



Field Guides Tour Report

Colorado Grouse II 2016

Apr 10, 2016 to Apr 20, 2016

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For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, [please VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE.](#)



Sharp-tailed Grouse were definitely the best dancers among the lekking birds we observed. Their lavender air sacs were eyecatching as well. (Photo by guide Eric Hynes)

Thanks so much for choosing Field Guides for your Colorado Grouse adventure. Pepe and I had a blast showing you so much of the state and a little bit of Kansas too. We pulled off the clean sweep of targeted grouse, vanquished a number of your nemesis birds, and encountered over two dozen mammal species along the way.

Our first afternoon was principally spent traveling south, but we looped in some productive birding on the plains east of Colorado Springs. Prairie species highlights that first day included Mountain Plover, Burrowing Owl, numerous Swainson's Hawks, Sage Thrasher, and the first of many Great Horned Owl nests.

Day two was our first full day of birding together, and we put a serious dent in the checklist by the time we called it quits. Our route roughly followed the Arkansas River going east, with stops at several key reservoirs. Tardy Snow Geese, Cinnamon Teal, Scaled Quail, Clark's Grebe, Ferruginous Hawk, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Snowy Plover, and hundreds of male Yellow-headed Blackbirds stood out.

In order to pick up our first targeted grouse, we were forced to expand our route into Kansas. The extra early start and lengthy drive on day three were worth it as we scored Lesser Prairie-Chicken. The rest of the day was spent getting ourselves north to Wray. A conversation with Bob Bledsoe at the end of a long haul proved very interesting and we discovered a few new things about each other.

We found ourselves surrounded by Greater Prairie-Chickens at sunrise on day four. The squawks, cackles, and hoots were as memorable as the displays. A short drive into the vast Pawnee National Grassland produced killer looks at McCown's Longspur. Our afternoon's birding was at Lower Latham Reservoir, where we picked up several shorebird species not encountered anywhere else on the tour.

Day five began with a hearty breakfast at Marion's of The Rockies. The chicken du jour was White-tailed Ptarmigan, so we wound our way up to 12,000 feet at Loveland Pass. Thanks to Pepe's sharp eyes, we quickly got on a small covey of them. After repositioning below the pass, we savored outstanding looks at those hardest of grouse. The duration of the day was filled with one spectacular view after another as we made our way over to Gunnison. Many of you exchanged high fives when we picked up a cooperative American Three-toed Woodpecker en route. The day ended with a dash up to Crested Butte.

Our scheduled visit to the only public access viewing area for the rare Gunnison Sage-Grouse was successful, although a hunting Golden Eagle kept the grouse at quite a distance. We complimented the lek experience with some birding around Blue Mesa Reservoir, and scored our only Clark's Nutcracker up in Taylor Canyon in the afternoon to round out day six.

We awoke to falling snow on day seven in Gunnison. Luck was on our side that morning, as we happened to find ourselves behind a plow truck, which we clung to as we traveled west up and over another summit. It was a different day when we descended into Montrose. Sweitzer Lake, like it does every year, turned up a number of species we hadn't seen yet on the tour, and some we never saw again. Swallows skimmed the lake by the thousands, and a large flock of coots miraculously grew legs and become White-faced Ibis in the scope. Fruit Growers Reservoir held a Willet and a Wilson's Phalarope, and a cooperative pair of Lewis's Woodpeckers visited a cavity.

We turned up a suite of new birds in the juniper and pinyon habitat of Colorado National Monument on day eight. Pinyon Jay, Juniper Titmouse, Bushtit, Townsend's Solitaire, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Bewick's Wren, Black-throated Sparrow, and Violet-green Swallow were spotted before we tracked north-northeast to Craig.

Some said it couldn't be done, but we pulled off the unlikely "double chicken maneuver" on the morning of day nine. It took several passes, but we eventually scored a displaying Dusky Grouse before sunrise, then raced over to a Sharp-tailed Grouse lek to see a fantastic dance party. We celebrated our rare feat with Colorado's best breakfast at Winona's in Steamboat Springs. On our way up to Walden, we spotted several Rough-legged Hawks and Pat got us onto Greater Sage-Grouse before we even got near a lek. Walden Reservoir was a waterfowl smorgasbord, including the highly coveted Barrow's Goldeneye.

