

Sax Zim Winter Driving Tour (Suggested Route)

Starting from US 53, approximately 0.5 miles north of mile marker 32, turn west on LAKE NICHOLS ROAD (CR232). Watch for northern owls, shrikes, and Gray Jays in the spruce bog along this road. You also may want to stop and listen for Boreal Chickadees and Black-backed Woodpeckers along this bog stretch, but pull off on the shoulder as the road can be semi-busy). Continue 2.4 miles to the "T" junction and turn right.

After another 1.2 miles you will reach the public access to Nichols Lake on the left. If there is open water, check for lingering waterfowl. The road continues another 3 miles west through good bog habitat popular with Gray Jays, Great Gray Owls, winter finches and other bog specialties.

Turn left on Highway 7 and head south approximately one mile to the intersection with CR133. Watch for Great Gray Owls and other raptors on the power poles, but be very careful if you slow down or stop on this relatively busy road.

Drive west on CR133 for 2.9 miles, watching for owls and other raptors (again this is a busy road, and make sure to check your rearview mirror before slowing or stopping, and pull well off the road if you stop). Turn right (north) on Blue Spruce Road (CR211) and continue 1 mile to the MORSE'S FEEDERS at the intersection of Blue Spruce and Swensen Roads. These feeders are popular with redpolls, Pine Grosbeaks, Evening Grosbeaks (occasionally), nuthatches, woodpeckers (Downy and Hairy), and there are often Ruffed Grouse in the area as well.

Drive south from the Morse feeders back to CR133, and turn right (west). After about two miles you will pass Little Whiteface Road. The ABRAMSON'S FEEDERS are located a short distance north on Little Whiteface Road and are worth checking as well. South of this intersection, CR47 heads south and west adjacent to some excellent bog habitat and is worth checking for wintering owls and Ruffed Grouse if time allows later in the day.

Continuing west on CR133 another mile will bring you to Andrews Road (CR29). Turn right (north) here at the Jehovah Witness church and head north 2.7 miles. This route passes through open fields, worth checking for Rough-legged Hawks, Snow Buntings, Black-billed Magpies and rarely Snowy Owls. Sharp-tailed Grouse occur in this area as well, and can often be spotted at dawn or dusk perched in bare trees. Also check for Sharptails below the feeder at the last house on the right before Correction Line Road. Turn left on Correction Line Road at the T and continue a short distance to Owl Avenue, where you will turn right (north).

For the next two miles you will pass through good spruce bog habitat. Watch for owls, Gray Jays, Boreal Chickadees and woodpeckers. After 2 miles you will reach the intersection with Overton Road, and another 0.4 miles north of this intersection

(where Owl Avenue veers to the right) you will find the FRIENDS OF SAX ZIM BOG WELCOME CENTER on the left.

At the Welcome Center you will find a variety of feeders popular with finches, jays, woodpeckers, nuthatches and other winter songbirds (the Center is open daily from 10am until 3pm mid December through mid March, but you can view the bird sighting information 24/7). The Center itself is a great place to warm up, buy souvenirs, get up to date bird sightings, and meet other birders and photographers, and there are hiking/snowshoe trails as well as primitive restroom facilities.

Once you have warmed up, head north again on Owl Avenue to ARKOLA ROAD (CR52). This stretch can be excellent for wintering Great Gray and Northern Hawk Owls, as well as other bog species. Turn right (east) on Arkola Road. The road passes through excellent bog habitat for the next 1.5 miles and you should watch for owls, finches, Gray Jays, Boreal Chickadees, and other typical bog species.

Arkola Road continues east through agricultural land, and the next few miles can be good for Rough-legged Hawks, Sharp-tailed Grouse, and rarely Snowy Owls. After 5.4 miles you will reach the intersection of Arkola Road and Highway 7, where you should turn right (south) and proceed one mile to Kelsey Whiteface Road.

Turn Left (east) on Kelsey Whiteface Road and proceed 0.5 miles to LORETTA'S FEEDERS on the right. Here you can park and walk along a short trail lined with a variety of feeding stations, popular with chickadees, nuthatches, redpolls, jays, grosbeaks and woodpeckers. Keep an eye out for Black-billed Magpies here and Ermine possibly at one of the rib cages.

After you have stretched your legs, continue another 0.5 miles east to Peary Road and turn left (north). After about 0.5 miles you will reach the FOSZB YELLOW-BELLIED BOG on the left. Feel free to explore this area on foot (or snowshoe) and check for boreal specialties. After 1 mile you will reach Arkola Road.

From this intersection it is a quick 4.7 mile drive east to the town of Cotton where you can find food (The Wilbert Cafe) and gas. If you are not ready for a break, you can proceed 1 mile west back to the intersection of Arkola Road and Highway 7. Turn right (north) and proceed north 8 miles to Stone Lake Road (CR319), watching for raptors (Roughlegs and rarely Snowy Owls) in the open country, Great Gray and Northern Hawk Owls in the spruce bog habitat), Sharp-tailed Grouse, Snow Buntings, Northern Shrikes, and Moose. Remember to watch for traffic on this birdy, but busy stretch of road!

Turn right on STONE LAKE ROAD and watch for owls and other raptors, Northern Shrikes, and waterfowl if there is open water at the inlet to Stone Lake itself. Though this is a dead end road, you can turn around at the Public Landing (where there is a seasonal outhouse). Retrace your route back to Highway 7 and turn right (north) and proceed another 1.5 miles to Zim Road (CR27) where you should turn left.

Proceed 1.2 miles to ADMIRAL ROAD and turn left again (south). After you pass a gravel pit you will enter excellent spruce bog habitat, popular with owls, Gray Jays, Moose (rarely), and other boreal species. A few miles south of Zim Road you will reach the famous Admiral Road feeders (perhaps THE best place in the country to see Boreal Chickadees and popular with finches, woodpeckers, nuthatches, redpolls and Gray Jays). Boreal Chickadees are especially fond of peanut butter, and often appear soon after this is smeared on the feeder frame and perches.

From the feeders head south another 3.4 miles to Kolu Road and turn right (west). Proceed 0.9 miles to McDAVITT ROAD (CR213) and turn right (north). After about 2 miles you will enter excellent spruce bog habitat (the "Magic Mile"), popular with Great Gray Owls, Black-backed Woodpeckers, Gray Jays and other boreal species. There are logging trails heading west and east from McDavitt road at the south end of this stretch of bog, and another heading west located 2.7 miles north of Kolu Rd. These are worth exploring on foot or snowshoe if you don't find any owls along the road itself.

Another worthwhile side trip if time allows (especially for Evening Grosbeaks): from the North end of McDavitt Road/CR83, head west 8.9 miles to CR444 (one mile west of Hwy 5). Turn right, and head north 1 mile to MARY LOU'S FEEDERS, the first house on the the right. You are welcome to enter her yard to view the feeders, but make sure to pull well off the road to park, and do not block any driveways or point any optics in the direction of the house across the street.

Many birders and photographers finish their day by slowly driving through the good bog habitat along Admiral and McDavitt Roads (or along Highway 7 to the east, or Lake Nichols Road). Great Gray Owls feed most actively at dawn and dusk, and this can be a good time for spotting other wildlife as well.