

YELLOWSTONE IN LATE WINTER: BEARS, WOLVES & WINTER BIRDS

MARCH 25-31, 2018

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For this tour, participants will experience the late winter/early spring season at incomparable Yellowstone National Park. This trip is timed for the period when winter's grip is easing, mammal viewing is excellent, winter/spring birding is good, and the park is receiving light visitation. Our focus is on providing a rich, all-around natural history tour. We will make a special effort to locate the high profile mega-fauna for which the park is so well known. We have opportunities to see mule and white-tailed deer, bighorn sheep, pronghorn, bison, elk, wolves, and with a little luck, grizzly bear, moose, and river otter.

In addition a limited variety of exciting birds can be found in Yellowstone during late winter. Time in the field may produce Trumpeter Swan, Barrow's Goldeneye, Bald and Golden eagles, Northern Pygmy-Owl, Bohemian Waxwing, Black Rosy-finch, Gray-crowned Rosy-finch, Red Crossbill, Pine Grosbeak, and others.

The trip also offers an educational theme which will cover the predator and prey relationships within the greater Yellowstone ecosystem. In addition, we will discuss adaptations animals have evolved to cope with winter, such as migration, hibernation, and toughing it out.

At around four million acres, Yellowstone stands as a monument to wilderness. The vastness of the park, the abundance of its wildlife, and its spectacular natural landmarks make it among the most beloved destinations on Earth. For Americans, the reverence we feel for our nation's first national park is limitless. As children we develop a fascination for a number of the park's trademark features, including Old Faithful Geyser and Mammoth Hot Springs. This fascination is life-long for many, as evidenced by the millions of visitors that make the trip to Yellowstone each summer.

We will have four full days to explore the north side of the park and the nearby Paradise Valley. Each day we will enter Yellowstone's north entrance. This is the original entrance to the park, and we will pass through the famous archway entrance, erected and dedicated to President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903. One road is open during the Yellowstone winter, and we will spend each day traveling it from Gardiner to Cooke City—scouting for wildlife.

Our lodge is certainly worth mentioning. Chico Hot Springs in Pray, Montana is a western lodge established in 1900 and is situated in the beautiful Paradise Valley, just north of the Gardiner entrance to Yellowstone. Although modernized for today's world, the lodge still gives the feel of old Montana with the setting, food, and decoration providing an exceptionally comfortable and fun atmosphere. And, of course, there are hot springs. Two pools collect natural hot water from the surrounding mountains and provide exuberant pleasure after a long day in Yellowstone's winter. The water in these pools averages 103 degrees in the small pool and 98 degrees in the large pool. It is

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worth a dip! The Paradise Valley will also give us the opportunity to look for such wintering birds as Rough-legged Hawk, Prairie Falcon, Northern Shrike, and Townsend's Solitaire.

March 25, Day 1: Arrival in Bozeman, Montana. Tour participants may arrive into Bozeman International Airport (code BZN) any time this afternoon. A complimentary airport shuttle servicing the Holiday Inn can be found outside baggage claim. We will meet in the hotel lobby at 6:00 p.m. this evening for a brief orientation and welcome followed by dinner.

NIGHT: Holiday Inn, Bozeman, MT

March 26-29, Days 2-5: Paradise Valley and Yellowstone National Park. We will leave Bozeman on Day 2 and head south toward Chico Hot Springs, where we will stay for the next four days. The remainder of the day and the following two days will involve considerable time in the field birding and searching for wildlife in the Paradise Valley and the north side of Yellowstone National Park. Our exact itinerary will depend on where we think we have the greatest opportunity to encounter wildlife.

Yellowstone National Park is known throughout the world for its scenic grandeur, fantastic geothermal features, and wildlife. Historically however, it was well known to many of the local Native American tribes long before the travels of early fur traders and explorers. John Colter, of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, is often thought of as the first white man or mountain man to explore the park, in 1807 or 1808. By around 1825, many fur traders had entered the region and their stories of visiting “hell”—steam, hot springs, and geysers—were generally disbelieved by more educated Easterners. Gradually, more people explored the area, and eventually the United States government deployed teams to map and record the uniqueness of the region. In 1872, Congress created Yellowstone, our nation’s first national park.

