



Field Guides Tour Report

Colorado Grouse I 2014

Apr 5, 2014 to Apr 15, 2014

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

Colorado in April is a capricious temptress, full of wind and snow and bitter cold, and gloriously sunny days where you can eat a picnic lunch in your shirtsleeves. This year, we may have seen fewer mammals and fewer wildflowers and a bit more of the white stuff than we'd have liked, but there was still plenty to enjoy. Chief among the highlights of this tour, of course, are all those "dancing chickens", and we saw all seven of the main targets very well indeed.

We started with the rapidly declining (and newly listed as "threatened") Lesser Prairie-Chickens, which leapt acrobatically around in the golden grasses at a secret spot in southeastern Colorado. Next were the larger Greater Prairie-Chickens, whose strutting, stomping antics we enjoyed from within a shifting ring of curious cows -- which licked our vehicles "clean" while we enjoyed the show. Our White-tailed Ptarmigan wasn't really dancing; instead, he crept across a snowy pass, picking delicately at the few protruding willow buds. Gunnison Sage-Grouse braved falcons and hawks and coyotes and grazing elk to strut their stuff among the sagebrush, while our Dusky Grouse proved almost ridiculously tame, standing in the middle of the road and wandering among the group. Sharp-tailed Grouse spun spreadeagled on a grassy hillside, and Greater Sage-Grouse gathered on a snowy plain, where two matched males ruled the roost.



Here's the "attack grouse" (aka Dusky Grouse) we found at Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP. It was perhaps the least cautious bird I've ever seen -- particularly when Doug exited the vehicle in his puffy orange coat! Photo by participant Jakapat Vanichanan.

Of course, it wasn't just chickens that delighted. In every corner of the state, spectacular vistas spread before us: empty rolling grasslands, brick-red wind-sculptured sandstone ridges, snow-covered peaks. A host of birds -- including dozens of Brown-capped Rosy-Finches, a pair of Clark's Nutcrackers, a handful of Evening Grosbeaks and a couple of Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches -- descended on a bank of feeders near Silverthorne. A Barrow's Goldeneye floated among a big mixed raft of ducks in a roadside pond. McCown's Longspurs tiptoed across a snowy patio. A Great Horned Owl blinked sleepily from a nest. And who will soon forget our wonderful encounter with the displaying American Dippers and the swimming Mink along a tumbling mountain stream?

Thanks to all of you for your fine companionship, good humor and perseverance in the face of cold and snow. It was great fun exploring the state together! -- Megan

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*) – A big, shifting flock in one of the ponds along Route 50 was a bit of a surprise; most are long gone by the time of our tour.

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) – Somehow, we managed to miss these one day -- which wasn't easy!

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*) – Common on ponds and lakes throughout, including a quintet on the settling ponds outside Haxtun, dozens on Blue Mesa Reservoir near Gunnison, and a few resting on the ice at Lake John, outside Walden.

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*) – Reasonably common throughout, including good numbers on Lake Henry, a handful with the ducks on a pond south of Meeker, scores on Blue Mesa Reservoir and a few along the ice at Lake John.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Very common and widespread, seen every day of the tour.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Anas discors*) – A few on the settling ponds outside Haxtun, with another pair on the pond south of Meeker.

CINNAMON TEAL (*Anas cyanoptera*) – Two drakes and a hen rummaged along the edge of a pond south of Meeker before moving out into the larger raft of ducks. We saw another pair in the little pond near the top of the hill at Jimmy Dunn gulch.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*) – Regular across the state, including a big spinning mass of them feeding in the Doubletree pond, a few in the settling ponds outside Haxtun, and good numbers snoozing on the ice at Walden's Lake John.

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – Several dozen along the far shore at Lake Henry, with smaller numbers on settling ponds outside Haxtun, a pair or two on a pond near Meeker and a few on Lake John.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN) (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) – Particularly common on the second half of the tour, where scores paddled on Blue Mesa Reservoir and others floated on the pond south of Meeker and at Lake John.

CANVASBACK (*Aythya valisineria*) – Best seen at Doubletree pond in Colorado Springs, where a drake floated beside a drake Redhead for convenient comparison; we spotted a female there as well. Some of the group saw others at Lake Henry (while Pepe and I fixed lunch) and Blue Mesa Reservoir.

REDHEAD (*Aythya americana*) – A handful of drakes floated along the edge of the ice cover on Blue Mesa Reservoir.

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*) – Courting birds bobbed on Schweitzer Lake, and others floated on a pond south of Meeker. We had another, which appeared to be a hybrid, snoozing on the Doubletree pond.

