

Trip Report- North Dakota 2

July 1-8, 2021

It was fascinating to immediately run a second tour around the same route in North Dakota. All six of us met at the Bismarck hotel ready for our exploration of North Dakota's diverse range of habitats. Our hotel was situated on the main road heading north out of town, but looked over a well-vegetated gully where Ring-necked Pheasant and Willow Flycatcher managed to find a home. Our first stop was the extensive Fort Abraham Lincoln State Park; a great spot for American Redstart, Black-and-white Warbler and Yellow-breasted Chat. Thankfully the Piping Plover showed itself on the sand bars in the Missouri River and a male Lazuli Bunting sang from the top branches of a dead tree. A brief stop at Little Heart Bottoms, also on the Missouri River, was dependable for a small number of the once-endangered "Interior" Least Tern. According to the Fish and Wildlife Service, the population has now risen significantly to over 18,000 birds. Heading west we had lunch at Sweet Briar Lake where the Yellow-headed Blackbirds were feeding chicks. Some wanderings after dinner didn't produce any Baird's Sparrows, but we got our first Upland Sandpiper, Dickcissel and several good sparrows.

Early the next morning found us exploring the Little Missouri National Grassland, enjoying Lark Buntings, Chestnut-collared Longspurs and Ferruginous Hawks. A Baird's Sparrow showed very briefly and then went to ground without giving us extended views. Later that day, before the heat set in, we had our first Wilson's Phalaropes, Swainson's Hawks and a female Sharp-tailed Grouse with 3 well-grown chicks. A nice surprise was a small flock of Chimney Swifts twittering and feeding over downtown Dickinson around dinnertime. After dinner we made another run at some short-grass prairie habitat, but no Baird's Sparrows made an appearance. A couple of Great Horned Owls were a nice consolation, and quite picturesque silhouetted against the evening sky.

We made a brief stop at Medora WTP the following morning, but the Bullock's Oriole we glimpsed there last week was not in evidence this time. The rest of the day was spent in the southern unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park, a dramatic landscape of rocks, canyons and cliffs. As well as finding some of our target birds, such as Rock Wren, Violet-green Swallow and Mountain Bluebird, it was wonderful to see some mammals; herds of American Bison lounged along the road and Black-tailed Prairie-Dogs sat outside their burrows while both Mule and White-tailed Deer frequent the wooded areas. It was also interesting to watch the hundreds of Cliff Swallows building their mud nests in the cliffs over the Missouri River – their traditional habitat! It was then off to Bowman for the night and an evening excursion to look for Common Poorwills. The human population is very sparse in this corner of North Dakota and the town of Amidon (county seat of Slope County) had only 27 residents in the last census and a police car with a uniformed dummy is parked along the roadside making for a good photo opportunity! Our evening run for the Poorwills wasn't successful, but it was a beautiful and very peaceful spot and we had more Sharp-tailed Grouse and Pronghorn on the way there and back.

The 4th July found us leaving Bowman early for the southwestern corner of North Dakota. A brief stop at Bowman WTP (viewed from the road) produced a few distant ducks, but along the way to Rhame we had great views of several Long-billed Curlew, a family of Loggerhead Shrikes, and our quarry in this part of the state – Brewer's Sparrow. As we were so close to both South Dakota and Montana we had to cross the state lines and get a few birds in adjacent states! As

we were watching the Cliff Swallows around the bridge (from South Dakota) a Great Horned Owl flew out from under the bridge and landed in North Dakota. This was followed by a Prairie Falcon which flew over and also perched atop the riverbank (also in ND) and what may have been the same bird flew into view a mile down the road in Montana, where a Burrowing Owl also made a brief appearance. After a brief stop for groceries in Bowman, we had lunch at Gascoyne Lake, where we found a shaded picnic table and a few shorebirds – Solitary Sandpiper, Greater Yellowlegs and Wilson’s Phalarope. More shorebirds (Least, Pectoral and Semipalmated Sandpipers) were seen at Lake Patricia WMA, and at last we managed some perched Bank Swallows – perfect for those avid photographers! Dinner was at our soon-to-be regular spot in Bismarck, the Stone home Brewing Company, which was a high point in the general desert of decent eating places along our route.

The following morning, after a brief visit to the “world’s largest buffalo” in Jamestown, we walked along the Spillway Trail at Jamestown Dam. As well as the expected “eastern” warblers, such as American Redstart and Black-and-white Warbler, we also heard and saw a pair of Yellow-throated Vireos. This may be as far west as this species occurs. Also a Cooper’s Hawk glared at us from her nest. The rest of the morning was spent at Arrowwood NWR where we tracked down Sedge and Marsh Wrens, a breeding colony of Purple Martins and the normal blizzard of Yellow Warblers. As the area is a maze of farm roads and ponds, we decided to explore our way towards Chase Lake and the breeding colonies of Black Terns and American White Pelicans. Each pothole was different with some being devoid of birds while others had shorebirds, ducks or even large numbers of grebes. Some of the day’s highlights were Snow, Ross’s and Greater White-fronted Geese, Sora, American Bittern and so much more.

