

MONTANA OWL WORKSHOP

APRIL 20-25, 2018

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High, wide, and handsome, Montana is the country's fourth largest state, encompassing 145,392 square miles (376,564 square kilometers), and yet has one of the lowest human densities of all states; about six to seven people per square mile. Its biological diversity and variable climate reflects its immensity. Among its alpine tundra, coniferous forests, plains, intermountain valleys, mountains, marshes, and river breaks, Montana lists about 425 species of birds, 109 species of mammals, 13 species of amphibians, and 18 species of reptiles. Montana also maintains about 2,080 species of native plants. Join researchers for four full days of learning how to survey, locate, and observe owls in the field.

Montana boasts the largest number of breeding owl species in any state within the United States. Fifteen species of owls occur in Montana, of which 14 species breed: American Barn Owl, Flammulated Owl, Eastern Screech Owl, Western Screech Owl, Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl, Great Gray Owl, Northern Hawk Owl, Northern Pygmy Owl, Burrowing Owl, Boreal Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Long-eared Owl, and Short-eared Owl. Snowy Owls are winter visitors only. Although all species will not be seen, chances are good for five to seven species, and with some luck, eight species are possible. Highlights can include Great Gray Owl, Northern Pygmy Owl, Boreal Owl, and Northern Saw-whet Owl.

It's not often the public has an opportunity to follow wildlife researchers on projects. During this educational workshop, we will meet and observe field researchers of the Owl Research Institute (ORI) who have been conducting long-term studies on several species of owls. Our group will spend one morning observing researchers conduct studies on Long-eared Owls. As part of the breeding season research activities, ORI researchers will band, weigh, measure, and record other biological data on this secretive nocturnal species. We will discuss the importance of wildlife research, and how researchers share their findings with the scientific community and the public. We'll discuss the natural history of owls and review their evolutionary adaptations. For example: how do owls hear, see, fly silently, conceal themselves, and hunt. Owl roost sites and pellets will be searched for and dissected in the field.

Other aspects of this workshop include learning techniques for investigating woodpecker and natural holes in trees for cavity nesting species such as: Northern Pygmy Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, and other cavity nesters. We will discuss the pros and cons of nest boxes programs for species such as the Boreal Owl. If we're lucky, we might observe the elaborate "sky dancing" courtship display of the ground-nesting Short-eared Owl. We'll look for stick nests in stands of trees around farms, tree groves, and woody thickets for species such as Great Horned Owls. A hike in the coniferous forest might result in a sighting of the very elusive Great Gray Owl. Please remember that the schedule, locations, and numbers of owls can change, depending upon prey species populations and the timing and whereabouts of the owls.

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April 20, Day 1: Arrival in Missoula, Montana. Participants should make arrangements to arrive in Missoula today and transfer to the hotel, where a room will be reserved in your name. We will meet in the hotel lobby at 6:30 p.m. and proceed to one of Missoula's many restaurants for a get-acquainted dinner.

NIGHT: Doubletree by Hilton Hotel, Missoula

April 21, Day 2: Mission Valley. This morning after breakfast, we will meet in the lobby at 8:30 a.m. for our departure. We will spend the morning in the Missoula Valley looking for Pygmy Owls, and the afternoon searching for Long-eared Owls. We will then drive north approximately 50 miles and arrive at our hotel in late afternoon for check-in and dinner.

NIGHT: Ninepipes Lodge, Charlo

April 22, Day 3: Mission Valley. This morning after breakfast, we will meet in the lobby at 8:00 a.m. We will spend the day in the Mission Valley learning techniques for locating owls that nest in stick platforms, such as the Great Horned Owl. We will learn how to find owl roost sites, and hopefully collect and dissect owl pellets in the field. After an early dinner, we hope to observe the "sky-dancing" courtship display of the Short-eared Owl.

NIGHT: Ninepipes Lodge, Charlo

April 23, Day 4: Mission Valley. After breakfast, we will meet in the lobby at 8:00 a.m. to depart once again for the beautiful Mission and Flathead Valleys. We will learn how to check natural cavities for nesting Northern Pygmy and Northern Saw-whet owls. We will then hike through the forest and search for Great Gray Owls.

NIGHT: Ninepipes Lodge, Charlo

April 24, Day 5: Mission Valley. After breakfast, we will make a long drive to the high mountains passes to search for Boreal Owls. We will be in snow. Indeed, it might be three or more feet deep. However, we will have fun trudging through the snow on several short walks. This evening there will be a farewell dinner at one of Missoula's fine restaurants.

NIGHT: Doubletree by Hilton Hotel, Missoula

April 25, Day 6: Departure for Home. Tour participants may depart at any time on this day.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 14 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Denver Holt & Matt Larson

Denver Holt is a wildlife researcher and graduate of the University of Montana. He is founder and president of the Owl Research Institute and the Ninepipes Wildlife Research Center, a nonprofit organization located in Charlo, Montana. A dedicated field researcher in North and Central America, Denver believes that long-term field studies are the primary means to understanding trends in natural history.