The Greater Sage-Grouse lek on our last morning was outstanding. The 114 individuals was a high count for me in the last five years. Thanks to a friendly conversation with a local the day before, we visited a private home and observed the full set of rosy-finches before making tracks to the south. Another helping of Barrow's Goldeneye was welcomed at Windy Gap Reservoir on our way back to Denver. Our last birding stop was at Genesee Park where we scored excellent scope views of Red Crossbills and some busy Pygmy Nuthatches.

By the time we arrived back in Denver, we had covered the equivalent of driving from Washington, D.C. to L.A. It was a heck of an avian adventure and we thoroughly enjoyed every mile of it with all of you. Thanks for being such a fun bunch to bird, drive, and dine with. Greater Prairie-Chicken and White-tailed Ptarmigan tied for favorite species of the tour. Greater Sage-Grouse took the silver medal and Mountain Plover and Lewis's Woodpecker tied for third.

Good birding and I hope our paths cross again some day!

-- Eric in Vermont

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

SNOW GOOSE (*Chen caerulescens caerulescens*) – The second run of this tour is often too late for this early migrant but we happened upon six lingering birds in corn stubble west of Lamar.

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) – The individuals incubating on top of the hay bale stacks were most memorable.

WOOD DUCK (*Aix sponsa*) – We enjoyed a wonderfully cooperative drake the first afternoon

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*) – Almost an everyday bird

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*) – Common

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – An everyday bird

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Anas discors*) – Our best looks were during the second half of the tour

CINNAMON TEAL (*Anas cyanoptera*) – Our first good looks were at Cheraw Lake but we saw quite a few of these handsome dabblers.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*) – These comical looking dabblers were numerous at a number of locations

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – This elegant duck was surprisingly scarce this year.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN) (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) – More days than not

CANVASBACK (*Aythya valisineria*) – Our best looks were at Walden Reservoir

REDHEAD (*Aythya americana*) – We saw quite a few of these sharp diving ducks.

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*) – Mostly at sites in the latter half of the tour

LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*) – Plenty

BUFFLEHEAD (*Bucephala albeola*) – Nearly an everyday species

COMMON GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala clangula*) – We enjoyed some wonderful comparisons with the next species

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala islandica*) – This species was a primary target for a number of you so we delighted to catch up to a gorgeous pair at Walden Reservoir and then we saw a significant number at Windy Gap Reservoir.

HOODED MERGANSER (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) – Only at Sweitzer Lake State Park

COMMON MERGANSER (*Mergus merganser*) – None during the first half of the tour but plenty near the end

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – It was a treat to study the bold breeding plumage of these rubber ducky shaped divers

Odontophoridae (New World Quail)

SCALED QUAIL (*Callipepla squamata*) – After a number of frustrating encounters, we finally lucked into an individual that held its perch at length.

GAMBEL'S QUAIL (*Callipepla gambelii*) – Bob spotted a distant bird teed up while we were at Sweitzer Lake State Park. Thank goodness he did because our reliable spot the next day was very quiet thanks to a copulating pair of Cooper's Hawks.

NORTHERN BOBWHITE (*Colinus virginianus*) – Driving out to the Greater Prairie-Chicken lek, we came upon a covey in gorgeous evening light.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

RING-NECKED PHEASANT (*Phasianus colchicus*) – We spotted quiet a few out on the eastern plains. [I]

GREATER SAGE-GROUSE (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) – This largest of grouse put on an incredible show with 116 individuals in view at the lek.

GUNNISON SAGE-GROUSE (*Centrocercus minimus*) – This endangered bird has a very restricted range. The presence of one of its chief predators, a Golden Eagle, at the lek undoubtedly influenced the distance at which we observed the birds.

WHITE-TAILED PTARMIGAN (*Lagopus leucura altipetens*) – Hooray! The weather gods were good to us when we visited Loveland Pass. Pepe quickly spotted a small flock and after repositioning out of the wind, we savored spectacular views.

DUSKY GROUSE (*Dendragapus obscurus obscurus*) – Some wintry weather kept us from reaching Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park unfortunately so we turned to plan B. It took three passes but eventually we got good looks at a strutting male at dawn.

