



In partnership with



MONTANA

Where the mountains meet the
plains

June 20-25, 2019
From Bozeman

\$1895 per person based on double occupancy
\$360 single supplement
Maximum group size is 14 participants

Guide: Adam Sell

2nd guide will be added with 8+ participants

Check out the trip website here: redhillbirding.com/montana

To register, fill out the booking form here: redhillbirding.com/bookingform

Where the Great Plains meet the grandiose peaks of the Rocky Mountains is a place known as Big Sky Country: a land where the vistas are surpassed only by the birds that inhabit them. In the expansive grasslands we will look for Baird's Sparrow, Sprague's Pipit, Mountain Plover, Long-billed Curlew, Ferruginous Hawk, Lark Bunting, and McCown's and Chestnut-collared Longspurs. These grasslands abut grand, snow-capped mountains, with a totally different but equally alluring set of birds, including Black Rosy-Finch, American Three-toed Woodpecker, Dusky Grouse, and Clark's Nutcracker. We will also visit wetlands that will be crowded with breeding waterbirds, including a wide variety of ducks and grebes and a cacophony of Yellow-headed Blackbirds. We will also pass through Yellowstone National Park, giving us a chance to see some of the West's iconic mammals.

This short trip will find some of North America's most highly-sought species on their breeding grounds. Conveniently, there are non-stop flights between Chicago and Bozeman, and Bozeman is a great jumping-off point if you would like to visit Yellowstone National Park or Grand Teton National Park before or after the birding trip.

ITINERARY

Day 1, Thu, June 20: Arrival in Bozeman, to Harlowton. We will gather at the Bozeman airport around mid-day (see “Timing” below for arrival details), load the vehicle, and head northeast to Harlowton. We will stop on the way at Cottonwood Reservoir, where we will get our first real taste of western birding. The lake hosts good numbers of nesting Western and Eared Grebes (and occasionally Clark’s), Wilson’s Phalarope, Willet, American Avocet, and Cinnamon Teal, along with many more familiar waterbirds. Yellow-headed Blackbirds lurk in the cattails and bulrushes at the edge of the lake. A pair of Trumpeter Swans is usually present in summer, as are Franklin’s Gulls. The surrounding vegetation hosts Sage Thrasher and Brewer’s Sparrow.

We will make it to Harlowton in the evening and settle in. If we have time, we will take a short drive out of town to get our first taste of Great Plains birding, where Lark Buntings dot the roadside fences and McCown’s and Chestnut-collared Longspurs flush from the roadsides.

Day 2, Fri, June 21: Judith Gap Grasslands. We will have a full day to bird the extensive grasslands north and northeast of Harlowton, in particular around Judith Gap and, depending on timing, Lake Mason National Wildlife Refuge. This area is home to the whole swath of mouthwatering Great Plains specialties: Baird’s Sparrow, Sprague’s Pipit, Mountain Plover, Upland Sandpiper, Long-billed Curlew, Ferruginous Hawk, Lark Bunting, and McCown’s and Chestnut-collared Longspur. Other birds in the area include Golden Eagle, Prairie Falcon, Swainson’s Hawk, and Brewer’s Sparrow. Wetlands host a variety of ducks and shorebirds, including Marbled Godwit and Wilson’s Phalarope. We have a good chance of seeing Pronghorn Antelope here as well.

Day 3, Sat, June 22: Harlowton to Red Lodge. We will have an early morning outing, either to look for any of the grassland birds that we missed yesterday or to an area right near Harlowton to look for birds that breed in riparian habitats, like Lazuli Bunting, Black-headed Grosbeak, Bullock’s Oriole, and Western Wood-Pewee.

We will spend the bulk of the day slowly making our way to Red Lodge, at the foot of the Beartooth Mountains. We will take a side road near Lavina to look for Greater Sage-Grouse, though it takes some luck to find them when they are not lekking. Burrowing Owls are sometimes found in the same area. We will stop in at a few wetland and riparian woodlands along the way as our schedule allows, including after we arrive in Red Lodge, where there is good birding nearby.

Day 4, Sun, June 23: Beartooth Mountains. We will have a full day to bird in the Beartooth Mountains. We will focus on finding some of the more difficult-to-find birds of the Mountain West, including Black Rosy-Finch, American Three-toed Woodpecker, Cassin’s Finch, and Dusky Grouse. We will also look for many of the characteristic birds of the mountains, including Hammond’s and Dusky Flycatchers, Western Tanager, Mountain Chickadee, Clark’s Nutcracker, White-throated Swift, Rock Wren, Green-tailed Towhee, Violet-green Swallow, Broad-tailed and Rufous Hummingbirds, and “Audubon’s” Yellow-rumped Warbler.

Days 5, Mon, June 24: Red Lodge to Gardiner via Yellowstone National Park. We will spend the first part of the morning birding in the lower elevations around Red Lodge, where we may find Red-naped Sapsucker, MacGillivray's Warbler, and Calliope Hummingbird.

We will then head back into and through the Wyoming side of the Beartooth Mountains, across northern Yellowstone National Park (including passing through the bison-filled Lamar Valley) to Gardiner, Montana. We will be birding along the way, stopping when we see interesting birds. As we get farther west, we may get lucky with Williamson's Sapsucker, Pine Grosbeak, and Cordilleran Flycatcher in the woods and American Dipper, Trumpeter Swan, Barrow's Goldeneye, and Harlequin Duck in the streams and wetlands. This is an excellent area for mammals, too, and we will keep an eye out for Bighorn Sheep, Mountain Goat (introduced here), American Bison, Moose, Black Bear, Grizzly Bear, American Badger, and even Gray Wolf. Before leaving the park, we will stop in at the famous Mammoth Hot Springs.

