



SOUTH DAKOTA: BADLANDS & BLACK HILLS JUNE 18 – 24, 2024

Guide: Josh Engel & Steve Huggins
Maximum group size is 12 participants

Price: \$2,790 per person sharing
Single room supplement: \$770

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

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

Western South Dakota is a classic summer vacation destination. The abundance of public lands, dotted with small towns and tourist attractions, provides a fantastic cross section of landscapes, birds, and Americana. This trip will take in Badlands National Park, with its incredible rock formations; the Black Hills, an outpost of the Rocky Mountains which reach an elevation of over 7,000ft; and the vast Great Plains north of the Black Hills. Birdwise, this is very much the West, featuring birds like American Dipper, Rock and Canyon Wrens, Lark Bunting, Ferruginous Hawk, and Burrowing Owl (not to mention bighorn sheep, bison, and other western mammals).



ITINERARY

Day 1, Tue, Jun 18. Arrive to Rapid City, South Dakota. Night: Rapid City

After your arrival to Rapid City, we will gather at the group's hotel in the late afternoon for introductions and a quick rundown of the upcoming tour. Given the late hour of sunset here in the summer, we may have some time for a bit of local birding in the late afternoon.

Day 2, Wed, June 19. Badlands National Park. Night: Rapid City

We will be up early today to head to the famed Badlands National Park for a full day of birding in this spectacular park. White-throated Swifts whizz around while Rock Wren's repetitive songs reverberates among the rock formations. Western Meadowlark, Mountain Bluebird, Say's Phoebe, and Upland Sandpiper dot roadside fenceposts and if we look at enough fenceposts, we may find a Burrowing Owl atop one as well. With luck, we may even find a Sharp-tailed Grouse feeding on a roadside. All along the way, today and for the rest of the trip, we will be looking out for roadside raptors, which could include Prairie Falcon, Golden Eagle, and Swainson's and Ferruginous Hawks.

We will have lunch in the famous Wall Drug, and we will eventually return to Rapid City for the night.

Day 3, Thu, Jun 20. Black Hills. Night: Custer State Park.

Today we will visit the Black Hills, an isolated mountain range that reaches 7,200+ feet in elevation and hosts many birds typical of the Rocky Mountains. We will also be sure to pay a visit to (and take the obligatory photos of) Mount Rushmore as well.

In this area, we may find montane-breeding birds like Western Tanager, Red Crossbill, MacGillivray's and Virginia's Warblers, Pygmy Nuthatch, Black-billed Magpie, and Townsend's Solitaire. The "White-winged" form of Dark-eyed Junco, considered a separate species in the past, only breeds in the Black Hills, and we have a good chance of seeing it.

We will spend much of the afternoon in Custer State Park, one of the country's largest state parks. We will continue to enjoy a wide variety of western birds, perhaps adding birds like Lazuli Bunting, Spotted Towhee, Bullock's Oriole, Western Wood-Pewee, Plumbeous Vireo, and the strange and beautiful Lewis's Woodpecker to our growing list. No doubt we will encounter plenty of eastern birds too, here approaching the western edge of their typical distribution, including birds like Brown Thrasher, Red-headed Woodpecker, and Orchard Oriole. This is also a good area to look out for mammals, including American bison, bighorn sheep, mountain goat, and the resident group of feral donkeys.

Day 4, Fri, Jun 21. Custer State Park and surrounds. Night: Custer State Park

We will start our morning around Sylvan Lake, in some of the highest accessible elevations in the Black Hills, where we could get lucky and come across Black-backed or American Three-

toed Woodpeckers, Clark's Nutcracker, and Canada Jay among the more common western birds that typify montane areas of the Western US.

Afterwards, we will also cross the state border in Wyoming to visit a private feeder setup (if access is allowed) in Ferguson Canyon. This feeder setup is famous for its Pinyon Jays, a beautiful blue crow-like jay that roves widely in flocks and can be very hard to track down. We also have another chance to find Lewis's Woodpecker here, and could also see Cassin's Finch, Western Tanager, and other mountain birds coming to the feeders.

Day 5, Sat, Jun 22. Custer to Spearfish. Night: Spearfish

Today we will head to the north side of the Black Hills, spending the day birding in the canyons and forests in the area. Our primary target will be American Dipper, that iconic bird of the western mountains that inhabits fast-flowing rivers, where it swim-walks catching prey from river bottoms and under rocks. We will also look for any other Black Hills birds that we haven't seen yet, since this will be our last day in the mountains. Perhaps we will find Red-naped Sapsucker, Clark's Nutcracker, or another of the less common breeding birds of the region.

We will also pass through the historic town of Deadwood and if we have time, will spend a little while walking through the town.

Day 6, Sun, Jun 23. Belle Fourche area grasslands and wetlands. Night: Spearfish

For our last day of birding, we will leave the Black Hills and head out into the Great Plains grasslands that surround the mountains. We will be birding right around the geographical center of the United States. Out in the plains, the birdlife will be very different than in the mountains. We will hope to find Chestnut-collared Longspur and Long-billed Curlew doing their breeding displays over the grasslands, while Lark Bunting, Lark, Grasshopper, and Vesper Sparrows, Horned Lark, Bobolink, Upland Sandpiper, and Western Meadowlark sing and display in the background. We might even get lucky and find the rare Baird's Sparrow in this region.

