



TOUR INFORMATION FOR MINNESOTA AND NORTH DAKOTA

These notes are designed to help you prepare for your tour. Please read carefully.

ENTERING THE UNITED STATES: United Kingdom citizens need to have a passport that has a minimum validity of 6 months remaining after the tour has finished. This is an immigration requirement for many countries, including the USA. All nationalities require a machine-readable passport if travelling to the USA under the visa waiver programme (see below).

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has made changes to the immigration requirements. Travellers seeking to travel under the Visa Waiver Program must pre-apply for authorisation using the Electronic System for Travel Authorisation (**ESTA**). **ESTA** must be completed online via their website.

Having an **ESTA** is a mandatory requirement and applications should be made online at least 72 hours before departure via their website <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov> as although the majority of responses are immediate, it can take 72 hours for approval in some cases. There is a small fee to pay as a processing charge followed by a small fee when authorisation has been granted.

For further information, or if you don't have access to the internet, please contact the Embassy of the United States in London on 020 3608 6998.

Citizens of other countries should contact their nearest US Embassy for entry requirements.

Once you've applied for your ESTA please remember to print it out and take a copy of that document onto the aircraft with you.

All visitors to the USA's first port-of-entry have their index fingerprints taken by an electronic scanner at Passport Control. You will also have your photograph taken at the same time. Although the process itself only takes a few minutes the queue can be quite long if several flights arrive at the same time! If you need to change aircraft to continue on within the USA, you will then need to reclaim your checked-in luggage, go through security, then hand your luggage back to the airline staff who will be waiting nearby to give assistance. Once your luggage is back with the airline please proceed to the departure gate for your onward flight.

It is always a good idea to take a photocopy of your passport with you when travelling abroad. It can prove invaluable in helping you get a replacement if your original is lost or stolen. You should pack the photocopy separately from the original.

INTRODUCTORY MEETING: There will be an introductory meeting at 18:00 on Day 1 of the tour. This informal meeting affords the leader the opportunity to introduce everyone to each other and to let you know generally what to expect on the trip - pace of the tour, daily routine, the next day's schedule, etc. After the meeting, we will have dinner together.

TIME DIFFERENCE: Minnesota is 5 hours behind British Summer Time (6 hours behind GMT).

CLIMATE: Early mornings may be as cool as 35-40°F (circa 4°C) in some locations with temperatures warming to 65-90°F (18-32°C) during the day. On rare occasions, we have experienced highs only in the 50s F (10-16°C) to as high as 103°F. Rain is possible anytime and we can expect it at some point during the tour (though it is usually brief).

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PACE OF THE TOUR: We will be rising very early each morning so that we can be in the field at or before sunrise. There will also be several late evenings during the tour to look for rails and/or owls although such forays will always be optional. We'll make every effort to mitigate the effects of these long days by scheduling time to rest in our motels before supper.

There will be moderate to long drives between destinations on several days.

On our early mornings, picnic breakfasts will be provided by the hotel, and the leader will also have fruit, granola bars, and other breakfast items available in the van for later in the morning. Lunches will either be in restaurants or sandwich shops, or in the form of a picnic in the field, weather-permitting. With unforeseen exceptions suppers will be relaxed sit-down affairs in restaurants near the motels.

Most walking will be gentle along well-maintained gravel roads and trails. The exception will be when we look for certain species such as Connecticut Warbler, and Nelson's and Le Conte's Sparrows that may require us to walk in damp-to-wet meadows and bogs. If we *do* venture into marshes and bogs we'll be walking in ankle deep water across hummocks which will require being able to lift your feet relatively high and set each down again on potentially unstable substrate, balancing ability and stamina are important (although the pace will be slow). These walks will be short, are always optional, but might not be suitable for everybody.

HEALTH: It is essential that you contact your own doctor to obtain the latest information on the regions you are visiting. Please contact your doctor well in advance of your tour's departure as some medication must be initiated weeks before the period of possible exposure.

It is recommended that you are up-to-date on routine vaccinations. These include measles-mumps-rubella (MMR), diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis, varicella (chickenpox), polio, and your yearly flu jab.

Birdwatching in Minnesota poses no major health hazards. Biting insects can be numerous on several of the mornings and evenings with mosquitoes being the major adversary although we will also encounter blackflies. Those with an allergic reaction to mosquito or blackfly bites may wish to consult their doctor. Long sleeves and insect repellents work well to prevent bites. Head nets are generally not recommended. We can expect to encounter wood ticks in a few locations and deer ticks exist in small numbers.

For further information on health advice refer to the Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad website www.masta-travel-health.com

ACCOMMODATION: We will be staying in comfortable standard hotels throughout the trip, all within close walking distance of restaurants.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Currently self-service laundry facilities are not available in our hotels.

