



NEBRASKA

Sandhill Cranes & Prairie-Chickens

March 14 - 21, 2027



Sandhill Cranes on Nebraska's Platte. Photo Rick Wright

The springtime Great Plains is the scene of one of the greatest migration spectacles in the world, when untold numbers of waterfowl and nearly a million cranes gather along the winding, braided Platte River. On the nearby prairies, another drama plays out: the ancient courtship dance of Greater Prairie-Chickens.

Set at the very center of the Great Plains and the North American continent, Nebraska features an avifauna that famously combines east and west, north and south. The deciduous forests lining the Missouri River are home to such Carolinian specialties as Eastern Gray Squirrel and Red-bellied Woodpecker, while the grasslands covering much of the state are home to Western Meadowlark and Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel. The West truly begins in central Nebraska, where Mule Deer and Ferruginous Hawks live among the short grass and yuccas. Our tour is a chance to appreciate the tremendous biodiversity and unique human heritage of what too many travelers think of as “flyover” country.



Dozens, even hundreds, of Canvasback can sometimes be seen among the abundant waterfowl of the prairie spring. Photo Rick Wright

March 14, Day 1: Arrival in Omaha

Participants should plan to arrive in Omaha no later than today (airport code OMA). Our hotel provides free shuttle service from the airport; please call 712 847-0699 when you are ready to be picked up. A room will have been reserved in your name at our hotel near the airport in Carter Lake, a small city that geographic accidents have placed politically in Iowa. Our group will meet in the hotel lobby at 3:00 pm for a little birding, followed by the short drive to our first dinner together. This afternoon's outing will likely feature good numbers of waterfowl and other early migrants, and we will be on the lookout for up to 20 species of ducks and geese, along with Bald Eagles and perhaps a Killdeer or Greater Yellowlegs.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn Omaha Airport, Carter Lake, Iowa

March 15, Day 2: Missouri River Valley and West to Kearney

After breakfast in our hotel, we will spend the morning exploring the wooded bluffs and floodplain of the Missouri River, an important corridor for a wide range of migrants and home to several resident species near the northwestern edge of their range. We should find a few Harris's Sparrows among the juncos and American Tree Sparrows, and we will check blackbird flocks for wintering or migrant Rusty Blackbirds. Wild Turkeys occur in good numbers, and we might turn up a Barred Owl, Pileated Woodpecker, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, or other woodland birds more typical of areas farther south and east in the U.S. If acorn crops are favorable, we may find a few Red-headed Woodpeckers on the ridges above the river. Among the most dashing of their dashing clan, these noisy woodpeckers are common breeders and, in some years, common winterers in the woodlands of eastern Nebraska. If any notable rarities are present within an hour or so of Omaha, we will leave the Missouri Valley to have a look.

After lunch, we will make the three-hour drive west to Kearney, arriving in time for an early supper and our first experience with the Sandhill Cranes as they mass to roost on the nearby Platte River.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn, Kearney, Nebraska



The extremely local Harris's Sparrow is one of the region's most sought-after specialties. Photo Rick Wright

March 16, Day 3: The Central Platte Valley

We will visit another nearby crane roost this morning, arriving just before sunrise to watch the birds leave the river and spread out over sixty miles of fields and wetlands. The rest of the day will be devoted to an exploration of back roads in search of waterfowls, raptors, and sparrows. If water conditions are favorable, we may dip south into the western Rainwater Basin, where northbound waterfowl sometimes congregate in the thousands. In some years, the Snow Geese flock here totaling hundreds of thousands, and Greater White-fronted, Canada, and Cackling geese are also present in large numbers. Ross's Geese can be common in the flocks, and we will take the opportunity to study them wherever they appear. If the spring is an early one, we might also see Eared or Horned grebes, American White Pelican, Pectoral Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, or Franklin's Gull. Dusk will again find us on the banks of the Platte River, as endless lines of cranes descend to their traditional sandbar roosts and settle noisily in for the night. We will have dinner in Kearney, then retire with the spectacular sights and sounds of the crane flight still filling our eyes, ears, and imaginations.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn, Kearney, Nebraska