Yellowstone National Park is approximately four million acres—much of it high plateau country averaging 8,000 feet elevation. It is known as much for its geologic features as for its wildlife and landscapes. There are over 10,000 hydrothermal features in the park, the most of any place on Earth. Old Faithful Geyser, Mammoth Hot Springs, Grand Geyser, and numerous other hydrothermal marvels remind visitors of past and present volcanic activity. The variety of habitats is impressive, with valleys and hillsides covered in grassland-sagebrush, while cottonwoods line the creek bottoms at lower elevations. As one ascends in elevation, pines, firs, and aspen dominate the landscape. Eventually these trees give way to the spruce and fir trees of the upper forest zone, which ultimately yield to the harsh conditions of the highest-elevation alpine zone.

Outside Alaska, Yellowstone is among the best places in United States for viewing large animals. Bison and elk have long been symbols of the park, and studies of grizzly bears from 1959 to 1970 and wolf reintroductions by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service in the mid-1990s have made these animals some of the most popular to the public. In fact, the Yellowstone populations of the four species listed above are some of the highest numbers found anywhere in the United States. Some grizzly bears emerge from winter hibernation in March, and thus we will keep a keen eye for them also. Red Fox and Coyote are common and our chances are good for finding them. Mountain lions are common, but our chances of seeing one are unlikely.

A wide diversity of *corvids* winter in Yellowstone and Paradise Valley, and we hope to see Black-billed Magpie, Clark’s Nutcracker, Common Raven, and Gray, Pinyon and Steller’s jays. The magpies and ravens are some of our key species, as they often locate predator kills and thus alert would-be wolf watchers to an area where the predators are likely.

We will observe and discuss the natural history of all these species and bring together how the ecology of Yellowstone National Park is affected by the process. We will also cover aspects of snow ecology and geothermal features of Mammoth Hot Springs. Additionally, we will discuss how animals adapt to the extreme winter conditions that grip Yellowstone in winter.

NIGHTS: Chico Hot Springs, Pray, MT

March 30, Day 6: Yellowstone to Bozeman. We will leave Chico Hot Springs this morning and spend the day casually making our way back to Bozeman. We will take advantage of birding and mammal viewing where possible. Though the area may still be locked in winter, the earliest spring migrants may be in evidence. A smattering of waterfowl, raptors, and blackbirds should be around. We will have a farewell dinner tonight at one of Bozeman's fine restaurants.

NIGHT: Holiday Inn, Bozeman, MT

March 31, Day 7: Departure from Bozeman. Participants can depart Bozeman at any time today.

TOUR SIZE: This tour is limited to 14 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Denver Holt and Robert Ridgely

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 about 100 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, and the book won the prestigious National Outdoor Book Award for Design and Artistic Merit. In 2000, he 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.

Robert S. Ridgely has made an enormous contribution to Neotropical ornithology. A prolific author and researcher, he is the author, with John Gwynne, of *A Guide to the Birds of Panama*, still one of the finest field guides ever published (and one of the first, way back in 1976). Since then he has traveled virtually everywhere in South America and has become recognized as one of the top experts on its birds. In the early 1980s, he and his friend Guy Tudor began the monumental task of producing a series of volumes covering all the birds of that continent. The first, *The Oscine Passerines*, was published in 1989; it contained a magnificent set of plates by Tudor as well as Ridgely's concise, readable, and informative text. The second volume, on the *Suboscine Passerines*, appeared in 1994, with an abridged "Field Guide" containing updated text and many new images appearing in 2009. Bob continued his publishing blitz with the release in 2001 of the two-volume *The Birds of Ecuador*, with Paul Greenfield, and in succeeding years with the Wildlife Conservation Society series on Brazilian birds, the first on the Pantanal and Cerrado (2010), the second on the Atlantic Forest in the Southeast (2016).

