



## NBNC in the Wild West: Bears, Wolves, and Birds of Yellowstone

As the sun rises over the Rocky Mountains, the sounds of bellowing elk, croaking sandhill cranes, and howling wolves resonate across the valley. Alone in the fragrant sagebrush meadows, you encounter a herd of mother elk and newborn calves grazing in the cool morning air. On the hillsides above, you focus your spotting scope on a pair of courting black bears in the fresh alpine wildflowers at the edge of a montane glacier. Nearby, steam rises from the edge of a simmering hot spring as a great gray owl hunts in the nearby meadow. Bison and grizzly tracks skirt the orange and turquoise rim of the bubbling pool. On this week-long, small group safari into the heart of the wild, find out why the 18-million-acre Greater Yellow Ecosystem has been hailed as "America's Serengeti," "The World's Wonderland," and "The Land of Fire and Ice."



**Dates:** Friday May 21<sup>st</sup> 2019 – Thursday May 27<sup>th</sup> 2019 (7 days)

**Cost:** \$2,950 per person

### What's included:

- All lodging.
- All meals, including coffee, tea, and snacks throughout the journey.
- An expert naturalist guide and trip leader with years of experience in the Yellowstone region.
- Use of field guides and specimens such as antlers and fur samples.
- Optics, including individual binoculars and shared spotting scopes.
- Entrance passes for Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks.
- Transportation in a customized 15-passenger safari van.
- Pre-departure orientation session at North Branch Nature Center two weeks before the trip.

### Accommodations and physical requirements:

Our accommodations range from rustic cabins to motel-style lodges to full service hotels. We selected lodging that positions us for the best possible wildlife viewing opportunities, while ensuring a clean, warm, and comfortable place to spend the night. Participants should be able to hike 3-4 miles per day on moderate terrain, and be comfortable with early mornings (we will generally depart our lodging at or before sunrise).

**For more information and registration, contact:** [sean@northbranchnaturecenter.org](mailto:sean@northbranchnaturecenter.org)

### **\*\*Flight Details\*\***

**Participants must plan their flights to arrive in Jackson Hole before 4:30 PM on May 21<sup>st</sup> and depart any time on or after May 27<sup>th</sup>. Please contact us with any flight-related questions.**



**Day 1:** Our flights land in Jackson Hole, the heart of the wild west. As our plane taxis across the sagebrush prairie, we may glimpse our first pronghorn antelope or golden eagle right from the tarmac. For the next two nights we'll be hosted by Teton Science Schools, a world-renowned nexus of environmental education right in the middle of Grand Teton National Park. A centerpiece of western natural history and conservation legacy, our rustic lodging

is situated in a major wildlife movement corridor and features unparalleled views of the sunset over the Tetons. After an orientation dinner, we'll wind down to the sound of coyotes howling in the hills.

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**Day 2:** We'll depart early this morning to search for magnificent wildlife as a golden sunrise illuminates the glowing Teton range. Moose, coyote, bears, and bison are among the 61 species of mammals in Jackson Hole that we'll pursue today. Along our journey, we'll visit one of the best places in the country to see the spectacular yet threatened greater sage-grouse. After a full morning of wildlife viewing, we'll visit the historic cabin of two of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most influential naturalists, Olaus and Mardy Murie. The Murie Ranch is a place of magical conservation legacy that has welcomed and inspired

environmental leaders from Aldo Leopold to Jane Goodall for nearly a century. After lunch, we'll hike into the backcountry in search of songbirds, raptors, and wildflowers. We'll return to Teton Science Schools for a hearty dinner, followed by a campfire, stargazing, or evening birding.

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**Day 3:** Our adventure continues this morning in the northern reaches of Grand Teton National Park. Here we may witness newborn elk calves among the large herds that frequent the expansive willow flats, or even glimpse a grizzly bear hunting in the meadows. We'll enjoy sandhill cranes, trumpeter swans, and American white pelicans foraging in the foreground of America's most spectacular vistas. After a big brunch along the scenic shores of Jackson Lake, we'll venture north into Yellowstone. As

we travel through the nation's first National Park, we'll encounter our first hot springs, steam vents, and geysers. We'll settle into our lodging just a stone's throw away from Old Faithful, and take an evening hike through the world's most spectacular geothermal features.

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**Days 4 and 5:** Today we leave Yellowstone’s volcanic interior plateau and descend into the park’s wild Northern Range. This breathtaking million-acre expanse of valleys and mountain ranges, often referred to as “America’s Serengeti,” features some of North America’s premier wildlife watching. We’ll travel through herds of bison and pronghorn in search of black bears and grizzlies foraging in the grasslands. The region is also home to Yellowstone’s most illustrious and elusive carnivore: the grey wolf. We’ll spend our afternoons exploring abandoned wolf dens, hiking to historic wolf re-introduction enclosures, and visiting other hidden destinations steeped in ecology and conservation history. We’ll also keep an eye skyward for prairie falcons, Swainson’s hawks, and great gray owls.

In the evenings, we retire to the tiny mountain town of Cooke City, nestled at the base of the rugged Beartooth Mountains. This remote area of southern Montana is home our most specialized alpine inhabitants like mountain goats, pika, and rosy-finches.

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**Day 6:** As we ascend out of Yellowstone’s northern range, we’ll continue our search for wildlife in the quiet morning hours. Our journey then takes us over Dunraven Pass, where we may spot Clark’s nutcrackers foraging in the whitebark pines, or bighorn sheep clambering in the cliffs. We’ll exit the mountain pass into Yellowstone’s Grand Canyon, where we’ll witness a giant waterfall cutting a quarter-mile-deep trench through a dazzling, extinct geyser basin. From here, we follow the Yellowstone River in search of nesting harlequin ducks and American dippers, while watching out for members of the canyon’s resident wolf pack. We’ll make our way back to Jackson via the shores of the immense Yellowstone Lake, a popular stopover for migratory waterfowl like Clark’s and Western grebes. We’ll arrive at our lodge in Jackson with enough time to explore the town square and enjoy a final group dinner to celebrate our adventure.

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**Day 7:** Our excursion concludes this morning, but even the transfer to the Jackson Hole Airport may reward us with final glimpses of trumpeter swans and elk at the edge of town. As we await our departure flight, we’ll reflect on the week and enjoy a panoramic view of the Tetons in the morning light.

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**About the trip leader:**

Sean Beckett, NBNC's Staff Naturalist, has guided extensively in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks as a veteran wildlife expedition leader with the World Wildlife Fund. In Yellowstone's off-season, Sean's excursions bring travelers toe-to-toe with polar bears in the Canadian Arctic, and to the stunning canyon landscapes of the desert southwest. Sean has also worked as a field ornithologist nationwide, researching Atlantic puffins in Maine, saw-whet owls in New York, hawks and falcons in Idaho, pygmy-owls in Mexico, and Clark's nutcrackers in Wyoming. Sean studied Biology and Environmental Studies at Vassar College, and received his M.S. from the University of Vermont's Field Naturalist Program. A Vermont native, Sean's very first adventure outside of New England was as a teenager on a NBNC naturalist trip years ago!



North Branch Nature Center  
713 Elm Street, Montpelier VT 05602  
(802) 229-6206