

**American Explorer Series**  
**Verdant Vermont – ‘Bicknell’s Thrushes, Boreal Forests, and More’**

**May 30-June 5, 2021**

**Itinerary**

**Day 1: Sun, May 30 - Arrival**

Upon arriving at the Burlington airport you will be transferred to a nearby accommodation. **Please plan your flights to arrive no later than 6 PM** – we will meet for dinner and a brief orientation at 7 PM. Participants arriving earlier in the day will have the chance to join our guide for some local birding prior to dinner. ***Night near Burlington***

**Day 2: Mon, May 31 – Missisquoi NWR**

Our morning begins with a short trip north to the Franklin County Airport near Swanton, just south of the Canadian border. Thanks to delayed mowing protocols, Vermont’s state airports are havens for many grassland species which nest in the fields around the runway. Franklin County hosts one of the state’s only breeding populations of **Grasshopper Sparrow**, and **Vesper, Savannah, and Field Sparrows** are found here as well, along with **American Kestrel** and **Horned Lark**. Nearby grasslands also host small numbers of the state-endangered **Upland Sandpiper** and in some years **Sandhill Crane**.

Missisquoi NWR, just a few minutes to the west, contains over 6700 acres of excellent habitat which includes river delta, hardwood forests, grassland, and a large bog. The refuge holds the state’s largest population of **Black Tern**, as well as notable numbers of **Osprey, Wood Duck, and Bobolink**. Our afternoon will be spent exploring the refuge’s many habitats where we should find these birds as well as **Least, Alder, and Willow Flycatchers, American Bittern, Common Goldeneye, Northern Waterthrush, Swamp Sparrow**, and more. ***Night near Burlington***

**Day 3: Tue, June 1 - Moose Bog & Silvio O. Conte NWR**

Today we rise early and drive to the boreal forests of Vermont’s ‘Northeast Kingdom.’ Moose Bog in Wenlock WMA is our primary destination and is the most reliable spot in the state for **Spruce Grouse**. With luck we will find some displaying males! Many other species typical of boreal forests can be found here also, from **Yellow-bellied** and **Olive-sided Flycatchers**, to **Canada Jay, Boreal Chickadee, Black-backed Woodpecker**, and **Blackpoll Warbler**. It has also been a good spot over the years for both **White-winged** and **Red Crossbills**. Most of our day will be spent looking for all these and more in this remote and beautiful corner of Vermont. We will make a few stops on the return drive to Burlington, arriving with plenty of time to get washed up before dinner. ***Night in Burlington***

**Day 4: Wed, June 2 – Mt. Mansfield**

Today is our rendezvous with the **Bicknell’s Thrush**, one of North America’s rarer songbirds and a star species of this trip. Prior to 1995 it was thought to be a subspecies of the very similar Gray-cheeked Thrush but differences in song, morphology, distribution, behavior, and genetics led to it being classified as its own species. This declining bird breeds in the scrubby, spruce-fir forests found only in a handful of higher-elevation areas in the northeast US. Mount Mansfield, Vermont’s tallest peak (4,393 ft) is such a place and has proven to be reliable for them in recent years. A paved road runs to the top, offering spectacular views of the surrounding countryside as well as good birding. In addition to the Bicknell’s, we should also find numerous **Swainson’s Thrushes** for comparison, plus **Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Brown Creeper, Nashville & Yellow-rumped Warblers, Winter Wren, Common Raven**, and more.

This afternoon we visit the Birds of Vermont Museum, which houses an impressive collection of carved wooden birds. Aside from offering a number of exhibits, the property has a system of trails which traverses the surrounding 2<sup>nd</sup> growth forest and meadows. **Baltimore Oriole, Purple Finch**, and quite a few warblers are common here and occasionally **Evening Grosbeak** shows up at the feeders. ***Night near Burlington***

#### **Day 5: Thu, June 3 – Burlington Area Hotspots**

After checking out of our hotel, we will visit a few nearby spots in the Burlington area, looking for **Blue-winged** and **Golden-winged Warblers**. These closely related species regularly interbreed where the two overlap, producing hybrids referred to as **Brewster's** and **Lawrence's Warblers**, plus many other intermediate, unnamed forms. With luck we will get to see both species and some of the hybrids today, and we will make time to chase any local rarities that might be around. After lunch we head south to the small town of Woodstock, where we stay for the next 2 nights. Just a few minutes from our accommodation is Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, where we hope to find **Mourning Warbler** this afternoon among many other species. ***Night in Woodstock***

#### **Day 6: Fri, June 4 – Gifford Woods State Park; West Rutland Marsh**

This morning finds us on the famed Appalachian Trail in Gifford Woods State Park. The trail here is scenic and easy, running by Kent Pond and through forest which is excellent for a variety of warblers including **Nashville, Northern Parula, Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, Black-throated Blue, Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Black-and-white, American Redstart, Ovenbird** and **Canada**. The park is also home to several stands of old growth forest containing trees 200-400 years old and we should find a good wildflower show continuing as well. Our afternoon will be spent at West Rutland Marsh, a fantastic cattail marsh managed by Rutland County Audubon. Walking the boardwalk and trails here we will look for **American & Least Bitterns, Virginia Rail, Sora, Common Gallinule, Wilson's Snipe, Northern Harrier, Marsh Wren, Warbling Vireo**, and a selection of warblers. ***Night in Woodstock***

#### **Day 7: Sat, June 5 – Helen W. Buckner Memorial Preserve; Departure**

After breakfast and check out, we head west to the Nature Conservancy's Helen W. Buckner Memorial Preserve at Bald Mountain near Whitehall, NY. This 3,700+ acre preserve is one of the most ecologically diverse areas in Vermont, containing 20 distinct natural communities: Floodplain and upland forests, marsh habitat, three miles of undeveloped Lake Champlain shoreline, and wetlands along the Poultney River. Birding highlights are many but most notably - **Peregrine Falcons** nest on the cliffs of Bald Mountain, and due to conservation efforts, the preserve now has New England's largest population of **Golden-winged Warbler**. There's much more to discover here as well aside from birds – the area is part of a corridor for large mammals such as moose, bear, and bobcat, and the state's only lizard species, the Five-lined Skink, can be found in this rugged section of the state. ***The preserve is only accessible from a single road which can flood and become impassible at times during the spring. Should this happen we will visit other areas on our way back to Burlington.***

After a final morning of birding we head back to the Burlington International Airport arriving around noon for our return flights. ***Please plan your flights for 2 PM or later.***

***Itinerary subject to change based on local information, weather, and the whims of the leader!***