SHARP-TAILED GROUSE (*Tympanuchus phasianellus columbianus*) – These wind-up toys were highly entertaining. The brilliant sunlight reflecting off the clean snow really helped illuminate them at the lek.

GREATER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN (PINNATUS) (*Tympanuchus cupido pinnatus*) – Bob Bledsoe was pretty entertaining but the show at the lek was so much better. The intimacy of the experience made the morning magical. Closing your eyes and just listening to the cacophony was just as mesmerizing as watching the displays and skirmishes.

LESSER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*) – The overnight rain rendered the Colorado lek unreachable. Plan B was a ridiculously early start and trek into Kansas but we were rewarded at dawn with our first target grouse of the tour.

Gaviidae (Loons)

COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*) – Sweitzer Lake proved once again a reliable place to catch up to this majestic migrant.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – Uncommon but several good views

EARED GREBE (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – We observed far fewer of these dark little grebes than I am used to seeing. Perhaps many had already migrated farther north. Not being able to get to Lake Meredith contributed to our abnormally low count.

WESTERN GREBE (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) – We saw these large grebes on most significant bodies of water.

CLARK'S GREBE (*Aechmophorus clarkii*) – We had our first looks at Lake Henry outside of Ordway

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Walden Reservoir has a large breeding colony

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) – These massive soaring birds put on a good show overhead at Lake Henry and again at Walden Reservoir.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*) – We had a number of good looks, including a few rookeries

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

WHITE-FACED IBIS (*Plegadis chihi*) – Miraculously, a large flock of coots standing on the far shoreline of Sweitzer Lake morphed into this sharp wader.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – Plenty

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – we saw nests on multiple days [N]

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – These regal raptors were most common in the Craig area with a bird on a nest close to the road.

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*) – Scattered sightings throughout the tour

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*) – Our random stop for Fox Sparrow turned up a nice adult perched briefly below us.

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*) – Most sightings were toward the end of the tour.

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – The adult perched on the snag at East Elk Creek stands out. [N]

SWAINSON'S HAWK (*Buteo swainsoni*) – Conspicuous throughout the tour [N]

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – Nesting [N]

ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK (*Buteo lagopus*) – A few lingering migrants were seen well, particularly in the North Park region

FERRUGINOUS HAWK (*Buteo regalis*) – A soaring bird the afternoon of our first full day in the field turned out to be the only sighting of the tour.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*) – Everyday during the second half of the tour

Gruidae (Cranes)

SANDHILL CRANE (*Grus canadensis*) – The Yampa River Valley between Craig and Steamboat is where we saw the most pairs.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*) – Our best look was at Fruit Growers Reservoir on the leg up to Grand Junction.

AMERICAN AVOCET (*Recurvirostra americana*) – We had some great looks at birds in flight.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

SNOWY PLOVER (NIVOSUS) (*Charadrius nivosus nivosus*) – Holbrook Reservoir hosted five pairs of these gorgeous plovers.

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*) – More days than not

MOUNTAIN PLOVER (*Charadrius montanus*) – Among the most poorly named species in the world, this was one of our primary targets while out on the plains. We scored a great look east of Colorado Springs.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – Heard calling and seen on a couple of days

WILLET (WESTERN) (*Tringa semipalmata inornata*) – Pepe picked out one along the shore at Fruit Growers Reservoir.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*) – Several small flocks; our best looks were at the marsh at the south end of Lower Latham Reservoir

LONG-BILLED CURLEW (*Numenius americanus*) – Only a couple participants picked up this giant shorebird on day four while we were traveling.

MARbled GODWIT (*Limosa fedoa*) – Good looks in the retention ponds on the south side of the feedlot in Ordway

BAIRD'S SANDPIPER (*Calidris bairdii*) – Also in the retention ponds on the south side of the feedlot in Ordway

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*) – We were observing the activity in the marsh at the southern end of Lower Latham Reservoir for awhile before this colorful peep was teased out of the vegetation.

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – A good look at just one bird at Lower Latham Reservoir

WILSON'S SNIPE (*Gallinago delicata*) – Several of these guys stepped into view while we were watching the dowitcher at Lower Latham Reservoir.

