

# Churchill, Manitoba, Canada

## Location

The town of Churchill, with a year round resident population of about 900, is located on the western shore of Hudson Bay. Politically, it is on the northeastern border of Manitoba Province, on its shoreline on the Bay.

## Description

As we read in Phillippe Grandjean's article on the Wildlife of Nova Dania (see page 42), Churchill lies at the mouth of the Churchill River, in the taiga, the zone of transition between the boreal forest and the tundra. The port at Churchill is one of the oldest in western Canada and gives access to the waters of the Bay. Arctic flora and fauna abound in the marshes, lakes, fields, mudflats, and bordering the tidal zone. In summer of course, there is 'midnight sun' here, and so, energy permitting, one can easily bird from about 3 a.m. to nearly 11 p.m. with sufficient light hours.

Each late spring and summer, naturalists of every variety swarm (along with the clouds of mosquitos) to the Churchill area to view birds, wildflowers, Beluga and other whales, and some even come to see the predictably occurring (but not at all predictable) Polar Bears. To date, approximately 180 bird species have been recorded here, including the Siberian rarity, Ross' Gull (*Rhodostethia rosea*). In fact, Ross' Gulls nest in the vicinity of Churchill so it really isn't only a Siberian rarity any longer.

## Access

Churchill can be reached by rail and air from either Winnipeg or Thompson.

## Accommodations

The best time to bird this area is between late May and mid-July. There are a few hotels in Churchill; however, all ar-

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## *A birders' paradise that requires reservations well in advance.*

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rangements must be made well in advance as all hotels are booked months ahead. It is possible to camp on the tundra almost anyplace, but remember that this is a season where insects take over and there is a real Polar Bear problem here. If you camp, be sure to follow all of the rules and regulations distributed by the Chamber of Commerce. Be absolutely sure that you do not camp anywhere even close to a garbage dump and be sure to remove your own food at least 150 meters from your tent.

The weather can be rainy, windy, cold, foggy, warm, or pleasant in any given day or all of the above on one day, so bring appropriate clothing.

If birding alone or with a few friends it is imperative to obtain a rental car, which is available in Churchill. However, again, one must make arrangements well in advance in order to be sure one of the few available is reserved for you.

## Birding

Please refer to the section on publications for the Manitoba area (page 167). In order to get the most out of your Churchill experience, it would probably be wise to get all of the publications mentioned; however, *do not even think* of going without the Jehl/Smith book and the Lane/Chartier book. These are simply requisite items.

It is an excellent idea to contact a commercial tour operator if contemplating birding Churchill. If one is willing to use the services of such an operator, the problems of a rental car and accommodations are already solved. Additionally, good

tour guides know the area inside and out and are invaluable, especially if time is a consideration.

The Churchill Chamber of Commerce can supply a list of commercial tour operators. One of the best is Bonnie Chartier of Churchill Wilderness Encounters, Box 9, Churchill, Manitoba ROB OEO. Telephone: 204-675-2729 (o), and 204-675-2248 (h). She is an extremely experienced birder who is superb in the field.

In the space of one week, at the best birding season, one should be able to see Arctic (*Gavia immer*) and Red-throated (*Gavia stellata*) loons, Common (*Somateria mollissima*) and King (*Somateria spectabilis*) eiders, Oldsquaw (*Clangula hyemalis*), Thayer's (*Larus thayeri*), Sabine's (*Xema sabini*), Ross' and Little (*Larus minutus*) gulls, Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisea*), Willow (*Lagopus lagopus*) and Rock (*Lagopus mutus*) ptarmigans, Tundra Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*), scoters, ducks and geese by the thousands, Common (*Carduelis flammea*) and Hoary (*Carduelis hornemanni*) redpolls, Parasitic Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*), and even Harris' Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*). Other specialties of this magic place are Bohemian Waxwing (*Bombycilla garrulus*), Smith's Longspur (*Calcarius pictus*), and Yellow Rail (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*). There will be hundreds and hundreds of shorebirds nesting and in transit. Some species one might see are Lesser Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis dominica*), Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*), Stilt Sandpiper (*Calidris himantopus*), Short-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus griseus*), and Hudsonian Godwit (*Limosa haemastica*).

This is a birder's paradise. Enjoy it!!

## Seasonal Rating

Spring (April-June) \*\*\*\*

Summer (July-August) \*\*\*\*