GREATER SCAUP (*Aythya marila*) – A few were seen on the Doubletree pond, and Dan spotted some on Lake Henry.

LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*) – These were by far the most common duck on the Doubletree pond, and we saw scores of others on Lake Henry, Blue Mesa Reservoir, Schweitzer Lake and more.

BUFFLEHEAD (*Bucephala albeola*) – Small numbers of this little duck daily in the eastern part of the state, including a few diving on Lake Henry.

COMMON GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala clangula*) – Seen especially well on the Doubletree pond, with others on the settling ponds outside Haxtun and on Blue Mesa Reservoir, and in several roadside rivers.

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala islandica*) – A drake among the Common Goldeneyes on the Doubletree pond was a nice find, allowing good close study.

HOODED MERGANSER (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) – A small group on the Doubletree pond allowed close study, and we saw others outside Haxtun and on Schweitzer Lake.

COMMON MERGANSER (*Mergus merganser*) – Regular on streams in the highest west of the state, with a gang of males floating together on Blue Mesa Reservoir.

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – Particularly common on Lake Henry, where many floated, snoozing, in the middle of the lake. We saw others on the ponds outside Haxtun and at Schweitzer Lake SP.

Odontophoridae (New World Quail)

GAMBEL'S QUAIL (*Callipepla gambelii*) – One sprinted across the road in front of the vans as we left Schweitzer Lake SP, but our best views came just outside the Colorado National Monument, where a handsome male serenaded all and sundry from his perch atop a bush.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

GREATER SAGE-GROUSE (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) – On a chilly, chilly morning (so cold that we had to scrape frost off the INSIDE of the van windows) we watched more than 40 males display for as many as 20 admiring females. Despite the best efforts of the satellite males, only the two "top dogs" seemed destined to see any action -- until a passing young Bald Eagle flushed the whole lot of them off into the distance that is!

GUNNISON SAGE-GROUSE (*Centrocercus minimus*) – A small group of males displayed across a flooded field in front of our blind at the Wuanita lek -- until a hunting Rough-legged Hawk flushed the nervous gang off into the sagebrush. They relocated in another area further away -- until a Coyote trotted by and flushed them again. Last we saw them, they were dancing away on a distant ridge, with the rising sun making bright halos out of their fanned tail feathers.

WHITE-TAILED PTARMIGAN (*Lagopus leucura*) – Now here's one we had to work for! After scanning carefully from the parking lot at Loveland Pass (to no avail), most of the group trekked up the snow-covered ridge above the pass, climbing higher and higher onto the very windy mountain. We were still ptarmiganless after more than an hour of looking, so we retreated towards the van, conscious of the long drive we had ahead.

Fortunately, Pepe stopped for one more scan of the opposite ridge -- and found an adult male nibbling buds on a willow poking out of the snow. Yay!

DUSKY GROUSE (*Dendragapus obscurus*) – Wow! The only way we could have gotten much closer to this bird is if it had actually landed on somebody. Oh, wait...

SHARP-TAILED GROUSE (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*) – A big lek of these prairie-chicken relatives entertained us thoroughly one morning near Jimmy Dunn gulch; they were certainly the most energetic of the tour's dancers.

GREATER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN (*Tympanuchus cupido*) – There were a few fraught moments en route, when I thought we'd picked the wrong lek site to visit, but we ended up getting fine views of some 20 birds in a rye grass field on the Bledsoe Ranch -- those we could see around the cattle that gathered to lick our van clean, that is!

LESSER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*) – A long, predawn drive in a drafty old school bus brought us to the "secret spot" -- the largest remaining Lesser Prairie-Chicken lek in Colorado. This species is in serious trouble throughout its range, and just before the tour, the US Department of Fish and Wildlife listed it as "threatened". That made everybody unhappy: miners, ranchers and oil companies wanted it off the list entirely, while environmental groups wanted it to be listed as "endangered"!

WILD TURKEY (*Meleagris gallopavo*) – One strode purposefully across a roadside field, seen while we drove towards Wray -- nice spotting, Michael! It obviously knew where it was going, as the multi-stranded barbed wire fence didn't even slow it down.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – One floated among the ducks on the pond south of Meeker.

HORNED GREBE (*Podiceps auritus*) – One, not quite in breeding plumage but nearly there, floated near the back of the Doubletree pond.

EARED GREBE (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – A good number, including several already in fine breeding plumage, floated on Lake Henry.