WILSON'S PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus tricolor*) – A gorgeous female in breeding plumage dropped in for a few minutes at Fruit Growers Reservoir.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BONAPARTE'S GULL (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*) – A half dozen birds were flying around at Holbrook Reservoir.

FRANKLIN'S GULL (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*) – The beautiful pink hue of the bellies of some of the birds in the flock on Sweitzer Lake was an ephemeral treat.

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*) – here and there

CALIFORNIA GULL (*Larus californicus*) – Walden Reservoir attracts a small breeding colony

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Yep [H]

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – These species continues its rapid population growth in much of North America.

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*) – A daily occurrence

Strigidae (Owls)

GREAT HORNED OWL (*Bubo virginianus*) – It wasn't quite an everyday bird but we saw lots, including multiple nests with chicks

BURROWING OWL (*Athene cunicularia*) – The two pairs at the Greater Prairie-Chicken lek were highly entertaining.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – It seemed we would spot one on a wire as we crossed a bridge about every other day

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

LEWIS'S WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes lewis*) – Another nemesis vanquished for several of you. It is always a thrill when a staked out bird comes through for another year.

RED-NAPED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*) – We had several fleeting glimpses this year; usually they are more obliging

HAIRY WOODPECKER (ROCKY MTS.) (*Picoides villosus orius*) – Only one on the side road at the east end of Blue Mesa Reservoir

AMERICAN THREE-TOED WOODPECKER (ROCKY MTS.) (*Picoides dorsalis dorsalis*) – We were all thrilled to see a species high on the Most Wanted list so well.

NORTHERN FLICKER (YELLOW-SHAFTED) (*Colaptes auratus auratus*) – Only on the eastern plains

NORTHERN FLICKER (RED-SHAFTED) (*Colaptes auratus cafer*) – Common in The Rockies

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*) – An everyday bird

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – We had a great look at an immature bird molting into adult plumage at East Elk Creek -- great spotting Carla.

PRAIRIE FALCON (*Falco mexicanus*) – The one bird that streaked across the highway ahead of the lead van as we left Grand Junction turned out to be the only one of the tour surprisingly.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

SAY'S PHOEBE (*Sayornis saya*) – Plenty of good looks

WESTERN KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus verticalis*) – A few vanguard migrants were spotted on the west side of the state by only a few members of the tour.

Laniidae (Shrikes)

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (*Lanius ludovicianus*) – It seemed like an above average year for this declining species. We had multiple encounters the first four days of the tour.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

GRAY JAY (ROCKY MTS.) (*Perisoreus canadensis capitalis*) – We found an individual that likes peanuts up at Monarch Pass.

PINYON JAY (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*) – we had multiple good looks at this charismatic corvid in Colorado National Monument.

STELLER'S JAY (INTERIOR) (*Cyanocitta stelleri macrolopha*) – We saw a few most days spent in The Rockies

BLUE JAY (*Cyanocitta cristata*) – Shocking might be too strong a word but where do you think that individual in the Crow Valley Campground came from? It had to have crossed many miles of plains to get there.

WESTERN SCRUB-JAY (WOODHOUSE'S) (*Aphelocoma californica woodhouseii*) – We always see this species in Colorado National Monument.

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE (*Pica hudsonia*) – An everyday bird you never get tired of looking at; we saw them in greatest concentration on the stretch of road between Meeker and Craig.

CLARK'S NUTCRACKER (*Nucifraga columbiana*) – One perched bird high on the mountainside in Taylor Canyon was the only one of the trip.

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – We somehow managed to miss this species on two days while out on the plains.

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*) – Lots of these clever giant songbirds

Alaudidae (Larks)

HORNED LARK (*Eremophila alpestris*) – Are they all in eastern Colorado in mid-April? It seemed like we had to have seen all of them.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) – Our best look was on the barbed wire fence as we were exiting Sweitzer Lake State Park.

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – Tough to put a number on that swarm over Sweitzer Lake State Park but it was certainly in the thousands.

VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW (*Tachycineta thalassina*) – Only one flyby while we were in Colorado National Monument

BANK SWALLOW (*Riparia riparia*) – Part of the clean sweep of swallows at Sweitzer Lake State Park

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – Lots of good looks

CLIFF SWALLOW (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) – Only a few over Sweitzer Lake State Park

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE (*Poecile atricapillus*) – A couple of times in The Rockies

MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE (*Poecile gambeli*) – We saw "fierce" chickadees best near the end of the tour.