We moved into Kidder County, ND for the following day and spent it exploring more of the extensive pothole region. Once again we wandered along many of the backroads checking small and often-overlooked ponds and lakes. A pair of Ferruginous Hawks were nesting near one of our go-to spots and we had great views of the pair as they flew around the nest area. A few southbound shorebirds were beginning to appear and what was nicer was that they were all in the breeding colors. Also many of the locally-breeding grebes (Red-necked, Western, and Eared) were also in their finery and with delightful striped chicks. A stake-out Le Conte’s Sparrow played hide-and-seek with us for a while before popping into view and giving us some amazing shots – before once again disappearing into the rank vegetation. One spot we bumped into had several singing Nelson’s Sparrows- some giving us great views as they sat atop stalks singing their gasping songs. Today was our last day in the pothole country so we did a little back-tracking and exploring, finding a Clark’s Grebe sitting on her nest amongst a load of Westerns. A few more shorebirds were coming south including Semipalmated and Stilt Sandpipers and Long-billed Dowitcher. A short trip south of Bismarck found us in Beaver Creek Recreation Area; a lovely lakeside camping and picnic area with some great birds. It’s one of the few sites for Bell’s Vireo in the state and thankfully they are vigorous singers, so he was easy to find. Also Blue Grosbeak and our first Ruby-throated Hummingbird were added to our ever-growing list. We stopped at nearby Cattail Bay, but didn’t add a lot, before driving back to Bismarck and our preferred restaurant. As well as pretty good food, the beer selection was very extensive and it certainly one of the best restaurants on the tour.

We finished the tour with a fly-by Sharp-shinned Hawk for #172 of the trip with some excellent birds seen well and a few photographed as well. Highlights were many but overall it was the

quantity of birds breeding in the pothole region that was the most thrilling – thousands of Black Terns, American White Pelicans, Western, Red-necked and Eared Grebes and much more. Thanks to Clifton for planning the itinerary and Chris for doing the driving – we plan to do this tour again next year.

Simon Thompson

Birds Seen or Heard

Snow Goose
Ross's Goose
Greater White-fronted
Goose
Canada Goose
Wood Duck
Blue-winged Teal
Northern Shoveler
Gadwall
American Wigeon
Mallard
Northern Pintail
Green-winged Teal
Canvasback
Redhead
Ring-necked Duck
Lesser Scaup
Bufflehead
Hooded Merganser
Ruddy Duck
Wild Turkey
Sharp-tailed Grouse
Gray Partridge
Ring-necked Pheasant
Pied-billed Grebe
Eared Grebe
Western Grebe
Clark's Grebe
Rock Pigeon (feral)
Eurasian Collared-Dove
Mourning Dove
Common Nighthawk
Chimney Swift
Ruby-throated
Hummingbird
Virginia Rail

American Coot
Sora
American Avocet
Killdeer
Upland Sandpiper
Long-billed Curlew
Marbled Godwit
Stilt Sandpiper
Least Sandpiper
Pectoral Sandpiper
Semipalmated
Sandpiper
Short-billed Dowitcher
Long-billed Dowitcher
Wilson's Snipe
Wilson's Phalarope
Spotted Sandpiper
Solitary Sandpiper
Greater Yellowlegs
Willet (Western)
Lesser Yellowlegs
Bonaparte's Gull
Franklin's Gull
Ring-billed Gull
California Gull
Least Tern
Caspian Tern
Black Tern
Common Tern
Forster's Tern
Double-crested
Cormorant
American White
Pelican
American Bittern
Least Bittern

Great Blue Heron
Great Egret
Snowy Egret
Cattle Egret
Black-crowned Night-
Heron
White-faced Ibis
Turkey Vulture
Northern Harrier
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Cooper's Hawk
Bald Eagle
Swainson's Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
(Kriger's)
Ferruginous Hawk
Great Horned Owl
Burrowing Owl
Red-headed
Woodpecker
Downy Woodpecker
Hairy Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
American Kestrel
Merlin
Prairie Falcon
Western Wood-Pewee
Willow Flycatcher
Least Flycatcher
Say's Phoebe
Western Kingbird
Eastern Kingbird
Bell's Vireo
Yellow-throated Vireo
Warbling Vireo

Red-eyed Vireo
Loggerhead Shrike
Blue Jay
Black-billed Magpie
Black-capped
Chickadee
Horned Lark
Northern Rough-
winged Swallow
Purple Martin
Tree Swallow
Violet-green Swallow
Bank Swallow
Cliff Swallow
White-breasted
Nuthatch
Rock Wren
Sedge Wren
Marsh Wren
European Starling
Gray Catbird
Brown Thrasher
Mountain Bluebird

American Robin
Cedar Waxwing
House Sparrow
Sprague's Pipit
House Finch
American Goldfinch
Chestnut-collared
Longspur
Grasshopper Sparrow
Chipping Sparrow
Clay-colored Sparrow
Field Sparrow
Brewer's Sparrow
Lark Sparrow
Lark Bunting
Vesper Sparrow
LeConte's Sparrow
Nelson's Sparrow
Savannah Sparrow
Baird's Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Swamp Sparrow
Spotted Towhee

Yellow-breasted Chat
Yellow-headed
Blackbird
Bobolink
Western Meadowlark
Orchard Oriole
Baltimore Oriole
Red-winged Blackbird
Brown-headed
Cowbird
Brewer's Blackbird
Common Grackle
Ovenbird
Black-and-white
Warbler
Common Yellowthroat
American Redstart
Yellow warbler
Blue Grosbeak
Lazuli Bunting
Dickcissel

Mammals

Coyote
Red Fox
Raccoon
Mule Deer
White-tailed Deer
Pronghorn
American Bison
Horse (feral)
White tailed Jack rabbit
Cottontail sp.
Muskrat
Black-tailed Prairie dog
Thirteen lined Ground Squirrel
Richardson's Ground Squirrel