Day 6, Tue, June 25: Gardiner to Bozeman, departure. We will have a final morning to bird around Gardiner and Bozeman, before making it to the airport in the late morning. We will take into consideration what birds we still need to see and decide on the best plan of action for the morning's birding.

IMPORTANT NOTES

Contact information

The Red Hill Birding **tour manager** for this trip is Amanda Zeigler. To sign up, fill out the [booking form](#) and we will contact you regarding deposit information. If you have questions about this trip, please contact Josh or Amanda at info@redhillbirding.com.

Timing

The trip will **begin at a 1pm** at the Bozeman Airport on Thursday, June 20, 2019, and will end at **11:30am at the same location** on Monday, June 25. These times are organized to align with the daily non-stop flights on United Airlines between O'Hare and Bozeman. If you are taking other flights, please be sure to arrive to Bozeman by 12:30pm on June 20 and to depart after 1pm on June 25. We will coordinate with those who are not taking the non-stop flight from O'Hare or are arriving early.

The trip starts and ends in Bozeman, Montana, which is very convenient for those who would like to visit Yellowstone National Park on their own before or after the trip. We can also arrange a private trip extension to look for the newly described Cassia Crossbill in the South Hills of Idaho after the Montana trip for those who are interested.

Physical difficulty

This trip is **physically easy**. Much of the birding will be done from the road or from easy trails. Although we will be spending time in the mountains, we will not be taking any steep or long trails. We may do some off-trail walking on uneven ground to look for birds as necessary. There are times when we will be on our feet for several hours, but we will be walking at a “birding pace”. **We will reach elevations as high as 11,000ft at Beartooth Pass.** The highest elevation for any accommodations is 5,700ft in Red Lodge.

Pace

The **pace** of the trip is **moderate**. The day length is very long in Montana in summer, with almost 16 hours of daylight. We will typically be getting an early start for birding, taking breakfast with us into the field. We will stop for lunch (sometimes a picnic lunch), continue birding in the afternoon, then have a rest before dinner when time allows. Sunrise is around 5:30 and sunset around 9:15. We will compile our daily checklist (checklist provided) in the evening. The guide will also be keeping eBird lists, which we are happy to share with participants. We will be staying in three hotels over the five nights of the trip.

Price

The price of the trip is \$1895 and the single supplement is \$350. This price **includes** all meals and drinks with meals (excluding alcoholic beverages) from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 6; all transportation and accommodation during that period; an expert Red Hill Birding guide for the duration of the trip (two if more than 7 people register); all park entrance fees; and a bound checklist to keep track of sightings during the trip. It **does not include** alcoholic beverages, optional activities apart from those specified in the itinerary, snacks, laundry, tips (apart from meals), or other items of a personal nature. **Part of the proceeds from the trip go to the IOS Grant Fund, in order to help students fund their research on Illinois’ birds.**

A deposit of \$450 per person and the submission of the booking form will secure your place on the trip. Final payment is due by February 20, 2019. We accept payment by check, bank transfer, or the apps Venmo and Zelle. Our prices include a cash discount; we accept credit cards with a 3.1% service fee. Upon receiving your [booking form](#), we will send you deposit details.

Hotels

We will be staying in simple, comfortable motels in each location. We will be using three different motels over the five nights of the trip. The hotels all have wireless internet.

Photography

The **photographic opportunities** are **excellent**. We will often be birding in open habitat with birds that show themselves well. The light in summer is beautiful in this part of the world. That said, this is primarily a birdwatching tour, so while there will be ample opportunities for photography along the way, we will not be making special considerations for photographers.

Weather

The weather in June in Montana is usually very nice. The average high temperature at that time of year is about 70-75°F and the average low is about 45-50°F, depending on the location. Rain, high winds, snow, and freezing temperatures are possible, so an umbrella and/or raincoat for rain and a mid-weight jacket for cold and wind are recommended. Biting insects are generally not a problem, but ticks and mosquitoes can be present, so bringing repellent is recommended as a precaution.

Packing considerations

You will generally want to wear **comfortable birding clothes** that you don't mind getting a little dirty.

In terms of gear, you will generally want the usual binoculars, a field guide, and light-weight field clothing. A jacket for cool mornings and high elevations is important. Many people appreciate having a camera along. A reusable water bottle and, for some people, a travel coffee mug, are useful to have along in the car during the day. A raincoat and/or umbrella is useful in case of wet weather. Comfortable walking shoes are important, as we will be on our feet for extended periods. You will not need rubber boots or hiking boots.

Resources

Our favorite bird field guides in North America are the *Sibley Guides*, the larger *Sibley Guide to Birds* which covers all of North America and the more portable *Sibley Birds West* which will cover all of the birds on the tour. The Sibley Guide App is an excellent app that covers all North American birds, including with good recordings.

Tipping

We aim to provide **exceptional service**, using guides that are knowledgeable, interesting, personable, and experienced. While tipping is never expected, if you feel that your guides went above and beyond, you are welcome to leave them a gratuity. Tips at restaurants are included in the cost of the tour.

Travel insurance

We do not require travel insurance for trips within the USA. However, we highly recommend buying it can protect you from unforeseen costs associated with missed, delayed, or canceled flights, sudden illness, medical evacuation, damaged equipment, or other unexpected issues. Red Hill Birding is not responsible for such costs, as laid out in our [Terms & Conditions](#). Note that in some circumstances, such as if you have preexisting medical conditions, travel insurance must be purchased within 1-2 weeks of paying the trip deposit.