Minnesota
Boreal Breeders

Tour Leader: Tyler Ficker
July 1 - 7, 2021
After a late arrival the night before, the group met up and was eager to bird in the morning. Our first location was a nice local park just south of downtown Duluth where we enjoyed some of the more common breeders of the area such as Veery, American Redstart, Red-eyed Vireo, and Black-and-White Warblers.

That afternoon, we headed west towards McGregor Marsh and Rice Lake NWR to see if we could photograph some of the marsh and forest species there. We were treated to several very cooperative Sedge Wrens and Swamp Sparrows at the marsh. At Rice Lake, a very showy pair of Yellow-billed Cuckoos stole the show as we watched them fly around and forage out in the open. An Ovenbird made a quick appearance from deep in the forest and a group of Bobolinks put on a good show with a female posing very nicely for photos! As we check into the hotel that evening, a Dickcissel was calling from down the road and we went hoping to get some photos of it. The bird, perched in a lone spruce in a furniture store parking lot, gave us a fantastic opportunity to photograph a bird that is not too common in this area.
The next morning, we ventured North to Sax-Zim Bog where we got our first real opportunity to see and photograph some of the boreal breeders. We were greeted on the south side with more Dickcissels (part of an apparent irruption year for them here), Brown Thrashers, a flock of Black-billed Magpies, and a very curious yet elusive Black-billed Cuckoo hiding in bushes along the roadside. As we entered the wooded parts of the bog, we had opportunities to photograph species such as American Redstart, Magnolia Warbler, Black-and White Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, and Ovenbird. As the day got hotter, the birds got less active and we found ourselves taking a longer lunch break and spending time in the visitors center to cool off. Later in the evening, we headed back out and were able to photograph Purple Finch and spend some brief time with a Mourning Warbler, who we knew we would come back to the next day.
The next morning in Sax-Zim Bog was spent visiting the Mourning Warbler from the evening before. This time, we found 7 individuals who were quite accommodating for photos. In the area, we were able to photograph Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and improve on our Magnolia Warbler photos from the day before. We decided to head to our next location early because Sax-Zim was getting a little too hot for bird activity by late morning. After settling in, resting, and having dinner in Ely, we went out to do some sunset landscape photography over Birch Lake. Once the sun set, an unexpected lightning storm came in and allowed for some incredible landscape photo opportunities! We visited this location again the next morning with a fantastic morning of photographing warblers such as Mourning, Nashville, Blackburnian, Black-and-White, and Canda Warblers, Ovenbirds, and Northern Parula.
As we birded our way through Superior National Forest, we found very photogenic birds including Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler, Pine Warbler, Cape May Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Blue-headed Vireo, White-throated sparrow, Lincoln’s Sparrow, Alder Flycatcher, and a brief opportunity with Broad-winged Hawk. We arrived in Grand Marais and rested up, had dinner, and went back out with the goal of photographing the Milky Way in a true dark sky. Despite mosquitos and a long day, the photos did not disappoint!

The next morning along the Gunflint Trail was fantastic as we had very photogenic Blackburnian, Magnolia, Bay-breasted, Black-throated Green, Black-throated Blue Warblers, Northern Waterthrush, and even a Ruffed Grouse Crossing the road! After the successful morning on the Gunflint Trail, we made our way back to Duluth for a final dinner before heading out the next morning. Overall it was a fantastic time with 115 species and 20 warbler species photographed!
Join us in Minnesota for the opportunity to photograph the best the boreal forest has to offer!

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