A Ross's Goose watches its watchers. Photo Rick Wright

March 17, Day 4: A Morning with the Cranes at Rowe Sanctuary, on to McCook

The Platte River at dawn affords a spectacle unlike any on earth. As the sky brightens, what seem, at first, islands resolve into vast flocks of cranes crowding the shallow water and sandbars; the low murmur of the roosting birds turns to an unearthly rattling howl when the odd eagle or coyote passes. Soon the cranes swarm across the sky, spreading onto the nearby fields and wetlands to feed; their prehistoric trumpeting drowning out all other sounds. We will leave our hotel early to be in our blind on the banks of the river while the birds are still on the roost - a once-in-a-lifetime chance at being this close to the world's largest gathering of cranes. No matter the weather, it will feel cold on the walk to the blinds, and you should be sure to wear your warmest coat, long underwear, warm socks and boots, heavy gloves or mittens, and a good hat—all items you will have with you in any case for the rest of the tour. The Rowe staff asks that visitors make a point of wearing dark outer clothing.

Rowe Sanctuary's "discovery stations" are designed to minimize disturbance of the cranes while at the same providing the best possible views of the flocks. After a brief indoor orientation, our local guides will lead us on foot through the pre-dawn dimness to the blinds; red-light flashlights (no white lights are permitted on the paths or in the blinds) will be shared to help us find our way.

Given sufficient notice, it may be possible to have our local guides drive those with difficulty walking to the blind in golf carts. The blinds are accessible by ramps, and each has access to an adjacent warming room and primitive bathroom.

We expect to be in the blind for two and a half to three hours, depending on weather and the cranes' mood. There are viewing windows at different heights; some windows can be closed if



A Ferruginous Hawk takes advantage of a rare, elevated perch on the prairies. Photo Rick Wright

the wind rises. It is not permitted to leave the blind until the cranes have departed and our entire group is ready. We will have snacks with us and will enjoy a hearty late breakfast once we have left the blind.

Photographic opportunities here can be very good, but photography is permitted only once the Rowe guides have so indicated. NO FLASH is allowed, and the use of burst or continuous shooting modes is not permitted. No tripods are allowed in the blinds.

After admiring this moving sight, we'll return to Kearney for a late breakfast, then leave the Platte and its thousands of cranes behind for the time being. As we move west toward the city of North Platte, we should run across more waterfowl and a good selection of raptors, sometimes including a Ferruginous Hawk or Prairie Falcon among the more common Red-tailed Hawks, Northern Harriers, and American Kestrels. Greater Prairie-Chickens are occasionally seen flying across the road, but we can hope for far better views of that species to come.

We will have a light lunch in North Platte, then turn south and bird our way to McCook, arriving there in the late afternoon. After checking in to our hotel, we will attend a short, illustrated presentation introducing southwest Nebraska's grouse and their behavior, then have dinner in town.

NIGHT: Holiday Inn Express, McCook, Nebraska

March 18, Day 5: Dancing Chickens

We will leave our hotel around 6:15 this morning to be driven twenty minutes out of town to the dancing grounds of the Greater Prairie Chickens, where we will take our places in a blind as the males perform their captivating courtship displays at often breathtakingly close range. Horned Larks and Western Meadowlarks will also be singing from the ground and the fence posts or in the prairie sky. Mule Deer sometimes pick their way across the lek; the grouse react more strongly if a Coyote or a Ferruginous Hawk appears. We can expect to be in the blind for about two hours, then return to McCook for a delicious hot breakfast and a brief late morning break. Later, we will drive out onto the prairies in search of specialties such as a Northern Shrike or the dramatically declining, Black-billed Magpie. Depending on the weather, reservoirs in the

area may have good numbers of ducks and American White Pelicans. We will be back in McCook in time for a rest before dinner.