JUNIPER TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus ridgwayi*) – Walking around the campground in Colorado National Monument produced this habitat specialist.

Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)

BUSHTIT (INTERIOR) (*Psaltiriparus minimus plumbeus*) – A small band of these noisy little guys came and went in Colorado National Monument before we could get everyone on them.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*) – Their steady, nasal call was heard in several conifer forests but I don't think we ever got bins on one [*]

PYGMY NUTHATCH (*Sitta pygmaea*) – A couple of squeaky groups responded well at Genesee Park.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

ROCK WREN (*Salpinctes obsoletus*) – Everyone heard this songster but only a few people laid eyes on one surprisingly.

CANYON WREN (*Catherpes mexicanus*) – One of the best songs in North America; Bob did a heck of a job spotting one high on the cliff slope.

MARSH WREN (PLESIUS GROUP) (*Cistothorus palustris plesius*) – We had this variable singer in a couple places but our best look was at Sweitzer Lake State Park.

BEWICK'S WREN (*Thryomanes bewickii*) – One was singing up a storm in the campground loop at Colorado National Monument but we couldn't seem to find the angle to spot it. [*]

Cinclidae (Dippers)

AMERICAN DIPPER (*Cinclus mexicanus*) – One of the coolest bird around; somebody spotted at least one every day we were in The Rockies but we all enjoyed a dedicated observation just north of Gunnison.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia currucoides*) – This sky blue bird was eye-catching every day we spent in The Rockies.

TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE (*Myadestes townsendi*) – A couple good looks in Colorado National Monument

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*) – An every day bird

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

CURVE-BILLED THRASHER (CURVIROSTRE GROUP) (*Toxostoma curvirostre oberholseri*) – After waiting out the train, we had a prolonged look at a singing bird.

SAGE THRASHER (*Oreoscoptes montanus*) – Quite a few sightings throughout the tour

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Yep [I]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

AMERICAN PIPIT (*Anthus rubescens*) – Just a few

Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings)

MCCOWN'S LONGSPUR (*Rhynchophanes mccownii*) – Our experience in The Pawnee National Grassland couldn't have been better. Good spotting Pat!

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (AUDUBON'S) (*Setophaga coronata auduboni*) – Several yellow-throated butterbutts were foraging around the edges of the ponds at McCabe's Lane Wetlands.

BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER (*Setophaga nigrescens*) – A newly arriving migrant sang and teed up briefly for us as we finished our walk around the campground at Colorado National Monument.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

BLACK-THROATED SPARROW (*Amphispiza bilineata*) – What a good-looking sparrow

LARK SPARROW (*Chondestes grammacus*) – A few of us had a fleeting look at a bird we flushed off the road the first afternoon.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (PINK-SIDED) (*Junco hyemalis mearnsi*) – We had good looks at this subspecies in Colorado National Monument.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (GRAY-HEADED) (*Junco hyemalis caniceps*) – By far the most numerous subspecies of Dark-eyed Junco in Colorado during our tour

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (GAMBEL'S) (*Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*) – Most common out on the plains

VESPER SPARROW (*Pooecetes gramineus*) – Just a few here and there

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – Uncommon on our route

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*) – Good looks early on the tour; we also had one singing outside the blind in Gunnison

SPOTTED TOWHEE (*Pipilo maculatus*) – A great view of a singing male in Colorado National Monument

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – One headed for cover as we drove to breakfast in Kansas

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – An every day bird

WESTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella neglecta*) – So so many

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) – All those males earned this species several votes for favorite bird of the tour.

BREWER'S BLACKBIRD (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) – The guides were starting to sweat this one. We must have driven by some among the flocks in eastern Colorado but it wasn't until Walden that we scored a good look near the hotel.

COMMON GRACKLE (BRONZED) (*Quiscalus quiscula versicolor*) – Many

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – Seen most days in eastern Colorado

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*) – Smaller flocks than the previously listed Icterids

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH (HEPBURN'S) (*Leucosticte tephrocotis littoralis*) – Yeah Deb! Thank goodness she shared her location with us.

This subspecies has the nearly all gray head and breeds in the Pacific Northwest.

GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH (GRAY-CROWNED) (*Leucosticte tephrocotis tephrocotis*) – Our first bird at Moose Visitor Center looked sickly. Thankfully we caught up to more at Deb's house.

BLACK ROSY-FINCH (*Leucosticte atrata*) – We teased a few out of the 100 or so Brown-capped at Deb's house.

BROWN-CAPPED ROSY-FINCH (*Leucosticte australis*) – This near-endemic to Colorado was the most numerous rosy-finch we encountered.

HOUSE FINCH (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – More days than not

CASSIN'S FINCH (*Haemorhous cassinii*) – We found them in good numbers in Crested Butte.

RED CROSSBILL (*Loxia curvirostra*) – Wonderful views in Genesee Park. Don't ask me what "type" they were.

PINE SISKIN (*Spinus pinus*) – Just a couple; most people picked up this one at Genesee Park

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*Spinus tristis*) – At Crow Valley Campground

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Yep [\[1\]](#)

MAMMALS

NUTTALL'S (MOUNTAIN) COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus nuttalli*) – The cottontail above 6000'

DESERT COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus audubonii*) – Lots in many areas of the state; perhaps your best look was right at the hotel near DIA

WHITE-TAILED JACKRABBIT (*Lepus townsendi*) – This enormous lagomorph occurs in the North Park region. We flushed a couple en route to the Greater Sage-Grouse lek predawn and watched one dozing under the trailer on our way to Deb's house.

BLACK-TAILED JACKRABBIT (*Lepus californicus*) – we had multiple sightings on the eastern plains

LEAST CHIPMUNK (*Tamias minimus*) – It might be called least for its size but it is the most common Chipmunk we encountered.

COLORADO CHIPMUNK (*Tamias quadrivittatus*) – A few in Colorado National Monument

WHITE-TAILED ANTELOPE SQUIRREL (*Ammospermophilus leucurus*) – The particularly cute, small mammal we watched in the Devil's Kitchen area just before exiting Colorado National Monument at the East Gate

WYOMING GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus elegans*) – The uniformly beige "mini prairie dog" we saw in several regions but most commonly in North Park

ROCK SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus variegatus*) – The ground squirrel with the long, bushy tail

GOLDEN-MANTLED GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus lateralis*) – We saw several along the side road at the east end of Blue Mesa Reservoir

BLACK-TAILED PRAIRIE DOG (*Cynomys ludovicianus*) – The common prairie dog on the east front

WHITE-TAILED PRAIRIE DOG (*Cynomys leucurus*) – The prairie dog in The Rockies with the dark eye patch

GUNNISON PRAIRIE DOG (*Cynomys gunnisoni*) – The most range-restricted prairie dog in the Gunnison Valley

FOX SQUIRREL (*Sciurus niger*) – One walking the wire in Lamar

RED SQUIRREL (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) – Somewhere on the ninth day of the tour but I can't recall where

MUSKRAT (*Ondatra zibethica*) – Up close and personal at Walden Reservoir

NORTH AMERICAN PORCUPINE (*Erethizon dorsatum*) – One did its best to hide in an isolated tree outside of Walden

RED FOX (*Vulpes vulpes*) – Perhaps our best look was the one as we were heading back to Walden after seeing the rosy-finches

COYOTE (*Canis latrans*) – Quite a few; including several in Winter Park our last day

NORTHERN RACCOON (*Procyon lotor*) – Fun to see the one sleeping the day away in the tree at Fruit Growers Reservoir

STRIPED SKUNK (*Mephitis mephitis*) – We encountered several out in daylight in the North Park region

ELK (*Cervus canadensis*) – Colorado is a wonderful place to observe this impressively large deer

MULE DEER (*Odocoileus hemionus*) – Hundreds over the course of our adventure; sadly many roadkill

WHITE-TAILED DEER (*Odocoileus virginianus*) – Just a couple of times

PRONGHORN (*Antilocapra americana*) – It was an above average tour for this species. We had good looks on a majority of the days. Don't call them antelope.

BIGHORN SHEEP (*Ovis canadensis*) – We were unlucky on this run with sheep; the only day we spotted them was transferring from Wheat Ridge to Gunnison.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 155 bird taxa and 26 mammal taxa