WESTERN GREBE (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) – Reasonably common across much of the state, including dozens on Lake Henry and others at

Schweitzer Lake SP. Some of the group spotted a pair doing their "mirror dance" courtship moves on a roadside lake as we drove through Denver on our way to Gunnison.

CLARK'S GREBE (*Aechmophorus clarkii*) – Far less common than the previous species, but well on Lake Henry. The white on the face of this species extends further above the eye than does that on the Western Grebe and its bill is yellower.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Seen on scattered wetlands, particularly in the eastern half of the state, including dozens hunting on Lake Henry and others flying over the Arkansas River.

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) – Those in flight over Lake Henry showed the "breeding season bumps" on their beaks quite nicely. We saw several other large groups circling against the mountains beyond Lake John our final morning.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*) – Seen on many days, including a number on stick nests in a tree at the far end of Lake Henry, and one along the river at Neversink picnic grounds outside Gunnison.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – Common throughout, including dozens dropping into the trees along the river as we arrived in Wray in the late afternoon.

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – Singletons seen in flight on several days, including one carrying a large fish.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – Single birds seen on more than half of the days of the tour, with especially fine views of an adult perched on a pole beside the IL Ranch road and of a youngster soaring with the Peregrine Falcons above Lost Canyon.

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*) – Regular in the grasslands of the state's eastern plains, including one that spooked the shorebirds off a puddle along Route 50.

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*) – One circled over the stream where we spotted our American Dippers, part of a little run of raptors -- nice spotting, Rusty!

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*) – One flapped over as we drove south from Silverthorne, and a pair displayed high over the entrance road into Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP (with their fluffy white undertail coverts flared) seen as we left the park.

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – Our best views came near Lake John, where we found an adult perched on a roadside telephone pole; it eventually left the pole and flew directly to the big stick nest in a tree just outside town.

SWAINSON'S HAWK (*Buteo swainsoni*) – Surprisingly few seen during the tour, with single birds seen by most on the first three days -- including one coursing low over the fields along the IL Ranch road, near where we found our Mountain Plovers.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – This species, on the other hand, was abundant and widespread, including several pairs already on nests. [N]

ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK (*Buteo lagopus*) – Super studies of a couple of females on the drive to the Pawnee National Grassland (including one perched on a roadside wire), with another showing well as it hunted over the Gunnison Sage-Grouse lek, darn her! We saw our last along the road to Silverthorne on our final morning.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*) – A couple floated among the ducks on the Doubletree pond, and we saw others with the Snow Geese along Route 50. More fought the winds on Schweitzer Lake, a few paddled on the pond south of Meeker and a handful of others swam along the edge of the ice on Lake John.

Gruidae (Cranes)

SANDHILL CRANE (*Grus canadensis*) – A flock of a dozen or so flapped ponderously over the highway as we approached Craig late one afternoon, and a pair strolled away along a bank of a roadside pond on our way back from the Sharp-tailed Grouse lek the following morning. Most of the group spotted a small group circling against the mountains beyond Lake John, just before the American White Pelicans made their appearance.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

AMERICAN AVOCET (*Recurvirostra americana*) – Two snoozed on the ice at Walden's Lake John, their orangy heads and white-striped black wings helping to make them very obvious.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*) – Scattered pairs at various wet spots, including Lake Henry, the roadside pond where we found our Long-billed Curlew and near the settling ponds outside Haxtun. We also had a pair fly past while we enjoyed the Sharp-tailed Grouse lek.

MOUNTAIN PLOVER (*Charadrius montanus*) – A pair trotted across the brush-covered plains along IL Ranch road, giving us good scope views -- which in turn attracted the attention of the army security folks!

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – A dozen or more rested and preened in a puddle in a field along Route 50, seen as we headed back to the hotel after our morning at the Lesser Prairie-Chicken lek.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*) – One among the Greater Yellowlegs in the aforementioned puddle was relatively easy to pick out thanks to its smaller size and more finely-tipped bill.

LONG-BILLED CURLEW (*Numenius americanus*) – One strode along the back side of a wet field along Route 50, its huge beak immediately obvious -- nice spotting, Ann-Margreth!

BAIRD'S SANDPIPER (*Calidris bairdii*) – A half dozen or so of these big peeps pattered among the other shorebirds in the Route 50 puddle.

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*) – A handful of these small peeps foraged along the edges of a wet spot in a roadside field, where their pale legs helped to distinguish them from the previous species.