NIGHT: Holiday Inn Express, McCook, Nebraska

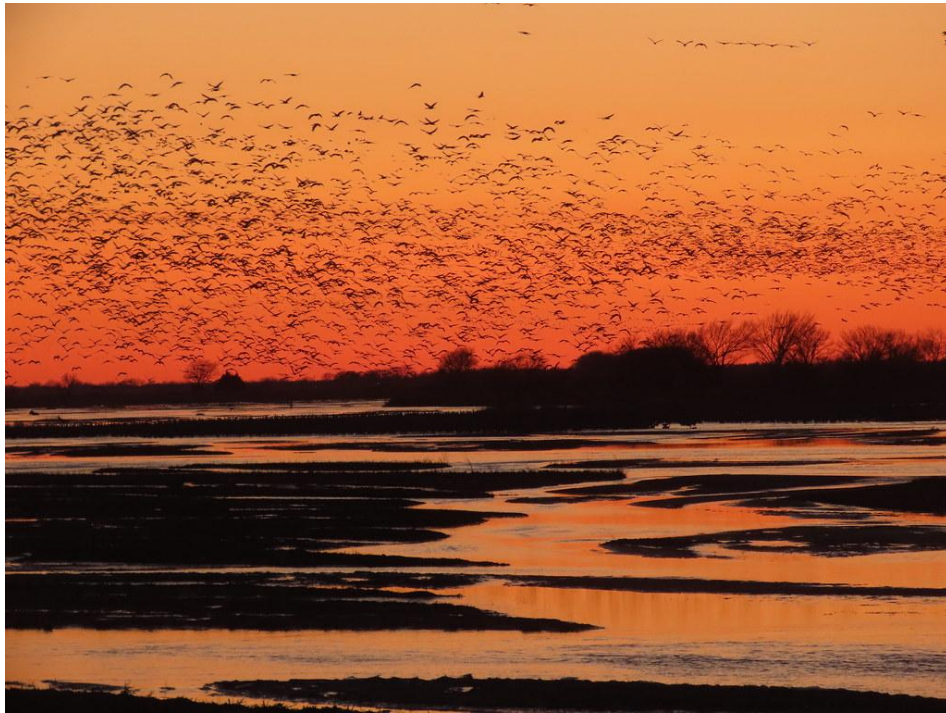


This fine Greater Prairie-Chicken must be irresistible to the females - and he seems to know it. Photo Rick Wright

March 19, Day 6: Return to the Platte

We'll check out of our hotel this morning, then start our drive east. If time allows and recent reports intrigue, we may also visit a site or two in Nebraska's Rainwater Basin, where large marshes and sheet water on the fields attract sometimes startling numbers of migrant birds. The million strong flocks of geese usually pass through in February or early March, but we may encounter numbers of Redheads, American Wigeon, and other ducks. Prairie dog towns in the area are a good place to look for the wonderful Ferruginous Hawk or even an early Burrowing Owl. Once in Kearney, we will have supper near our hotel before paying a final evening visit to the cranes.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn, Kearney, Nebraska



Platte River Sunset. Photo Rick Wright



American Wigeon. Photo Rick Wright

March 20, Day 7: The Lower Platte and Return to the East

The migration of the Whooping Crane through central Nebraska typically begins in early April, but recent years have seen birds returning as early as mid-March. The recovery of the Whooping Crane is one of the great conservation stories of the past 100 years, the result of the unflagging efforts of talented scientists and responsible landowners. If one of these birds—or an even rarer Common Crane, an annually occurring needle in the big gray feathered haystack—has been reported, we will spend the morning in search of the rarity; otherwise, after breakfast, we will make the two-hour drive back to the Omaha area. If time allows, we will make a stop at one of the most productive birding sites on the lower Platte River, Schramm Park. Outstanding views of Harris' Sparrows and a good variety of junco “flavors” can often be had at Schramm, and if the winter has been warm or the spring early, we have a chance at finding a Hermit Thrush, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, or Myrtle Warbler around the ponds or in the heavily wooded ravines. We plan to arrive in Omaha in time for a break before our final meal together.

NIGHT: Hampton Inn Omaha Airport, Carter Lake, Iowa



Sandhill Crane. Photo Rick Wright

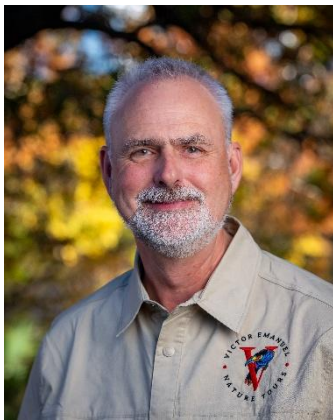
March 21, Day 8: Departure

You can schedule your departure from Omaha's Eppley Airfield at any time today.

