

Venture to Platte River, Nebraska

April 2 - 9, 2024

Itinerary

Day 1 – Tuesday, April 2

After arriving on flights to the Lincoln Airport (LNK) participants will transfer to a nearby hotel for the night. We will gather in the lobby of our hotel at 6 PM for a brief orientation before heading to dinner. *Night in Lincoln.*

Day 2 – Wednesday, April 3

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 – Thursday, April 4

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 – Friday, April 5

Today we visit the wonderfully named Funk Lagoon for migrating shorebirds and other species of interest. **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. Our final stop will be at Harlan County Reservoir for **Bald Eagle** and **American White Pelican**, among others, before heading to North Platte for the night. *Night in North Platte.*

Day 5 – Saturday, April 6

We'll rise early today for our planned visit to Nebraska's largest Greater Prairie-Chicken lek, for their booming and dance. Using an old school bus as a hide will allow us to get close views of the displaying birds without spooking them. After an early lunch, 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. *Night in Ogallala.*

Day 6 – Sunday, April 7

Today we visit Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge, which has 21 lakes and ponds and contains the largest continuous sand dune area in the U.S. 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 spend the rest of the day birding our way west, ultimately ending up in Wyoming for the night. *Night in Pine Bluff, WY*

Day 7 - Monday, April 8

Our main goal this morning will be to find Sharp-tailed Grouse (if we haven't seen any yet) and nearby Pawnee National Grasslands of Colorado are a great place to find them. We will likely have time for quick stops to other birding areas in Wyoming and Colorado before starting the drive back east. Much of our afternoon will be spent traveling today. ***Night in North Platte.***

Day 8 - Tuesday, April 9

After breakfast, we head back to Lincoln. **Plan your flight home for after 2:00 PM.**