ITINERARY

BIRDING THE DAKOTAS: PRAIRIES, BLACK HILLS & **BADLANDS**

May 30 - June 6, 2025



The Upland Sandpiper is a quintessential bird of the prairies. Its preferred habitat is open grassland, making the Dakotas ideal breeding habitat for these lovely birds. Photograph by guide Cory Gregory.

We include here information for those interested in the 2025 Field Guides Birding the Dakotas: Prairies, Black Hills, & Badlands tour:

- a general introduction to the tour
- a description of the birding areas to be visited on the tour
- an abbreviated daily itinerary with some indication of the nature of each day's birding outings

These additional materials will be made available to those who register for the tour:

- a detailed information bulletin with important logistical information and answers to guestions regarding accommodations, air arrangements, clothing, health precautions, and personal items
- a Field Guides checklist for preparing for and keeping track of the birds we see on the tour
- after the conclusion of the tour, a list of birds seen on the tour

North and South Dakota, the core of the Northern Prairie states, contain an impressive combination of geology, wildlife, scenery, and rich American history. This unique tour, which pairs birding with geology and visiting American landmarks, will not only target specialty birds but also visit several famous National Parks. Have you always wanted to see Mount Rushmore, visit Badlands National Park, or observe Bison at Theodore Roosevelt National Park? This trip aims to do all the above, and more.

Our eight-day itinerary loops through both of the Dakotas, starting and ending in Bismarck, North Dakota. The late spring to early summer period is a pleasant time to visit, and our time in the prairie-pothole region (created by glaciers more than 11,000 years ago) will be filled with the song of Western Meadowlarks, Bobolinks, Grasshopper Sparrows,

Chestnut-collared Longspurs, Lark Buntings, and more. Grassland shorebirds can be found here as well, including Upland Sandpiper, Willet, Long-billed Curlew, and the unique Wilson's Phalarope. We'll visit expansive wetlands teeming with Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Western Grebes, and Black Terns, while nearby wet grasslands are home to some fancy sparrows like Nelson's Sparrow and LeConte's Sparrow. In western North Dakota, we'll target additional specialties like Sprague's Pipit and the prized Baird's Sparrow in the dry prairie.

The second half of our tour has us switching gears and visiting the conspicuous Black Hills of South Dakota. This very isolated "island" of mountains, some reaching up to 7000 feet, hosts a very different array of birds and mammals. The many rushing rivers, deep gorges, meadows, and waterfalls make for a very pleasant wildlife destination. The list of western montane species found in the Black Hills is impressive; we'll be searching for American Dipper, Western Flycatcher, MacGillivray's Warbler, Canada Jay, Red Crossbill, Cassin's Finch, and others. We aim to see White-throated Swifts and Violet-green Swallows flying overhead, hear the cascading song of Canyon Wrens, and maybe even spot a Black-backed or Lewis's Woodpecker. The list of mammals in this area is quite remarkable as well, offering numerous opportunities to observe a variety of species, including the Black-tailed Prairie Dog, Bison, Pronghorn, Elk, Mule Deer, and Bighorn Sheep.

Whether it's the vast prairie, oceans of cattails, and rugged grasslands of North Dakota, or the Black Hills, Mount Rushmore, and the striking Badlands of South Dakota, this tour will be unique in sampling all of these!



Theodore Roosevelt National Park preserves drier prairie, where we'll search for Baird's Sparrow and Sprague's Pipit.

Photograph by guide Cory Gregory.

We want to be sure you are on the right tour! Below is a description of the physical requirements of the tour. If you are concerned about the difficulty, please contact us about this and be sure to fully explain your concerns. We want to make sure you have a wonderful time with us, so if you are uncomfortable with the requirements, just let us know and we can help you find a better-fitting tour! Field Guides will not charge you a change or cancellation fee if you opt out within 10 days of depositing.

Physical requirements of this tour

- **TRAILS**: We will not be taking any hikes longer than 1-2 miles but some trails may be hilly, sandy, or muddy depending on recent rains.
- POTENTIAL CHALLENGES: There will be drives that may be more than a couple of hours.
- PACE: We can expect mornings to start on the early side, usually about 6:00 AM. Dinners will usually be about 7:00 PM due to the long, summer days. In a couple of instances, we'll offer an optional post-dinner outing to look/listen for owls.
- ELEVATION: Between 1700 and 6000 feet.
- **WEATHER**: Temperatures could range from lows in the upper 30s °F, to highs in the low 80s °F. Rain is a possibility.

- VEHICLE SEATING: So that each participant has equal opportunity during our travel, we employ a seat rotation
 system on all tours. Participants will need to be flexible enough to maneuver to the back of the vehicle on
 occasion. Those who experience motion sickness will need to bring adequate medication for the duration of the
 tour, as we are not able to reserve forward seats for medical conditions.
- **BATHROOM BREAKS**: Bathroom stops at indoor restrooms will be made regularly; comfort stops in nature are also possible, should the need arise.
- **OPTING OUT**: Where we are staying multiple days in the same lodging, participants can easily opt to sit out a day or sometimes a half-day. This will not be possible on days when we are changing locations. It may be possible to opt out of various walks/hikes if needed, but keep in mind that the only alternative may be to stay with the vehicle instead.

If you are uncertain about whether this tour is a good match for your abilities, please don't hesitate to contact our office; if they cannot directly answer your queries, they will put you in touch with the guide, or help you to find the tour that is right for you!

About the Birding Areas



Bismarck area – We will be visiting just a few spots south of the city, on the shores of Lake Oahe. This enormous lake, which spans north to south for 250 miles, was formed by the damming of the Missouri River. What has resulted is an impressive body of water that attracts several important species. Our main targets here will be the rare Piping Plover which nests on some of the shallow, sandy islands, as well as another specialist of this habitat, the diminutive Least Tern.

Prairie Potholes area – This expansive region, which spans well to the north and south within the Great Plains, is a vast collection of shallow lakes called "potholes" and these numerous lakes host an impressive number of breeding waterfowl. In South Dakota, this region is located east of Bismarck, and we'll spend some time at the start of the tour exploring some of these potholes, looking for nesting waterfowl, shorebirds, and sparrows. Some of the specialties we'll be searching for includes Nelson's Sparrow and LeConte's Sparrow which prefer the wet grasslands. Upland Sandpiper, Marbled Godwit, and Willet also nest in this region. Additionally, the cattail-filled wetlands will be dotted with Yellow-headed Blackbirds while Black Terns will be swooping overhead.

Dickinson area – This portion of North Dakota, which is located a couple of hours west of Bismarck, is characterized by drier prairie. A different kind of prairie means different kinds of birds and we'll be focusing here for a couple of important targets. Main among them being the sneaky and uncommon Baird's Sparrow. With any luck we'll see this sparrow very well from road edges as we slowly work through remote country roads. Another specialist we hope to encounter in this habitat is the equally sneaky Sprague's Pipit. Hopefully we'll watch (and hear) them singing from their incredibly high display flights. The rugged and picturesque Theodore Roosevelt National Park dominates this region, and we'll pay a visit to this popular park where we might see prairie-dogs, Bison, and various open-country species.

Black Hills – Located in the southwestern corner of South Dakota, this mountainous region is as scenic as it is impressive. Being such an isolated mountain range means, of course, isolated bird populations and some resident species, like the American Dipper, have been isolated here for an extremely long time! Might they be on their way of becoming a different species? Our time here will be divided between many waterfalls, canyons, and meadows while our

evenings will find us in two scenic lodges; the first being in the Spearfish Canyon area and the second in Custer State Park. We'll watch for White-throated Swifts and Violet-green Swallows overhead, listen for Canyon Wrens, and maybe even track down some cool woodpeckers like Black-backed and Lewis's. We'll expect Red-naped Sapsucker, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Western Tanager to be common.

Badlands National Park— This National Park is well-known for its barren spires, rock formations, and desolate scenery. Geologically speaking, it's an interesting region, and it is home to one of the largest fossil beds in the world. Rarely does a park have so much geologic time so plain to see; the Cheyenne and White Rivers did a lot of the carving of the rocks and, still today, water is wearing away the sedimentary rock by about one inch every year. Although the very nature of the barren landscape means it's not home to much lush habitat, it's still a very good location for dry mixed-grass species like Western Meadowlark, Rock Wren, Lark Sparrow, Burrowing Owl, and maybe even an imposing Prairie Falcon. Mammals are well-represented too and we might spot Bison, Bighorn Sheep, and Black-tailed Prairie Dogs.