Essential Tour Information

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 12 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Rick Wright & Raymond VanBuskirk



Rick Wright is a widely published author and sought-after lecturer and field trip leader. A native of southeast Nebraska, Rick studied French, German, Philosophy, and Life Sciences at the University of Nebraska before making a detour to Harvard Law School. He took the Ph.D. in German Languages and Literatures at Princeton University in 1990, then spent a dozen years as an academic, holding successive appointments as Assistant Professor of German at the University of Illinois, Reader in Art and Archaeology at Princeton University, and Associate Professor of Medieval Studies at Fordham University. His numerous scholarly publications include two books on the Latin animal literature of the later Middle Ages. Among Rick's recent books are second editions of his *ABA Field Guide to Birds of New Jersey* and *ABA Field Guide to Birds of Arizona*; his *Peterson Reference Guide to American Sparrows* was published in 2019. He is also the co-author with Sanford Sorkin of *Watching Birds in Montclair* and *Watching Birds in the New Jersey Meadowlands*. Especially interested in the history and culture of birding, he is hard at work on a study of hummingbird collecting in France from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. In his spare time, he teaches Latin courses online for the Paideia Institute. Rick lives with his family, Alison Beringer and Avril Huang, and their black lab, Quetzal, in northern New Jersey, where he offers private birding tours to the marshes, woodlands, and ocean beaches.



Raymond L. VanBuskirk is an expert birder who has been guiding tours for over a decade. Raymond has led tours throughout the Western Hemisphere from Alaska to Chile and most parts in between. He has guided in almost every country in Central America, across the Caribbean, and down both sides of the Andes in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Chile. Raymond’s experience is not limited to the New World—he has traveled widely across the globe, has spent a great deal of time in the Pacific studying pelagics, and

has led tours in Asia and Africa. Raymond has had a longtime commitment to ornithology. In addition to guiding, he has conducted research with USFWS in the Arctic Ocean, North Pacific, and New Mexico. He has held leadership roles in the Central New Mexico Bird Alliance and Western Field Ornithologists. Raymond also helped guide the next generation of birders by being a regular instructor at the ABA’s youth birding camps and at the Hog Island Audubon camps in Hog Island, Maine.

Raymond is also committed to including everyone in birding, and organizes and leads annual conferences for QBNA, an informal club for LGBTQIA+ birders. When not leading tours or conducting research, Raymond can be found at his home in St. Louis, Missouri with his partner, Marissa; stepdaughter Savannah; and their dog and two large snakes.

TOUR COSTS & PAYMENT INFORMATION

TOUR FEE: \$5,195.00 per person based on double occupancy or **\$5,820.00** for a person requiring single accommodation. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 8, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, all ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does **not** include airfare to nor from the starting/ending city; however, flights within the tour (if any) are included. The fee also excludes laundry, personal expenses, and other items of a personal nature. For information about gratuities, please see the “TIPPING” sub-section below. If the minimum group size is not met, each participant will be charged with a small-group supplement—shared equally and communicated in advance—to allow the tour to proceed.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: You may register for this tour through the VENT [website](#) or by calling our office (512-328-5221). The initial deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date which is November 14, 2026.

EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS: Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

FUEL SURCHARGES: Our prices are based on fuel prices at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TIPPING: An important part of the value of a VENT tour is knowing that tips for local service providers at our destinations—restaurant staff, hotel staff, drivers, local guides, and various other support staff—are included in your tour fee. If you would like to offer any of your local guides an additional tip, \$5 to \$10 a day is a common amount.

Tips for your VENT tour leader(s) are **not** included, but it is customary to tip one or both if you feel that you have received exceptional service. To assist in your planning, we recommend tipping your VENT tour leader(s) \$15 to \$20 per day, or the equivalent of approximately 2–4% of the tour fee.

If you plan to give tips by cash, they should be given directly to your tour leader at the end of the tour and **not** sent to the VENT office. Some of our tour leaders use mobile payment applications such as Venmo, PayPal, and Wise. If you would like to use this method, please ask your tour leaders directly whether they can accept tips through such an application.