Since 1978, Denver's focus has been researching owls and their ecology. He has published numerous professional papers and technical documents, including four species accounts for the *Birds of North America* project. He was also team leader for the Strigidae family (owl) species accounts for *The Handbook of the Birds of the World, Volume 5*, covering 189 species of the world's owls. In collaboration with elementary school teachers, he has co-authored two children's science books on owls: *Owls, Who Are They?* and *Snowy Owls: Who Are They?*. In 2006 he was a chapter author on owls for the book *Arctic Wings*, highlighting the birds of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The foreword was written by former United States President, Jimmy Carter. In 2000, Denver was named Montana's "Wildlife Biologist of the Year" by the Wildlife Society of North America.

Denver's research has been acknowledged by the media, including a cover story for *National Geographic Magazine* in December 2002. His work has been the subject of many television bites on all the major networks, as well as featured on Audubon's *Up-Close* series, PBS's *Bird Watch*, Disney, and David Attenborough's *Life of Birds*, among others. His research on Snowy Owls has been showcased on documentaries for National Geographic Explorer, NHK Natural History Unit of Japan, and the Norwegian Broadcasting Company Natural History Unit. His Snowy Owl research has been the focus of the British Broadcasting Company's (BBC) documentary series, *Frozen Earth*, a sequel to the highly acclaimed *Planet Earth* series. In May 2011 and January 2012, Denver's research was featured in the *New York Times*. Also in 2011, Denver worked closely with a PBS documentary film crew featuring the breeding ecology of the Snowy Owl at his research site in Barrow, Alaska. The film, *The Magic of the Snowy Owl*, aired in 2012. Denver's research on Snowy Owls in Barrow, Alaska was featured in the Spring 2015 issue of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's *Living Bird* magazine. Denver has also been the keynote speaker for several major bird festivals in the United States.

Matt Larson is a graduate of the University of Montana. He has worked as a research biologist with the Owl Research Institute since 2008. He is a lifelong naturalist and avid outdoorsman. His research, focused primarily on North American owls, has afforded him the opportunity to travel and work throughout western Montana and Alaska. Matt has published six professional papers. He also has four papers in review and will be a co-author for the Northern Pygmy Owl, Birds of North America (BNA) species account. Matt shares his passion for field biology, natural history, and long-term research through several mediums: he has given several papers at professional meetings, numerous public lectures, and field workshops, and has served as a natural history guide. His recent publication describing Survey Techniques for Short-eared Owls is being widely applied across the west. He lives with his wife and two daughters in Missoula, Montana.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$2,095** per person in double occupancy from Missoula, MT. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 5, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Missoula and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$260**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The initial deposit for this tour is **\$300** per person. If you would like to pay your initial deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay the initial deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard, Visa, or American Express at the time of registration. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at www.ventbird.com) should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: Initial tour deposits may be made by MasterCard, Visa, American Express, check, money order, or bank transfer. All other tour payments, including second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc., must be made by check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refunds are made according to the following schedule: If cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$150** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$50** per person. If cancellation is made between 120 and 90 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 90 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions. *We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.*

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$150*
Between 120 and 90 days before departure	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance will be refunded
Fewer than 90 days before departure date	No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$50 per person.

Upon cancellation of the transportation or travel services, where you, the customer, are not at fault and have not cancelled in violation of the terms and conditions of any of the contract for transportation or travel services, all sums paid to VENT for services not received by you will be promptly refunded by VENT to you unless you otherwise advise VENT in writing.

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.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE: We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. VENT recommends Travel Insured International as our preferred insurance provider. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause, among others. **Contact Travel Insured International (www.travelinsured.com) or 800-243-3174 prior to registration for details.** Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than Travel Insured International, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

AIR INFORMATION: 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. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

CONDITIONS: This tour has a mix of driving and hiking. Driving can sometimes be long and boring; however, there is much country to cover to find owls. Hikes are of two kinds: 1) short and vigorous 2) medium distance (about one mile) and vigorous. Walking through forests with downed trees can be difficult, as is walking over spring snow which can be mushy and strenuous.

CLOTHING: This time of year in Montana, it is advisable to dress for the unexpected as temperatures can range from 30 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit. We recommend cold weather, warm weather, and wet weather clothing. A hat, gloves, coat or jacket, shelled parka or overcoat, and boots are a must. We recommend light, layered clothing, as opposed to bulky, heavy clothing. Leisure clothing, such as running shoes, short sleeved shirts, and sweat pants can be a welcome addition.

EQUIPMENT: You should bring binoculars along with a belt or day pack (good for carrying books, sunscreen, camera, etc.). As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medication and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Your leader will have a spotting scope but if you have one and wish to bring it, feel free to do so. Other items to bring should include an alarm clock and sunscreen.

HEALTH: If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, 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. As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots.

SUGGESTED READING: Our website, www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from this store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You may also visit such other online stores such as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print or hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com or www.buteobooks.com which specializes in ornithology books.

- Gill, F.B. *Ornithology*. W.H. Freeman and Company, New York. 2007.
- König, C. and F. Weick. *Owls of the World*. Yale University Press, New Haven and London. 2008.
- Mikkola, H. *Owls of the World: A Photographic Guide*. Christopher Helm Publishing, London. 2012.
- Reid, F.A. *Mammals of North America North of Mexico*. Peterson Field Guides. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. 2006.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

RESPONSIBILITY: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger 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 passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved 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. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. Where this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect May 25, 2017 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation .