Black Hills Birding Tour Itinerary

Join fellow IAS members for an early summer birding adventure into the Black Hills area of South Dakota. This seven day birding tour will provide participants a chance to log an immense amount of western species without having to travel too far west. The Black Hills is home to many easternmost outposts for a few western specialties, including American Dipper and Virginia’s Warbler.

This van tour will be led by IAS Past-President, Brad Bumgardner. Transportation will consist of 12 person passenger vans, leaving out of Indianapolis on June 3 and arriving back late June 9.

**Day 1 (June 3):** Participants meet in Indianapolis. Leave by 9am. Day’s drive to Sioux Falls, SD. Total driving time 10 hrs 45 minutes.

**Day 2 (June 4):** Leave Sioux Falls. Drive west towards Wall, SD. Lunch along route, followed by afternoon drive through Badlands National Park in search of afternoon birds. Possible species include Burrowing Owl, Horned Lark, Lark Bunting, Ferruginous Hawk, Northern Harrier, American Kestrel, and some large Bank Swallow colonies. Prairie Falcons are possible, but uncommon. After the Badlands we will drive 1 hour, 15 minutes to Custer State Park. The group will visit the Visitor Center and drive the Wildlife Loop for late afternoon birds and other wildlife before heading into Custer to check into the hotel. Optional: Nocturnal birding for Common Poorwill after dinner.

**Day 3 (June 5):** Drive west to Hell Canyon. Hell Canyon will provide an immense selection of western specialties in one long, but doable hike. This rugged canyon system is characterized by sedimentary outcroppings of sandstone, dolomite, gypsum, some shale and limestone. A few of the birds being sought will be White-throated Swift, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Western Wood-Pewee, Cordilleran Flycatcher, Plumbeous Vireo, Clark’s Nutcracker, Canyon Wren, Townsend’s Solitaire, and MacGillivray’s Warbler. Afterwards the group will drive to Elk Mountain for a search of the elusive Lewis’s Woodpecker. Additional birds seen may be Western Meadowlark, Rock Wren, and Say’s Phoebe. Nocturnal birding will be offered again after an early dinner.

**Day 4 (June 6):** An early start will send us 45 minutes west to explore the dry southwestern area of the black hills that contain a pine-juniper-shrub habitat that is very limited in South Dakota. This habitat is structurally similar to pinyon-juniper habitats of the southwestern United States and contains an interesting assemblage of birds, including the most northeastern breeding population of Virginia’s Warblers. Other common birds include Dusky Flycatcher, Violet-green Swallow, Pinyon Jay, Plumbeous Vireo, Yellow-rumped (Audubon’s) Warbler, and Western Tanager. The group will then drive one hour north to the spectacular Spearfish...
Canyon for lunch. Steep limestone cliffs define the canyon. Ponderosa pine and white spruce line the draws, and riparian shrubs and deciduous trees edge Spearfish Creek. This is the best site for American Dipper, and the trail along the scenic waterfalls can find Townsend’s Solitaire, Chipping Sparrow, Western Tanager, Dark-eyed (White-winged) Junco, Pacific Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Swainson’s Thrush. Optional nocturnal birding will again be offered after dinner.

**Day 5 (June 7):** Burrowing Owls will be the target species of the morning as we travel through Custer State Park to Wind Cave. Wind Cave contains mixed-grass prairie, with scattered pine groves, pine forest, deciduous shrubbery and thickets. Recent sightings will help determine which areas to target for this elusive bird. Other species seen this morning will include Upland Sandpiper, Black-billed Magpie, Western Meadowlark, and Mountain Bluebird. Lunch will be had in the state park. Afternoon birding will take place in the higher elevation Sylvan Lake region. The trip back will be along the famed Needles Highway and its amazing, scenic views. This sub-alpine area hosts Red Crossbills, Cassin’s Finch, and Red-naped Sapsucker. Our last dinner in the Black Hills will be at the famed State Game Lodge in the state park.

**Day 6 (June 8):** Upon checkout, the group may visit Custer SP again for any remaining target species. Otherwise we’ll leave early and head east towards Badlands National Park. Morning birding in the Badlands may produce more species when it’s hot, including possibly Swainson’s and Ferruginous Hawk. Dinner and overnight will be in Sioux Falls.

**Day 7 (June 9):** Depart Sioux Falls. 10 hr 45 min drive back to Indianapolis.