

Itinerary for Nebraska Venture

March 13-20, 2022

Day 1 – Sunday, March 13

After arriving on flights to the Lincoln Airport (LNK) participants will transfer to a nearby hotel for the night. You may arrive anytime you wish, but for those arriving earlier in the afternoon we will meet for dinner and have a brief orientation at 7 PM. *Night in Lincoln.*

Day 2 – Monday, March 14

We'll drive west into the Great Plains. As we view the stark, rugged beauty of the Nebraska prairie, we'll search the skies for **Rough-legged Hawk**, **American Kestrel** and **Prairie Falcon**. Our first stop will be at Harvard Marsh and Massie Waterfowl Production Areas. We should find a good selection of ducks, including **Common Goldeneye** and **Common Merganser**. It also will have up to 200,000 geese. We'll search for **Ross' Goose** among all the **Snow Geese** and **Greater White-fronted** and **Cackling Geese** should be there also. A little farther west, we'll watch the evening fly-in of the Sandhill Cranes. *Night in Kearney.*

Day 3 – Tuesday, March 15

We'll start early in the morning at Rowe Sanctuary, managed by National Audubon. We'll spend about 3 hours in a large blind on the Platte River. The Platte is wide and shallow and the Sandhill Cranes use it to roost at night. This is the peak of crane migration, with a total number for the area around 300,000 - it is a sight and sound you'll never forget! We'll check the feeders at the visitor's center before driving the area to watch the cranes dancing in the corn stubble. Each year there are a few **Whooping Cranes** mixed in, so we'll be looking for them as well. Next, we'll head to the Nebraska Nature and Visitor's Center and walk some of their trails, looking for **Harris's**, **Lincoln's** and **American Tree Sparrows**. Nearby Shoemaker Island Road follows the Platte River and can be good for **Northern Harrier** and possibly **Northern Shrike**. After an early dinner, we'll return to look for **Short-eared Owls**. *Night in Kearney.*

Day 4 – Wednesday, March 16

The morning fly-out of cranes is different in the sunrise light. Hearing them is almost equal to seeing them. After watching them leave for the day, and looking for **Ring-necked Pheasants**, we'll check the wonderfully named Funk Lagoon for migrating shorebirds. **Great-tailed Grackles** and **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** breed there. **Cinnamon Teal** should be found among the many ducks. Nearby Johnson Waterfowl Production Area should also add to our list. Any of the grasslands could have **Horned Lark**, **American Pipits**, and both meadowlarks. We will finish the day at Harlan County Reservoir for **Bald Eagle** and **American White Pelican**, among others. *Night in Kearney.*

Day 5 – Thursday, March 17

We'll drive west to Lake McConaughy and Lake Ogallala State Rec Areas, keeping an eye out for **Ferruginous Hawks** and **Golden Eagles**. The size of Lake McConaughy is a draw for **Common Loon** and four grebes; **Horned, Eared, Western** and possibly **Clark's**. **California** and **Thayer's Gulls** are likely. In the afternoon we'll go to Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge, which has 21 lakes and ponds and contains the largest continuous sand dune area in the U.S. *Night in Lewellen.*

Day 6 – Friday, March 18

We'll spend another morning back at Crescent Lake NWR. Shorebirds should be plentiful, with good chances for **Baird's Sandpiper** among others. We'll check the reeds for **Marsh Wren** and an early **Sora** or **Virginia Rail**. In the grass-covered dunes, we'll search for **Western Meadowlark** plus any sparrows we can find. **Yellow-headed** and **Brewer's Blackbirds** will hopefully be spotted here as well. We'll bird our way out of the refuge and take scenic Highway 2 east to Burwell, stopping anywhere we find interesting birds. We should arrive at Switzer Ranch in mid-afternoon for our two-night stay. Depending on the time, and when the home-cooked dinner is served, we'll bird the area around the ranch after settling in. *Night at Switzer Ranch*

Day 7 - Saturday, March 19

We'll be out early, going to a Greater Prairie-Chicken lek, for their booming and dance. We'll be sitting in an old school bus very close to the birds - sometimes they will even land on the bus itself! Returning to the ranch, we'll have a delicious hot breakfast. The morning will be spent birding by jeep, as we explore the beautiful and rugged Nebraska sandhills. After lunch, we'll go to the nearby Calamus Reservoir and State Wildlife Area, looking for more waterfowl and anything we have so far missed. We'll have another home-cooked meal at the ranch, and stay the night. ***Night at Switzer Ranch***

Day 8 - Sunday, March 20

Another early morning, but this time we go to a Sharp-tailed Grouse lek. Like the prairie-chicken, the male is trying his best to woo the ladies, but it's a very different dance as we will see. Again, we'll be close, possibly 50 feet away. After breakfast at the ranch, we leave for Lincoln for our flights home. We may have a little time to stop for anything interesting along the way. **Plan your flight home for after 2:00 PM.**