Baird's Sparrow is a grassland species that breeds in the upper Great Plains. We'll look for these secretive birds near Dickinson.

Photograph by guide Cory Gregory.

Itinerary for Birding the Dakotas: Prairies, Black Hills, & Badlands

Day 1, Fri, 30 May. Arrival in Bismarck. Once you arrive in Bismarck, please plan to meet the guide at 1:00 p.m., 3:00 p.m. or 6:00 p.m. on the curb outside of baggage claim. *(Note: Transfers could vary depending on flight times. We will advise you about exact times closer to the start of the tour.) People arriving early or not around one of the designated pick-up times will need to take a taxi/Uber/Lyft to the hotel. We will gather at the hotel at 6:30 p.m. and drive to our get-acquainted dinner. Night in Bismarck.

Day 2, Sat, 31 May. Prairie Potholes. Today we'll explore east of Bismarck in the prairie pothole region where we hope to find a rich variety of birds. We'll visit wet grasslands for a chance at the very local Nelson's Sparrow and LeConte's Sparrow, and we'll also visit nearby cattail marshes and lakes which are a mecca for breeding Black Terns, Western Grebes, and Yellow-headed Blackbirds. If we're lucky, we might find a Clark's Grebe mixed in with the Western and Eared grebes. This region can be very good for other grassland specialties as well like Ferruginous Hawk, Upland

Sandpiper, Willet, Marbled Godwit. Later in the day, we'll make our way south to the shores of Lake Oahe to search for Least Terns and Piping Plovers. Night in Bismarck.

Day 3, Sun, 1 June. Bismarck to Dickinson. We'll target any remaining targets in the region this morning before making our way west. Beyond Dickinson, farther west, lays the scenic and rugged grasslands of Theodore Roosevelt National Park. From the historically significant ranches, the Long X Trail battle corridor, the thriving populations of Bison, Pronghorn, and prairie dogs, to the various bird life, this park is a population destination. We'll visit some riparian areas which might yield Western Wood-Pewee, Yellow-breasted Chat, Western Kingbirds, and Lazuli Buntings. Depending on time, we may visit some prairie outside of the park before returning to town. Night in Dickinson.

Day 4, Mon, 2 June. Dickinson to Black Hills. We'll start out today by visiting some beautiful prairie west of Dickinson where we'll look for the sneaky Baird's Sparrow, Sprague's Pipit, Chesnut-collared Longspurs, and displaying Lark Buntings. We'll also watch for Long-billed Curlews, Burrowing Owls, Ferruginous Hawks, Swainson's Hawks, and more. From there we'll head into South Dakota, leaving the prairie behind us, and drive all the way into the Black Hills where we'll climb up the steep Spearfish Canyon to our beautiful lodge. Near the lodge we might see Red-naped Sapsucker or American Dipper. Night in Spearfish Canyon.

Day 5, Tue, 3 June. Spearfish Canyon area. Today we'll have all day to explore some of the many canyons, rivers, and waterfalls in the Black Hills. Due to the disjunct location of the Black Hills, many of the birds here are western species that nest in isolated populations. Together, with the different habitats, we'll be around a vastly different collection of species including, Black-headed Grosbeak, Western Flycatcher, Western Tanager, Canada Jay, MacGillivray's Warbler, White-throated Swift, Violet-green Swallow, and more. Night in Spearfish Canyon.



When we visit the Black Hills, we'll watch for montane species such as the gorgeous Mountain Bluebird.

Photograph by guide Cory Gregory.

Day 6, Wed, 4 June. Black Hills. Our aim today is to visit some new spots in the Black Hills. As we leave the Spearfish Canyon region, we'll wind our way south to Custer State Park, South Dakota's first and largest state park. It's there that we'll find a maze of canyons, scenic lakes, and eye-catching rock pinnacles. The birding can be quite good and we'll search for Canyon Wren, Plumbeous Vireo, Lewis's Woodpecker, Mountain Bluebird, and Red Crossbill. We'll close out the day looking up, looking for Common Nighthawks, as we settle into our comfortable lodge in Custer State Park itself.