We emphasize that tipping is optional and that these amounts are only recommendations. The amount you decide to tip is based entirely on your experience and at your discretion.

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS

CANCELLATION BY PARTICIPANT:

- **More than 120 days prior to the tour start date:** A refund of all monies paid will be issued, less 50% of the deposit.
- **120 days or fewer prior to the tour start date:** No refund will be provided.
- **Optional add-ons:** Some tours offer optional add-ons that are designated as non-refundable. Any such add-ons are clearly identified as non-refundable at the time of booking. By selecting and purchasing an optional add-on, the participant acknowledges and accepts its non-refundable status. Fees paid for non-refundable add-ons are not refundable under any circumstances, regardless of when the tour is cancelled.

This cancellation policy applies to all participants and all tours (Pre-Tours and Extensions are considered self-contained tours separate from the main tour). Because unexpected events can occur, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance.

CANCELLATION BY VENT:

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A ***“Force Majeure”*** event means any act beyond VENT’s control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or

transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

SUGGESTED OPTIONS: To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with **Redpoint Travel Protection** as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend its comprehensive Ripcord plan, which includes a medical evacuation benefit. With this in mind, it is important to note that medical evacuation is not offered by Redpoint as a stand-alone policy or benefit. For travelers not interested in comprehensive travel insurance, VENT recommends **Medjet** and its **MedjetAssist®** plan. Medjet is not an insurance company, and Medjet Assist is not an insurance product; rather, Medjet is a membership-based air-medical transport company specializing in moving hospitalized travelers from an admitting hospital to a medical facility of choice. Medjet does not provide medical evacuation service from the point of injury or illness; yet, the MedjetAssist plan offers robust enough travel protection to satisfy the medical evacuation insurance requirement in place for many VENT tours.

About Redpoint Travel's Ripcord Plan

Ripcord is a completely integrated travel insurance program with single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims. Critical benefits include comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption, medical evacuation from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice; medical expense coverage, death of pet, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as evacuation

coverage in case of a natural disaster or political or security reasons, waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.*

For a price quote or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: [Ripcord Travel Insurance](#); or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help > Preparation and Insurance > Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 15 days of making your first trip payment. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, second deposit, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 15 days, and insure all non-refundable trip costs in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

Redpoint considers COVID-19 illness as any other seasonal respiratory illness. Providing only a positive Covid-19 test result will likely not be considered a covered event per the terms and conditions of the company's policy. Redpoint maintains a [Coronavirus FAQ page](#) on its website that addresses questions and concerns travelers may have regarding COVID-19 and Redpoint's policy. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of relevant topics.

About Medjet’s MedjetAssist Plan

MedjetAssist is a membership program that functions like AAA for motorists. The company’s primary service is air medical transport. Critical benefits of MedjetAssist include a staff on call and ready to provide assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; all-expenses-paid air medical transport in the United States and internationally to medical facility of choice, regardless of medical necessity; repatriation of remains; and no exclusions for pre-existing conditions.

For travelers under 75, MedjetAssist may be purchased as Short-Term Memberships of 8, 15, 21, and 30 days, or Regular Annual Memberships from 1 to 5 years. For travelers 75–84, Medjet offers a Diamond Membership that is the same program but with a few additional conditions.

For a price quote or to purchase MedjetAssist, please visit: [Medjet.com/VentBird](https://www.Medjet.com/VentBird) or call 1-800-527-7478. Pricing is based on type and term of membership.

GETTING THERE & REQUIRED TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

AIR TRAVEL: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Per person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. **Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be held responsible for any air ticket penalties.**

*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler's consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

BAGGAGE: Please limit baggage to one piece of luggage and one carry-on. The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your pre-departure materials and/or airline to find out specific weight restrictions.

As a precaution against lost luggage, we suggest that you pack a change of clothes, toiletries, medications, important travel documents, optics, and any other essential items in your carry-on bag. Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government's attempts to improve airport security, we recommend that you check the website of the [Transportation Security Administration \(TSA\)](#) for information pertaining to permissible carry-on items.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

PASSPORTS: Travelers using non-U.S. passports are responsible for confirming any entry requirements that apply to their home country.

