



Sax-Zim Bog and Northeast Minnesota

Jan 23 - 27, 2021

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This was Red Hill Birding's first out-of-state trip during the covid-19 pandemic. It was also the fifth consecutive winter that we've led a trip to Minnesota in winter! It was a special private trip for just one client, so we had no problem staying safe. It was a careful trip--we drove from Chicago; the hotels were following strict cleanliness protocols; we brought breakfast from home and lunches and dinners were carried out; and we basically only went inside for bathrooms, to order food, and to sleep. And the birding was absolutely tremendous, a who's who of Northwoods birding in winter: Great Gray Owl, Northern Hawk Owl, Snowy Owl, Northern Goshawk, Evening and Pine Grosbeak, Hoary and Common Redpoll, Black-backed Woodpecker, Spruce, Ruffed, and Sharp-tailed Grouse, Boreal Chickadee, White-winged Crossbill, Northern Shrike, Snow Bunting, Canada Jay, Black-billed Magpie. Plus we found bonus waterbirds like Harlequin Duck and Glaucous Gull.

We spent our time primarily in Superior National Forest and Sax-Zim Bog. We had beautiful weather: cold, yes, but with little wind and lots of sunshine. And we took advantage of driving from Chicago, rather than flying, seeing some good birds on the ride home. Rather than a day-by-day trip report, I've done an annotated checklist with details for some of the key species.



Great Gray Owl in Superior National Forest

BIRD LIST. 43 species. Taxonomy follows the Clements/eBird Checklist, 2020 update. Former (or alternate) English names are in parentheses. (H) = heard only; (L)=Tour leader only. The global IUCN red list status is listed for threatened and near-threatened species: CR=Critically Endangered, EN=Endangered, VU=Vulnerable, NT=Near-threatened.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*
American Black Duck *Anas rubripes*
Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus*

Great views of a long-staying male in Two Harbors

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*
Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*
Ruffed Grouse *Bonasa umbellus*

Excellent views a couple of times, including one eating grit on the roadside.

Spruce Grouse *Falcipennis canadensis*

It took two attempts, but we eventually had great views of a flock eating spruce needles and eventually dropping onto the road and eating grit in Superior National Forest.

Sharp-tailed Grouse *Tympanuchus phasianellus*

Another grouse that made us work for it, we eventually saw them sitting atop tall conifers near a lek in Sax-Zim, and eventually flying to yard and eating birdseed. These normally very reliable birds made us sweat this year!

Wild Turkey *Meleagris gallopavo*

There's something unexpected about seeing turkeys in the Minnesota winter landscape, but we came across a good-sized flock in Sax-Zim.

Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) *Columba livia*
Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura*
Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*
Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*

Good views of immatures and an adult in Duluth.

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

Adults seen twice, first flying over a road as we drove, and the second time much better, a bird perched with the sun rising behind it in Sax-Zim.

Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*
Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis*
Rough-legged Hawk *Buteo lagopus*

One seen on the roadside in Wisconsin on our way back to Chicago.

Snowy Owl (VU) *Bubo scandiacus*

It was a poor year for these in the Duluth area, so we were happy that one was being seen near Madison. We passed through the area where it was being seen on our way back to Chicago and found other birders already looking at the owl as it rested in a field. As we watched, it got up and flew closer to us, then across the road and off into the distance. It was a great last bird of the trip.

Black-backed Woodpecker *Picoides arcticus*
Downy Woodpecker *Dryobates pubescens*

Tremendous views of a female at close range in Sax-Zim.

Hairy Woodpecker*Dryobates villosus***Pileated Woodpecker***Dryocopus pileatus***Northern Shrike***Lanius borealis*

Seen a number of times in various areas.

Canada Jay*Perisoreus canadensis*

Seen "in the wild" in Superior National Forest, but our best views were at feeders in Sax-Zim.

Blue Jay*Cyanocitta cristata***Black-billed Magpie***Pica hudsonia*

Seen a couple of times in Sax-Zim

American Crow*Corvus brachyrhynchos***Common Raven***Corvus corax***Black-capped Chickadee***Poecile atricapillus***Boreal Chickadee***Poecile hudsonicus*

Excellent, close views of a pair coming to feeders in Sax-Zim.

Horned Lark*Eremophila alpestris*

One seen flying past as we watched the Snowy Owl.

Red-breasted Nuthatch*Sitta canadensis***White-breasted Nuthatch***Sitta carolinensis***Brown Creeper***Certhia americana***European Starling***Sturnus vulgaris***Bohemian Waxwing***Bombycilla garrulus*

Stunning views of a flock in the town of Ely. Seen two other times as well, but not as well.

House Sparrow*Passer domesticus***Evening Grosbeak (VU)***Coccothraustes vespertinus*

Fantastic views coming to the feeders at the Sax-Zim Welcome Center.

Pine Grosbeak*Pinicola enucleator*

A good winter for them, we saw them a number of times, including at feeders, at a crabapple in a town, and way out in the boreal forest.

Common Redpoll*Acanthis flammea***Hoary Redpoll***Acanthis hornemanni*

We had many good views of Common Redpolls, including at feeders at Sax-Zim. One of the flocks coming to a feeder included a Hoary Redpoll, which obliged us with excellent, prolonged views, allowing us to really see the field marks to tell it from Common.

White-winged Crossbill*Loxia leucoptera*

It took a bit of searching, but we ended up getting long studies of a group of three feeding in a cone-laden black spruce north of Sax-Zim.

Snow Bunting*Plectrophenax nivalis*

We bumped into a flock feeding on the roadside on our way to the Snowy Owl spot near Madison.

MAMMAL LIST. 3 species. As there is no standard list of names for mammals, the names used here are simply commonly used names. Alternate names are in parentheses. IUCN Red List status listed for threatened and near-threatened species: CR=Critically Endangered, EN=Endangered, VU=Vulnerable, NT=Near-threatened.

American Red Squirrel - *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*

Red Fox - *Vulpes vulpes*

White-tailed deer - *Odocoileus virginianus*



A small part of a flock of Bohemian Waxwings that we came across in the town of Ely.



We had unbelievable views of this female Black-backed Woodpecker foraging right in front of us.



Some years Boreal Chickadees can be hard to find. Not this year!



Roadside female Spruce Grouse.



Pine Grosbeaks at a feeder in Sax-Zim Bog.