ELECTRICITY: 110/120V AC 60Hz. An international travel plug is useful and can be bought in most airport departure lounges. You may find the following website helpful: <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>.

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FOOD: Food is good American standard.

Sunbird tours are all-inclusive and no refunds can be issued for any tour meals participants choose to miss. While we will try to do all we can to accommodate the requirements of all participants, please note that we cannot guarantee all causes of food allergies can be avoided at every destination. Many restaurants offer set menus and are unable to accommodate all special requests within a group. Thus, participants with significant food allergies or special dietary needs should bring appropriate foods with them for those times when their needs can, regrettably, not be accommodated. Our tours are carefully scheduled to ensure the best possible birding experience and although the leaders will do all they can to make sure the group eats at a reasonable time, sometimes early or late lunches and/or evening meals cannot be avoided. Any participants who need to eat at specific times may need to take supplemental food with them.

DRINKS: Bottled water, a soft drink or a beer (or wine if appropriate) are provided at meals, as is coffee or tea. In addition, we keep a supply of bottled water on the tour vehicles. Bottled or filtered water may also be provided in some rooms where we stay.

INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS: Our hotels have reasonably good Wi-Fi connections. Mobile phone access is good near our lodging locations but can be intermittent when in the field

Mobile phones can be useful while on tour but keep in mind that many countries operate on a different cellular technology. Your phone may be incompatible with the local system, so please check with your local carrier. Fortunately, with the advent of smartphones, it is easy to download applications such as Skype or Google Voice, which can make calling home free or very inexpensive. Another option is to replace the data ("SIM") card in your phone in-country. The SIM cards, including data can be very cheap. If you wish to use this option you will need to check that your smart phone has a SIM card slot.

FIELD CLOTHING: Dress will be informal throughout. The following items are basic:

Moderate-weight sweatshirt or sweater	Shorts
Long-sleeved shirt(s)	Quick-drying long trousers
Short-sleeved shirt(s)	Fleece jacket (optional)
Moderate-weight, wind-proof jacket	Rain-proof clothing

Optional: Gloves are useful on one or two cool mornings.

Footwear: Sturdy shoes or light- to moderate-weight hiking shoes will suffice for a vast majority of the trip although some may find comfortable hiking boots with firm soles helpful during our walks on gravel roads. There are two schools of thought on dealing with marsh walking. Some opt to use old trainers which are light and easy to pack and have the advantage of letting the water out as well as in. The water may be chilly, however, and many opt to wear knee-high rubber boots. Be prepared to get a little wet, regardless of footwear. Mornings in North Dakota walking into the grasslands, as well the first morning in the Twin Cities, may also be damp and dewy and some people prefer to wear rubber boots.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS:

Notebook and pen	Alarm clock
Water bottle/canteen	Insect repellent
Sunglasses and sunscreen (important!)	Wrist watch
Torch (with spare batteries)	Ear plugs (if you are a light sleeper)
(very useful for walking around the marsh)	Personal medication

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Optional: Telescope & tripod (recommended if you have them), camera, film or memory cards, spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guide.

Note: The most effective insect repellents are those containing at least 35% of the active ingredient diethyltoluamide (DEET). The higher the percentage, the greater the effectiveness. However, care must be taken to avoid getting the repellent on to optical equipment as it dissolves rubber and plastic and can damage coated lenses. A reasonably effective alternative, which isn't corrosive, is Mosi-guard, produced by MASTA, and we recommend this. It is available in most high street chemist (including those at the airport). Camping supply stores sell a product containing permethrin 0.5%, which must be applied directly to clothing in advance of wearing and allowed to dry. This non-staining, odourless chemical is non-toxic to humans and protective on clothing through several launderings. Please make sure you never to spray insect repellent inside the vehicle or when you are standing close to other participants – it may drift on to their optical equipment.

LEADER'S EQUIPMENT: Leader will provide the following:

Telescope	Maps
Step stool for the minibus	Ice box
Laser pointer	Basic first-aid kit

LUGGAGE: Our Final Information document, which will be sent to you approximately three weeks before departure, will give details about baggage weight and size restrictions imposed by the airline used for this tour.

If possible, please bring your luggage in soft-sided bags or cases (rather than large hard 'Samsonite'-type suitcases) as these pack more easily into our vehicles during the tour. Please note that on many tours there are no porters to carry your luggage so please ensure that **no bag is so heavy that you are unable to lift and carry it yourself**. As a general rule, in addition to using your luggage labels, it is a good idea to fix identification to the *inside* of each piece of luggage.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Scenery and memory shots will be plentiful and simple to obtain but birds are difficult to photograph. Although there will be occasions when bird photography is possible, a birdwatching tour is not normally the best means of pursuing this aim. "Digiscoping", on the other hand, is perfectly compatible with the tour, though it is recommended you bring your own telescope! Bring all your film or memory cards with you as it may be difficult to find precisely what you need on short notice. Camera equipment should be packed in moisture- and dust-proof bags, as a precaution.