VISAs: If you hold a passport from a country other than the U.S., please check with your consulate or embassy for the most accurate guidance.

CLOTHING:

- **Warm Winter Coat:** waterproof is ideal
- **Insulated Hiking Boots:** if there is no snow, there will be mud
- **Hat**
- **Gloves**
- **Small blanket:** the blinds can be chilly in the mornings

EQUIPMENT: Having the right equipment makes the travel experience more enjoyable. Below is a list of items that will ensure you are well-prepared:

- **Binoculars:** We strongly recommend you bring a pair of good binoculars of 8x32, 8x42, or 10x42 magnification. Please do not bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like them because they are small and lightweight; but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light gathering power. You will find that 8x32 binoculars are compact and light enough.
- **Spotting Scope:** Your tour leaders will have scopes available for group use throughout the trip, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.
- **Camera:** Bird photography is challenging, but cranes, waterfowl, and sometimes raptors can be relatively photogenic in this area. The landscapes and river views are equally

appealing to photographers. Be sure to bring as many batteries and memory cards as you think you will need. Note that flash and tripods are not permitted in blinds.

DESTINATION INFORMATION & LOCAL CONDITIONS

CLIMATE & WEATHER: March weather varies wildly on the Great Plains. In a “typical” season, highs on the central Platte River will be in the upper 40s and lows in the low 30s (°F); temperatures are often a few degrees lower in the McCook area. It is not unusual in this area to experience a temperature range of over 60° in the course of the week. We can expect wind most of the time, ranging from a light (but often still chilly) breeze to strong winds. Precipitation is possible at any time. On average, rain is more likely than snow in the central part of Nebraska, but any combination is possible—as is a solid week or more of warm, bright, clear days. Whatever the weather, our mornings spent sitting or standing in blinds and at other observation points are likely to feel chilly. The weather’s variability and the possibility of rapid changes make dressing in layers essential.

CONDITIONS: Though the physical demands posed by this tour are modest, and there will be occasional opportunities to sit out a particular excursion, you will benefit most from our birding if you are able to walk a mile at a normally slow birding pace over even terrain on roads, paths, and trails. Most walks will be short, although we may offer an outing or two of up to a mile round-trip in length. Many of our destinations can also be birded from the vehicle, an important consideration should the weather turn cold or rainy.

BLINDS & BLIND ETIQUETTE: For crane viewing at Rowe Sanctuary, we will visit a blind right on the banks of the Platte. Reaching the blind here involves a walk of up to half a mile each way. The path is broad and flat, but for those anticipating difficulty, it is possible to arrange for a ride in a golf cart driven by an Audubon staff member or volunteer.

Whether the day is warm or not, it will be very chilly in the blind, which is not heated. It is possible to leave briefly to use the restroom, but otherwise we should count on being in the blind for up to three hours. Cell phones must be silenced before entering the blind. Please do not use the light on your phone or a flashlight of any kind; our local guide will have a light should it be needed for some reason.

We view the booming of the Greater Prairie-Chickens from a converted stock trailer, with openings large enough to easily accommodate binoculars and cameras; spotting scopes are inconvenient here and unnecessary, as the birds are usually very close. We generally leave our hotel around 6:15 a.m. and are in the blind before 7:00 a.m. We extinguish the overhead lights inside as soon as we are all settled in our seats, which are cushioned; the blind is unheated. It is possible to stand up and stretch quietly in the blind, and comment and conversation are acceptable at low volume. We stay in the blind until the birds leave the booming grounds to feed, usually about two hours later.

There are no opportunities to use the restroom until we leave the prairie-chickens, a circumstance that should be kept in mind if you drink coffee in the early morning. Snacks and drinks from our supply can be consumed in the blind, but please avoid crinkling wrappers or clanking thermos cups.

FOOD & WATER: Central Nebraska is not known as a “foody” destination, but our meals on this trip will range from satisfying to good. Most of our days will start with breakfast around 6:00 a.m., followed by a full morning in the field before stopping for lunch; after our return from the grouse blinds, we will enjoy a full hot breakfast in an excellent McCook cafe. Dinners will be sit-down affairs but casual.

INTERNET ACCESS: Free Wi-Fi is available in our hotel rooms.