Day 7, Thu, 5 June. Mt. Rushmore and Badlands. This will be a big day for viewing some of the most well-known American vistas. After we leave Custer State Park, we'll start by visiting Mt Rushmore first thing before it becomes too busy. While we're snapping pictures of this easily-recognized National Memorial, we may hear Canyon Wrens singing, see White-throated Swifts ripping overhead, or maybe even spot a Mountain Goat. Following our brief visit there, we'll start heading downhill and out the Black Hills. With the mountains in our rearview, we'll drive east to the famous Badlands National Park. While we're enjoying the incredible and stark landscape, we'll keep an eye out for any prairie species we might still need, such as Prairie Falcon. After our time at the Badlands, we'll drive east to Pierrie. Night in Pierre.

Day 8, Fri, 6 June. Bismarck, **depart for home.** We'll depart Pierre this morning and start our drive back to Bismarck. Although we may make a couple of brief birding stops depending on remaining targets, this will mostly be a driving day. We'll arrive at the Bismarck airport at about noon. You can book your flight home any time after 2:00 p.m. Safe travels!

About Your Guide

Cory Gregory started learning birds on flashcards at the age of three, but it wasn't until the ripe age of ten that things started to get more serious. Since then, he has traveled to Central and South America, Australia, and all 50 states to try to get his fill of birding (and it hasn't worked yet!).

Cory earned a B.S. in zoology in Michigan, where he also worked for Whitefish Point Bird Observatory for several seasons. He then ventured to Iowa State University, where he earned an M.S. studying Long-billed Curlews in Nebraska. As an avid shorebird ecologist, he has handled more than 2000 shorebirds of more than 30 species.

"Cory was wonderful. He surely knows his birds, and his calm presence and dry sense of humor made the trip a lot of funand very productive as well. I would absolutely take another tour with him." S.S, Arizona Nightbirds

After finishing school, Cory worked for several organizations as a shorebird ecologist and guided on St. Paul Island in the Pribilofs of Alaska for the 2014 and 2015 seasons. It was on St. Paul that his dream of stumbling on a first North American record was finally fulfilled. Cory is currently based out of Missouri where, when not on tour, he pursues his interest in birds, butterflies, and dragonflies with abandon.

Cory has co-led Field Guides groups all over the USA, from Arizona, Alaska, and Oregon, to Michigan, Texas, New Jersey, and Maine. He has a busy and wide-ranging schedule coming up for 2024 --from the US and Canada, to Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Iceland, and Australia.

Visit https://fieldguides.com/our-staff/ for Cory's complete tour schedule; just click on his photo.

Financial Information

FEE: \$3975 DEPOSIT: \$400

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: December 1, 2024 SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$725

LIMIT: 7

Other Things You Need to Know

TOUR MANAGER: The manager for this tour is Nicole Cannon. Nicole will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call her!

AIR ARRANGEMENTS: On Day 1, please plan to arrive in Bismarck in time to meet the group at 6:30 p.m. The guide will make several airport pick-ups on Day 1; 1:00 p.m., 3:00 p.m., and 5:00 p.m. Please do not schedule your homeward flight on Day 8, the last day of the tour, until after 2:00 p.m. *(Note: Transfers could vary depending on flight times. We will advise you about exact times closer to the start of the tour.) People arriving early or not around one of the designated pick-up times will need to take a taxi/Uber/Lyft to the hotel. Field Guides is a full-service travel agency and your tour manager will be happy to assist you with flights to join this tour. Field Guides does not charge a service fee

for these services to clients booking a tour. However, we understand that tech-savvy clients often prefer to shop online or that you may wish to use mileage to purchase tickets. Regardless of which method you choose, your tour manager will be happy to provide assistance regarding ticket prices and schedules, along with rental cars and extra hotel nights as needed.

Please be sure to check with your tour manager before purchasing your ticket to make sure the flights you have chosen will work well with the tour itinerary and that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. Once purchased, most airline tickets are non-refundable and carry a penalty to change. Field Guides cannot be responsible for these fees.

Also, it is imperative that we receive a copy of your comprehensive flight itinerary—including any and all flights not covered in the tour fee—so that we may track you in the event of missed connections, delays, or other mishaps.

LUGGAGE: Please be aware that many airlines have recently modified their luggage policies and are charging additional fees for checked bags. Updates could easily occur before your departure, so you may wish to contact your airline to verify the policy. Additional charges for bags on any flights, whether these are covered by the tour fee or not, will be the client's responsibility.

SMOKING: Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. If you smoke, please be sensitive to the group and refrain from smoking at meals, in vehicles, and in proximity to the group on trails and elsewhere.

TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS: The **tour fee** is \$3975 for one person in double occupancy from Bismarck. It includes all lodging from Day 1 through Day 7, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through lunch on Day 8, all ground transportation (except where specified), entrance fees, and the guide services of the tour leader(s). Tipping at group meals and for drivers, porters, and local guides is included in your tour fee and will be handled for the group by your Field Guides leader(s). However, if you would like to recognize your Field Guides leader(s) or any local guide(s) for exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are optional and not expected.

The above fee does <u>not</u> include your airfare to and from Bismarck, airport taxes, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, any alcoholic beverages, optional tips to local drivers, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The **single supplement** for the tour is **\$725**. If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee. The single supplement is calculated by taking the actual cost of a single room and subtracting one-half the cost of a double room (plus any applicable taxes).

TOUR LIMITS: Our limits are firm and we don't exceed the limit by one to accommodate a couple when only one space remains open. However, on occasion, we will send along a guide in training on a tour. In these cases, one seat in the van or bus will be taken by the guide in training. Our guides will have a rotation system within the vehicle so that clients share the inconvenience equally. We hope this minor inconvenience will be more than offset by the advantages of having another guide along.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact us at <u>fieldguides.com/contact-us/</u>. Our office will be in touch with you by email by the next business day (Mon-Fri) with instructions on how to complete our new electronic registration form and medical questionnaire. (We are no longer accepting the paper version.)

Please mail your **deposit of \$400** per person, or see https://fieldguides.com/payment-options/ for our Payment Options. Full payment of the tour fee is due 180 days prior to departure, or by December 1, 2024. We will bill you for the final payment at either 180 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later.

Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by your tour manager.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refund of deposit and full payment, less \$100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 180 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 179 and 90 days before the departure date, 50% of the full tour fee is non-refundable, which would include the full deposit if the final payment has not yet been paid. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable and non-transferable.

Our cancellation policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change, or are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of that insurance is not refundable, so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airline's restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure. In most such cases, full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. Note this exception, however: If you have been advised pre-tour that there is a non-refundable portion of your tour fee no matter the reason for Field Guides cancellation of the tour, that portion will not be refunded. The right is reserved to substitute in case of emergency another guide for the original one.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE: We strongly recommend you consider purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to cover your investment in case of injury or illness to you or your family prior to or during a trip. Because we must remit early (and substantial) tour deposits to our suppliers, you acknowledge and agree that we will not issue a refund when cancellation occurs outside of our cancellation policy as published in the itinerary (see CANCELLATION POLICY). In addition, the Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. US medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Furthermore, US Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States.

When making a decision regarding health insurance, Americans should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a medical evacuation to the United States may cost well in excess of \$50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or whether you will be reimbursed later for expenses that you incur.

US citizens will receive information from us regarding optional tour cancellation/emergency medical insurance. Our agent, CSA, will insure for trip cancellation and interruption, medical coverage, travel delay, baggage loss and delay, and emergency medical transportation. If you purchase the insurance prior to, or within 24 hours of making final payment for the tour, and cover all non-refundable parts of the trip (including any non-refundable flights and in some cases, other arrangements), pre-existing conditions are covered. You may purchase your CSA policy on-line by visiting our website at https://fieldguides.com/trip-cancellation-insurance/ and clicking the link to CSA. The CSA webpage also includes a contact number.

Currently we are unable to offer CSA insurance policies to residents of New York and Hawaii. We have had clients provide positive feedback after acquiring insurance thru InsureMyTrip (https://www.insuremytrip.com/) in the past, and would suggest that company as an alternative. When purchasing insurance with a company other than CSA, you will want to understand whether the timing of your purchase will affect coverage before paying your first deposit. Insurance purchase requirements can vary from company to company, and such requirements could limit your options if you do not look into this until making your final payment for your tour. Please let us know if you have any questions about this.

Please note, once the insurance is purchased it is non-refundable, so please check with your tour manager prior to making the purchase to assure the tour will operate as scheduled. Citizens of other countries are urged to consult their insurance broker.

RESPONSIBILITY: For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Field Guides Incorporated, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the registration form. Field Guides Incorporated acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. You acknowledge and agree that Field Guides Incorporated is not responsible for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, the information bulletin, and other pertinent matter provided by Field Guides. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.

THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION.

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