We will also bird some wetlands in the area. Water is a precious resource here and the wetlands host many breeding waterbirds, including Yellow-headed Blackbird, Western and Eared (and occasionally Clark's) Grebes, Wilson's Phalarope, and a wide variety of ducks.

Day 7, Mon, Jun 24. Departure from Rapid City.

Today is a departure day, and you can schedule your departing flight for any time today. Depending on flight times, we may sneak in some last minute birding in Bear Butte Lake on the way to Rapid City.

IMPORTANT NOTES

Contact and registration information

To sign up, each participant should complete the [booking form](#). Once we receive the form, we will send you information about paying the trip deposit. If you have any questions before registering, please contact the office at info@redhillbirding.com.

Timing

The trip will **begin at 4:00pm in the lobby of the Rapid City hotel on Tuesday, June 18** for a general introduction and a little local afternoon birding, and will **end on the morning of Monday, June 24 at the Rapid City Airport**. We will try to have the guides provide airport pickups on June 18 and we will drop everyone at the airport on June 24. We will let you know ahead of the tour which hotel in Rapid City this will be in case participants arrive at other times. For a group of 7 or fewer, we will have one van with a guide driving; for a group of larger than 7, we will be birding in two vans with the guides driving each.

Price

The price of the trip is **\$2790** and the single room supplement is **\$770**. This price **includes** all meals (excluding alcoholic beverages) from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 7; all transportation and accommodation during that period; an expert Red Hill Birding guide with a scope and audio equipment (two guides if more than 7 participants register); all park entrance fees; and a bound checklist to keep track of sightings during the trip. It **does not include** airfare, alcoholic beverages, travel insurance, airport transfers in some circumstances, optional activities, snacks, laundry, tips (apart from meals), or other items of a personal nature.

A deposit of \$600 per person and the submission of the [booking form](#) will secure your place on the trip. Upon receiving your booking form, we will send you deposit details. Final payment is due by March 18, 2024. We accept payment by Zelle, check, or bank transfer. We also accept payment by credit card with a 3.1% processing fee.

Physical difficulty

This trip is **physically easy**. While much birding will be done from roads and other easily accessible places, we will occasionally be walking on mountainous trails. None will be difficult, long, or steep, though there can be uneven or rocky ground in some places. We will always be walking at a birding pace (that is, very slowly). These walks could last up to a few hours and are always optional.

Pace

The **pace** of the trip is **moderate**. A typical day will have us up early to take advantage of early morning bird activity. We will sometimes take breakfast into the field with us. Some days will

include a mid-day siesta before returning out in the cooler afternoon temperatures and finishing with time for a short rest before dinner. There are unlikely to be nighttime outings.

Hotels

Accommodations are very good throughout. Generally, there will be free wireless internet. We favor hotels that are convenient to our birding sites whenever possible.

Photography

The **photographic opportunities** are **very good**. The open nature of the habitat lends itself well to bird photography, although it is more difficult in the forests where we are birding at higher elevations. We hope to visit at least one feeder. Although this is primarily a birding tour and we will not be making special accommodations for photographers, this is an excellent part of the country for bird photography and any photographers in the group will go home with many excellent images.

Weather

The weather in South Dakota in June is generally quite comfortable. For example, in Rapid City, the average high temperature in June is 76° and low is 55°. It could be cooler in the early mornings at higher elevations, and it could be hotter in the grasslands outside of the mountains. It is generally a fairly dry region, with low humidity, though occasional rain or storms are possible. It is worth checking the weather forecast before departure.

Packing considerations

You will generally want to wear comfortable, light-weight clothing. Long sleeves and long pants are recommended for sun protection. A warm sweater or mid-weight jacket is useful for cool nights and mornings.

In terms of gear, you will want to bring the usual binoculars, field guide, hat, camera, and other gear you are accustomed to going birding with. Please bring a reusable water bottle to stay hydrated in this dry environment. For coffee drinkers, a travel coffee mug is a nice thing to have along in the morning. This is typically a sunny region in summer, so bring sunscreen and a hat as well.

eBird

Your Red Hill Birding guide and/or local guides will be eBirding the entire tour. If you have an eBird account, they will collect your username/email address in order to share those lists, and will share them when it is convenient. You are welcome to edit your lists to add/remove species, edit text, or change numbers as much as you would like, since any edits you make to your lists do not change others' lists. And we love it when participants add photos and sound recordings to the checklists!

The leader will also provide an eBird Trip Report after the tour and will add participants who have an eBird account to the report; this way, you can see your own personal trip details and those of the whole group. These trip reports are accessible to anyone who has the link, so participants who do not have eBird accounts can still view the report to see the trip list, photos, and any added text.

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 domestic trips. However, we recommend purchasing it to help protect you against the unexpected. For your convenience, we offer travel protection through Travelex Insurance Services. For more information on the available plans or to enroll, go to www.travelexinsurance.com or contact Travelex Insurance Services at 800-228-9792 and reference location number 13-0441.

Travelex Insurance Services, Inc CA Agency License #0D10209. Travel Insurance is underwritten by, Berkshire Hathaway Specialty Insurance Company, NAIC #22276. 55Y

Note that to be eligible for some benefits, travel insurance must be purchased within 1-2 weeks of paying the trip deposit.



Lazuli Bunting, photo by Evelyn Ralston