WFO TOUR TO WISCONSIN JUNE 7-15, 2024
WITH JON DUNN, TOM SCHULTZ, AND JEFF BAUGHMAN

Clockwise from top left: Cerulean Warbler, Upland Sandpiper, Sedge Wren, Kirtland's Warbler, Henslow's Sparrow. Photos: Tom Schultz

WFO is pleased to announce an early summer 2024 trip to Wisconsin. It will be led by Jon Dunn and Tom Schultz. Tom and Jon have known each other for over four decades. They worked closely together (Tom as illustrator) on all seven editions of the National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America and Tom (with Cindy House) was one of two illustrators for the Warblers guide (co-authored by Kimball Garrett) published by Houghton Mifflin in 1997. Tom and Jeff are both past presidents of WSO (Wisconsin Society for Ornithology), and have served on the board for 37 years – serving as co-chairs of the Field Trip Committee. Tom and Jeff look forward to sharing and teaching us about the birds and habitats of this beautiful state, located near the midpoint of the vast geographical region known as the Midwest.

Our trip is timed during the height of the breeding season when birds should be in full song. We will start in Madison, then work west to the Mississippi River in the southwest part of the state before working our way north to the boreal zone near the border with the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, before returning to Madison after a stop at the famous Horicon Marsh. We have an excellent chance of seeing 25, or more, species of wood warblers including Louisiana Waterthrush, Golden-winged, Blue-winged, Prothonotary, Mourning, Kentucky, Hooded, Cerulean Blackburnian, Black-throated Blue and Canada. A small population of Kirtland’s Warbler now breed in central Wisconsin and will make a special effort to see this species. We should see all five species of eastern Empidonax
and should see a variety of grassland species including Grasshopper, Lark, Clay-colored, Vesper, and Henslow’s sparrows and Dickcissel. We will visit several marshes where in the north we might see Sedge Wren and LeConte’s Sparrow and at other marshes have a chance for American and Least bitterns, and Black Tern.

The tour starts and ends at Madison (Dane County) located in south-central Wisconsin. It is the state capitol with connecting flights from Chicago and elsewhere.

**Day 1** – The trip begins after dinner with an 8:00 p.m. meeting in the lobby of our hotel.

**Day 2** – This morning we will depart west to Thompson Memorial Prairie where we will look for grassland species, particularly a variety of sparrows (Grasshopper, Henslow’s, Field and Vesper), but also Eastern Meadowlark and Orchard Oriole, Dickcissel and Upland Sandpiper. From here we will go to Governor Dodge State Park where we hope to see Louisiana Waterthrush and perhaps a White-eyed Vireo near the northern edge of its range. Continuing further west we will check in to our hotel at Prairie du Chien along the Mississippi River and after dinner will visit Wyalusing State Park for some late afternoon and early evening birding. Our main goal will be to hear and perhaps see Eastern Whip-poor-will and we might encounter an Eastern Screech or a Barred Owl.

**Day 3** – We will spend the entire morning at Wyalusing State Park where we hope to encounter a number of wood warblers near, or at, the northern end of their breeding range. These include Blue-winged, Prothonotary, Kentucky, Cerulean and Yellow-throated. After a picnic lunch we will head northeast, stopping at Spring Green State Natural Area, one of the few spots in the state where Lark Sparrow breeds. Grasshopper Sparrows also breed here. Night in Baraboo near the Baraboo Hills.

**Day 4** – This morning we will visit the Baraboo Hills, an isolated raised upland where a few more normally northern species can be found. Our primary birding stop will be at Baxter’s Hollow in the Baraboo Hills where we will be looking for Winter Wren, Worm-eating, Hooded and Blackburnian warblers as well as Acadian Flycatcher. Later we will continue on to Portage, stopping at Aldo Leopold’s shack where he spent much of his summers after teaching at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. It is here that he died in 1948 at the age of 61. We will spend the night in Plainfield, Waushara County.

**Day 5** – This morning we will be birding mostly in Adams County where our main goal is to see a Kirtland’s Warbler, a small population of which now nests in Wisconsin. Pine Warbler is possible here too and in the Buena Vista Grasslands we might see Brown Thrasher, Grasshopper, Clay-colored, Henslow’s and Vesper sparrows, Eastern Towhee, Brewer’s Blackbird and Upland Sandpiper. Greater Prairie-Chicken is here too, but they are unlikely to still be on their leks. Still, we might get lucky and see one near the road, or in flight. From here we will drive a few hours north into the boreal zone and will overnight in Eagle River. If the weather is nice (no rain or wind) we might venture out to Powell Marsh for American Bittern and perhaps LeConte’s Sparrow along with a variety of other species like Wilson’s Snipe and Swamp Sparrow. If we stay late enough we have a chance of hearing a Northern Saw-whet Owl.
Day 6 – We will spend the entire day birding the boreal woods around Eagle River searching for boreal species like Olive-sided, Yellow-bellied and Alder flycatchers, Golden-winged, Nashville, Mourning, Magnolia, Black-throated Blue, Palm, Black-throated Green and Canada warblers. Scarcer species we might encounter include Canada Jay, Boreal Chickadee and Cape May Warbler. Both Spruce and Sharp-tailed Grouse occur here, but they are more difficult to see in summer. Here, or elsewhere we have better chances of seeing Ruffed Grouse. If we haven’t visited Powell Marsh yet and the weather is nice, we might visit Powell Marsh again. Night in Eagle River.

Day 7 – We will spend the morning birding the boreal woods again looking for any species we might have missed the previous day. Later we will head south towards Waipun near the famous Horicon Marsh. If there is time in the late afternoon/early evening we might visit this marsh.

Day 8 – We will spend all morning birding Horicon Marsh searching for American and Least Bitterns, Wilson’s Phalarope, Black and Forster’s Terns, Marsh Wrens (these are “eastern” marsh wrens with a distinctly different song from western birds) and Yellow-headed Blackbirds. In the afternoon we will return to Madison. Night in Madison.

Day 9 – Some will catch early flights, but we will offer morning birding near Madison. Perhaps a Northern Bobwhite (a rapidly disappearing species over much of its range, particularly in the north). In some years a pair of Red-necked Grebes is found not far from Madison. We will return back to the Madison airport by late morning where the tour will conclude.

Trip Cost and Registration Information

$1,750 per person

Participants will make their own motel reservations and travel arrangements to and from the meeting location. Motel information will be provided to participants shortly after registration.

Registration for Life/Patron members will begin on February 11 at 5:00 p.m. Pacific time; registration will open to all members on February 18 at 5:00 p.m. Pacific time. A registration link will be sent out before registration begins.

Limited to 12 participants

Questions about the trip? Contact Tom Schultz at trschultz44@gmail.com