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Starting in 1997 with his discovery of his Jocotoco Antpitta, Bob shifted much of his energy to international conservation issues, in 1998 founding the Jocotoco Foundation in Ecuador, which would go on to protect the habitats of many of that country's most imperiled birds. He currently serves as the President of Rainforest Trust, an NGO based in Airlie, Virginia, that works with international partner groups around the world on behalf of endangered species, with millions of acres having now been protected! Through it all, Bob still likes nothing much better than just to look at birds, and he credits VENT with having helped give him the opportunity to see so many of them. In late 2003, having long lived in the Northeastern megalopolis, the lure of New Hampshire became too much, and Bob and his wife, Peg, made the move to their beloved house in the North Woods. They've resided there ever since, crossbills and Moose right outside.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$2,695** per person in double occupancy from Bozeman, Montana. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 6, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, park entrance fees, gratuities and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Bozeman 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 **\$440**. 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 #201499850.

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* (800-243-3174 or www.travelinsured.com) 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 air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

BAGGAGE: As this tour is short, we do ask that you limit your baggage to one medium-sized bag and one carry-on per person. As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications, and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag.

CLOTHING: The late winter/early spring season at Yellowstone has weather conditions that can vary dramatically. For this reason, we recommend bringing a diversity of clothing that will keep you prepared, regardless of temperature or precipitation. Beautiful spring days can quickly turn into cold, late-winter snowstorms. Layered clothing is recommended. When packing, please consider these items for cold conditions: lightweight long underwear, such as wool, polypropylene, capilene, or silk; a wool shirt; pullover or zip-up fleece; wool pants or another type of insulated pants; an outer protective coat or windbreaker; insulated winter boots; winter socks; a warm hat that covers your ears. A scarf or neck gaiter and gloves or mittens are of high importance. We guarantee that you will have a more enjoyable trip if you are warm. In the event we experience warm, balmy conditions, it is advisable that you be able to layer down to a flannel shirt, or even long-sleeved t-shirts. You should also bring a bathing suit or shorts for the hot springs at your hotel, and comfortable, informal dress clothes for dining.

CLIMATE AND CONDITIONS: Although Yellowstone is beautiful and full of wildlife, it is also high plateau country, where winter is often harsh and late-lingering. Participants should be prepared for all weather conditions. The end of March is spring in many parts of the country; in our area of Yellowstone, however, it is still late winter. There will be snow, and temperatures will range from 20° to 40° Fahrenheit. A warm day would be 50°, but we should be prepared for snowstorms and even blizzards with sub-freezing temperatures. The wind often blows very hard on the plateau, with accompanying wind chills that are downright cold.

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Physical activity will be light, but participants should be prepared to walk through shallow snow fields or snow banks if necessary for better wildlife viewing.

EQUIPMENT: You should pack a pair of binoculars that are in good condition, along with a belt pack or day pack (for carrying books, sunscreen, camera, etc.). As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag. Your leader will have a spotting scope available for group use; however, you are encouraged to bring your own for this trip if you desire. Since mammal watching is the primary focus of the tour, you may find greater enjoyment in having your own scope. Be sure to bring your camera, for great scenery. Remember however, that much of the wildlife-viewing will take place at considerable distances. Don't forget sunglasses and sunscreen! A travel alarm clock is always recommended.

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: A number of 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:

National Geographic Society. *Field Guide to Birds of North America*. Sixth Edition. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2006. **The recommended bird field guide for this tour.**

Sibley, D.A. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. New York, NY: Alfred Knopf Publishing Company, 2000. 544 pages.

Field Guides, Mammals:

Reid, Fiona A. *Peterson Field Guides: Mammals of North America*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006. **The recommended mammal field guide for this tour.**

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

Foresman, K.R. 2012. *Mammals of Montana*. Mountain Press Publishing, Missoula, MT.

Olaus, J. Murie and Mark Elbroch. *A Field Guide to Animal Tracks*. 3rd Edition. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 2005.

Other Resources:

Blevins, W. *Roadside History of Yellowstone National Park*. Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 1989. 106 pages.

Eversman, S. and M. Carr. *Yellowstone Ecology: A Road Guide*. Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 1992. 242 pages.

Fritz, W.J. *Roadside Geology of the Yellowstone Country*. Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 2003. 149 pages.

McEaney, T. *Birds of Yellowstone*. Boulder, CO: Roberts-Reinhart Publishing Company, 1988. 171 pages.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurants, 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 such 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 on a date to be announced 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.

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