PECTORAL SANDPIPER (*Calidris melanotos*) – At least one was spotted by some of us in the mixed shorebird flock along Route 50; unfortunately, when they flushed, they didn't all come back!

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – A few with the mixed shorebird flock along Route 50 probed the muddy edges of the puddle.

WILSON'S SNIPE (*Gallinago delicata*) – Two rested on the edge of a trickling stream on the outskirts of Walden, their long beaks silhouetted against the snow.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BONAPARTE'S GULL (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*) – A handful flapped over Lake Henry, far outnumbered by the next species.

FRANKLIN'S GULL (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*) – Particularly common in the east of the state, where we saw them around many roadside ponds and lakes. Those at Lake Henry gave us especially nice studies of the pink breasts of their breeding plumage.

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*)

CALIFORNIA GULL (*Larus californicus*) – One snoozing on the ice at Lake John, in the company of three smaller, paler Ring-billed Gulls, gave us nice views of its distinctive beak when it raised its head.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [I]

BAND-TAILED PIGEON (*Patagioenas fasciata*) – One flew in and landed in a tree over the Silverthorne feeders, showing its neck band nicely -- good spotting, Gloria!

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – Abundant throughout; this recent arrival has certainly found Colorado to its liking!

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*) – Common and widespread, including multiple pairs along the IL Ranch road.

Strigidae (Owls)

GREAT HORNED OWL (*Bubo virginianus*) – Our best view came on the drive to the Pawnee National Grasslands, when we found one on a nest right along the highway. Those in Pepe's van spotted another as we raced from one Greater Prairie-Chicken lek to the other. [N]

BURROWING OWL (*Athene cunicularia*) – One sat hunched among the prairie dog mounds along the IL Ranch road -- great spotting, Michael!

Apodidae (Swifts)

WHITE-THROATED SWIFT (*Aeronautes saxatalis*) – Dozens coursed back and forth along the cliffs at Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP, chittering madly. We saw (and heard) others over the Colorado National Monument.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon*) – Two flew along the river at Neversink picnic grounds, heard by all and seen by most while Pepe and I made lunch.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*) – One in nice comparison with the next species at those fabulous Silverthorne feeders.

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*) – At least one (and possibly two) at the Silverthorne feeders; it was particularly obliging when it clung to a small nearby tree trunk, blinking in the sunshine.

NORTHERN FLICKER (RED-SHAFTED) (*Colaptes auratus cafer*) – Common and widespread, including several small flocks of probably migrants gathered along roadside telephone poles on several days. Though both Red-shafted and Yellow-shafted Flickers are found, the former is far more common.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*) – Regular throughout, with dozens seen on roadside wires across the state.

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – A hunting pair flashed across the Pawnee National Grasslands, causing the gathered larks and longspurs we were watching to flee in terror. We had nice scope views of them standing on the ground in the aftermath.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – A pair circled over roadside cliffs at Lost Canyon, briefly distracting us from the American Dippers -- good spotting, Michael! We saw another in a thermal with a couple of Red-tailed Hawks en route to Fruita.

PRAIRIE FALCON (*Falco mexicanus*) – Four seen during the course of the tour, all in flight, and all by less than the full group. Michael and Doug spotted the first on our drive to Lamar, Rusty saw one en route to Wray, some of the group saw one over the Gunnison Sage-Grouse lek (while others got on the Rough-legged Hawk) and a few spotted one at the Colorado National Monument.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

SAY'S PHOEBE (*Sayornis saya*) – Regular in small numbers, including a few calling birds hunting along the IL Ranch road and one singing from the antenna atop the visitor's center at Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP.

Laniidae (Shrikes)

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (*Lanius ludovicianus*) – A couple of birds hunting along the IL Ranch road showed particularly well when they perched side by side on a barbed wire fence. We saw another at the Dorenkamp's after our "chuck wagon" breakfast, and Russ spotted one at Schweitzer Lake SP.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

PINYON JAY (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*) – First one, then two, then a handful, then a mob... We ended up with quite a sizeable flock along the road near the entrance to the Colorado National Monument, with others seen in the park itself. Their quavering calls were a regular part of the tour soundtrack there.

STELLER'S JAY (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) – Best seen around the feeders in Silverthorne and at the Moose visitor's center, with others in Black Canyon of

the Gunnison NP.

BLUE JAY (*Cyanocitta cristata*) – One calling from a tree in Fowler (seen during a pit stop there) was a hit, to the bemusement of at least one nearby gardener. We saw another fly across the road near Holly, and still others at the Crow Valley campground all the way up in the northeast corner of the state. This species is expanding its range westwards.