There will be plenty of opportunities to take photos of birds, mammals and scenery and the leaders will do all they can to accommodate anyone wishing to take photographs. However if you are a serious photographer please bear in mind that this is first and foremost a birdwatching tour. Please do not allow your photographic desires to conflict with other participants' birdwatching activities.

TRANSPORT: We will be traveling by 15-seater minibus, depending on the group size. When using 15-seater, we will take a maximum of seven passengers plus the leader/driver. Participants should be able to ride in any seat in our vehicles.

SMOKING: We request that you do not smoke in the vehicles or when the group is gathered for meals, checklists, etc. If you are sharing a room with a non-smoker, please do not smoke in the room. If you smoke in the field, we ask that you do so well away and downwind from the group.

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TRAVEL INSURANCE: Travel insurance is essential and we insist that you take out suitable cover as soon as your tour is booked. If you are bringing expensive optical equipment or other valuable items, please make sure they are also adequately insured on your home contents policy, as most travel insurance policies do not cover very expensive individual items. You may wish to consult your insurance broker regarding coverage. Please also ensure that your policy covers you in the event of a medical emergency, cancellation of a trip or severe delays. Medical costs abroad can often be extremely expensive. Please note that Sunbird is not liable for any medical or repatriation costs resulting from injury or illness during a tour or for covering any costs resulting from a flight delay such as extra hotel accommodation.

If you wish, insurance can be arranged by Helen Fisher, Bullerwell Independent Insurance Brokers, 13 Goldington Road, Bedford, MK40 3JY. Tel: 01234-866964. Please contact Helen for a quote and she will send the schedule directly to you.

TIPPING: All tour-based tips are included in the tour price. These include tips to local guides, drivers, hotel porters, and waiters and waitresses when we have group meals together in restaurants. You only need to pay tips for personal services such as room service or drinks from the bar.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Field Guides:

Kaufman, Kenn. 2000. *Birds of North America*. Houghton Mifflin, New York. Illustrated with computer-enhanced photographs.

Dunn, J. L. and J. K. Alderfer. 2017. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. 7th Edition. National Geographic Society, Washington, DC. One of the top two field guides for North America, more portable than the Sibley guide. The latest edition contains subspecies maps for many polytypic species. **Recommended.**

Sibley, David Allen. 2014. *The Sibley Guide to Birds, Second Edition*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. Arguably the best North American field guide showing all North America's birds. Although comprehensive, it's larger-than-standard-field-guide size makes it difficult to carry into the field. **Highly recommended.**

Sibley, David Allen. 2003. *The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. The same concise and accurate illustrations and information as found in the more comprehensive guide though smaller and much easier to carry. **Recommended if size is an issue.**

References:

Eckert, Kim R. 2002. *A Birder's Guide to Minnesota*. Fourth edition. One of the best state guides. A county-by-county guide to over 1000 birding locations, including interesting information about Minnesota, miscellaneous references and resources, an annotated list of Minnesota birds, selected identification hints, and over 200 maps. Excellent general reference.

Janssen, Robert B. 1987. *Birds in Minnesota*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis. A guide to the distribution of 400 species of birds in Minnesota.

Strangis, Jay Michael. 1996. *Birding Minnesota*. Falcon Press Publishing Co., Inc., Helena, Montana. A generalized guide to birding in Minnesota.

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Other:

Carpenter, Bob. 1997. *Best Little Unsung Birding Spot in America*. WildBird September 1997: 22-33.

Zickefoose, Julie. 2004. *A North Dakota State of Mind*. *Bird Watcher's Digest* March/April (Vol. 26, No. 4): 100-111.

OBTAINING BOOKS: Most of the field guides and the major ornithological references in print are available by mail order from booksellers specialising in natural history titles.

Natural History Book Service Ltd
Tel: 01803 865913
www.nhbs.co.uk

Subbuteo Books
Tel: 0870 010 9700
www.wildlifebooks.com

WildSounds
Tel: 01263 741100
www.wildsounds.co.uk

MAPS: Maps of the region may be available from:

The Map Shop
Tel: 01684 593146
www.themapshop.co.uk

Stanfords
Tel: 020 7836 1321
www.stanfords.co.uk

FINAL INFORMATION: A Final Information sheet with instructions for meeting the group, hotel addresses, etc. and your flight tickets will be sent to you about three weeks before departure. If you have any questions about the tour please contact us.