TIME: Eastern and Central Nebraska are 1 hour behind Eastern Standard Time (EST)

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry service may be available in Kearney and McCook. Given the short length of this program, however, we recommend packing enough clothing to get you through the trip without having to resort to our hotel's laundry service.

HEALTH & SAFETY

HEALTH: VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult

travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

COVID-19: We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying “Up to Date” with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance for avoiding COVID-19.

SUN EXPOSURE: The sun’s ultraviolet rays are dangerous under prolonged exposure (sometimes only a matter of minutes), even in winter and early spring. Anytime you are outdoors you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. A severe sunburn is potentially very painful and will affect your level of enjoyment. Always protect yourself when outdoors and be sure to bring an ample supply of high SPF sunscreen and lip balm. We strongly recommend the use of ultra-violet blocking, polarized sunglasses.

INSECT REPELLENTS: There are insect repellents for the skin and an insect repellent used to treat clothing that should not be applied to the skin.

Insect repellents for the skin are commonly available in three forms:

- **DEET:** (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF!®, Cutter™, Ultrathon™, etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The formulations will state a percentage of the active ingredient DEET on the packaging.

DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.

- **Picaridin:** A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.
- **Herbal insect repellents:** Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

Insect repellent for clothing is marketed in one approved formulation:

- **Permanone® (Permethrin):** is an odorless spray-on repellent that may be used for pre-treatment of clothing, gear, and tents. It should not be used directly on the skin or sprayed on clothing while it is being worn. The pre-treatment process requires a number of hours to complete and must be done outdoors, so it is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment must be repeated more often than commercial treatment using Insect Shield® technology. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online.
- **Insect Shield® apparel:** Clothing pre-treated with Permanone is made by a variety of manufacturers. It is available for purchase from some sporting goods suppliers. The clothing is advertised as retaining its repellency for up to 70 washings.

The US EPA offers a search tool to help choose a repellent that is best for a particular situation. For example, some repellents work for mosquitoes, but not for ticks.

<https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/which-insect-repellent-right-you>

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta Georgia. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636), or you can check their website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

SUGGESTED READING & TRIP PREPARATION

A few traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend www.amazon.com which has a wide selection; www.buteobooks.com and www.nhbs.com which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and www.abebooks.com for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

FIELD GUIDES:

Birds

Floyd, Ted. *National Geographic Society Field Guide to the Birds of the United States and Canada*. 8th edition. National Geographic Society: 2025. If you prefer a smaller book, the regional volume *East* of this guide will serve.

Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. 2nd edition. Knopf: 2014. If you prefer a smaller book, either of the regional volumes of this guide will serve.

Mammals

Kays, Roland W., and Don E. Wilson. *Mammals of North America*. 2nd edition. Princeton University Press: 2009.

Birding Resources & General Nature

Paul A. Johnsgard. *The Nature of Nebraska: Ecology and Biodiversity*. University of Nebraska Press: 2001.

CLO Apps

eBird. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Among the largest and most successful citizen science projects in existence, eBird is an essential tool in promoting bird study and conservation. Among a range of benefits, eBird allows users to keep a variety of lists in a single application. When taxonomic splits are incorporated, lists are automatically updated. Additionally, trip leaders can share daily lists, so one only need accept a shared list and it will upload to your files. Highly recommended.

Merlin Bird ID. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Merlin is an app designed as a birding coach for beginning and intermediate birdwatchers. Excellent for use in the field, Merlin asks the observer a series of questions about his or her bird sighting, including date and location, and color, size, and behavior of a bird. Merlin then processes the viewer's responses to present a shortlist of possible identifications, from which the user can choose the likely bird. Species profiles include a brief physical description, photographs, and sound samples. The Photo ID feature allows anyone with a camera to snap a photo and obtain a list of suggestions. Merlin's Sound ID feature allows identification of birds through audible recognition. To use Merlin, download the app and the appropriate regional "pack." Highly recommended.

TERMS, CONDITIONS & RESPONSIBILITIES

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, "**VENT**") act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on July 15, 2026, and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant's Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant's risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the "**Airline**") is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline's aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

View the complete [Terms and Conditions](#) on our website.

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