Photography in a Winter Wonderland
Michigan’s Upper Peninsula

Tour Leaders: Brian Zwiebel and Jamie Cunningham
February 6 - 13, 2021
It was so wonderful getting back to running tours with our first tour back since the start of the pandemic last year. Adjustments were made to how trips are run to keep things safe and enjoyable. Armed with sanitizer, face masks, etc, our group headed north towards Marquette. We were lucky to have easy driving conditions and with some extra time, we made a short detour to look for Bohemian Waxwings. We spotted a group of cooperative birds feeding eye level on Mountain Ash berries. Many great shots were taken in the Mountain Ash. Post dinner some of group went out for night sky shots and were treated with an unexpected display of Northern Lights! What a great end to the first day!

Our next day was a busy one! We started off at a private feeder where Pine Grosbeaks were waiting for us. After we wrapped up with them, we headed west and spent time at another private feeder. One of the first birds we heard was the elusive Boreal Chickadee! Three individuals were at the feeders along with loads of Evening Grosbeaks. We also had a huge variety of other birds including Pine Grosbeaks, Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, Black-capped Chickadee, and our first Common Redpoll of the trip. Our evening ended with us spending time with a cooperative Canada Jay, which have become difficult to track down in the UP.

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Our next day was spent tracking down some of the harder birds to locate in the area. The group was thrilled to come upon a Black-backed Woodpecker who came in close to the group and spent a long time flaking off bark and feeding. This bird is very hard to find so it was an exciting opportunity for the whole group!
The UP of Michigan offers more than just birds, in winter, there are some amazing landscape opportunities to be found if you know where to look! First stop of the day was at a frozen wonderland at a waterfall near Munising. Every time I’ve visited these falls, the scene is different. One of the many reasons it’s always worth a stop! We continued back to the east and made a stop at the local landfill. Sounds like a weird place to take clients but it is a mecca for Gulls, Ravens, Crows, and Bald Eagles. We enjoyed lots of close opportunities including several Glaucous Gulls.

The following morning was a feeder set up where we captured great images of both Hoary and Common Redpoll and Pileated Woodpecker. But the real star of the show that morning was a delightful encounter with an Ermine (Short-tailed Weasel)!! These incredibly cute and curious mammals are just a joy to watch, but hard to photograph because of how fast they move! We watched as he scurried about and checked out the underside and tires of all of our vehicles.
The following morning was a visit to private feeders to photograph the skittish Sharp-tailed Grouse that come in regularly. We grabbed some close-up shots of five birds that came in for the group. Afterwards, we moved to another private feeder to shoot the hundreds of Snow Buntings that feed there. Our night ended with a glimpse of a porcupine and three Snowy Owls who gave us some great photo ops!

Our last full day delivered a bird that no one expected to see, let alone photograph. A Gyrfalcon made an appearance not far from our lodging and our group was able to see and capture images of this incredibly Arctic falcon! We ended our day spending time with a gorgeous young male Snowy Owl who delighted the group.
Our final day was our travel day back, but we managed a quick stop at Kensington Metro Park. This park is so much fun. Many birds are very used to people and are able to be hand-fed. This also provides close photo ops of birds like Dark-eyed Junco, Blue Jay, Tufted Titmouse, Black-capped Chickadee, American Tree Sparrow, Cardinal, and White-breasted Nuthatch. A Fox Sparrow was a nice addition to the species list too!

One of the clients asked me if I ever get tired of revisiting places, in particular, the UP. I do visit multiple times a year usually and while species diversity is never terribly high, I find there is always something interesting and exciting to see when I go. It is certainly a place worth visiting time and again.

Join us in the Upper Peninsula for the opportunity to photograph birds in one of the best spots Michigan has to offer!

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