cash, they should be given directly to your tour leader at the end of the tour and **not** sent to the VENT office. Some of our tour leaders use mobile payment applications such as Venmo, PayPal, and Wise. If you would like to use this method, please ask your tour leaders directly whether they can accept tips through such an application.

We emphasize that tipping is optional and that these amounts are only recommendations. The amount you decide to tip is based entirely on your experience and at your discretion.

RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, “**VENT**”) act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on July 1, 2025, and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant's Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is

otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant's risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the "**Airline**") is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline's aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

MWN:20260212
4/13/25 – EB
P 7/1/25 – PS; DE