WESTERN SCRUB-JAY (WOODHOUSE'S) (*Aphelocoma californica woodhouseii*) – Especially nice views of a pair near the first overlook at Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP; the female gathered nesting material while her mate supervised. We saw others in the pinyon pines at the Colorado National Monument and near Jimmy Dunn gulch. [N]

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE (*Pica hudsonia*) – Ubiquitous, including a group of nearly 20 foraging in a wet field along the highway south of Meeker.

CLARK'S NUTCRACKER (*Nucifraga columbiana*) – Fabulous views of at least two at some feeders in Silverthorne. These are montane pine specialists, typically found at higher elevations.

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Common and widespread in the mountains, less so in the rolling grasslands of the east.

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*) – Regular throughout. Their larger size, heavier bill, croaking call and wedge-shaped tail help to quickly separate them from the previous species.

Alaudidae (Larks)

HORNED LARK (*Eremophila alpestris*) – Abundant on most days in open country, including flocks of hundreds around Walden following the snowstorm and a handful in the treeless snowfields above Loveland Pass.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW (*Tachycineta thalassina*) – Small numbers mingled among the White-throated Swifts zooming around the cliffs at Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP, and others coursed over the Colorado National Monument.

BANK SWALLOW (*Riparia riparia*) – Gabriel and Michael spotted some in the James M. Robb - Colorado River State Park, just up the road from our Fruita hotel.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – Seen by Gabriel and Michael with the previous species over the James M. Robb - Colorado River SP.

Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE (*Poecile atricapillus*) – Particularly nice views of several around the Silverthorne and Moose visitor's center feeders, with others over our American Dippers in Lost Canyon.

MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE (*Poecile gambeli*) – The birds visiting the Silverthorne feeders were particularly obliging; we saw another briefly at the Moose visitor's center and in Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP.

JUNIPER TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus ridgwayi*) – One chortled from a pinyon pine near the Colorado National Monument's visitor's center -- good spotting, Dan! This was formerly a subspecies of the Plain Titmouse.

Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)

BUSHTIT (INTERIOR) (*Psaltriparus minimus plumbeus*) – Those in Megan's van got views of a gang of these small birds as they flitted through some bushes at the Colorado National Monument. Unfortunately, they'd moved back into bushes further off the road before Pepe could maneuver his van into position to see them.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*) – One called repeatedly and flitted from tree to tree in a snow-covered Crested Butte neighborhood, and some of the group spotted another near the visitor's center overlook at Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP.

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta carolinensis*) – One sang from a telephone wire along the entrance road to Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP before dropping back down into the pinyon pines.

PYGMY NUTHATCH (*Sitta pygmaea*) – Our best views came at those fabulous feeders in Silverthorne, where several clung to the suet blocks or carried sunflower seeds to nearby branches to hammer them open. We saw others in Crested Butte.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

ROCK WREN (*Salpinctes obsoletus*) – A pair on the barbed wire fence along the IL Ranch road won the prize for "weirdest location" -- there wasn't a rock larger than a pebble in sight in any direction! We had a trio of others chasing each other (and two Canyon Wrens) around in more typical habitat near the start of the road through the Colorado National Monument. What a great little song they have.

CANYON WREN (*Catherpes mexicanus*) – A singing bird near the Painted Rock overlook in Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP played (uncharacteristically) hard to get, repeatedly ducking back out of view just about as soon as we spotted him. Fortunately for those who struggled to get a look at him, another singing male at the Colorado National Monument proved far more obliging.

BEWICK'S WREN (*Thryomanes bewickii*) – Gloria heard one singing near the visitor's center at Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP, while walking down to the overlook to admire the view. [*]

Cinclididae (Dippers)

AMERICAN DIPPER (*Cinclus mexicanus*) – Wow! Getting a good look at a dipper is always fun, but seeing three up close -- including one swimming along the river's edge and one doing a "victory dance" territorial display -- from a few dozen yards away was truly a treat.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia currucoides*) – Surprisingly, this was the only bluebird we spotted this year -- though given the weather (and the earliness of the tour) perhaps that wasn't so surprising after all! We had multiple nice encounters, including one atop a tiny pine tree outside some Crested Butte condos.

TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE (*Myadestes townsendi*) – One atop a leafless tree in a gully down the hill from Jimmy Dean gulch was a nice finale to our morning at the Sharp-tailed Grouse lek.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*) – Daily, often in sizeable numbers.

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

CURVE-BILLED THRASHER (EASTERN) (*Toxostoma curvirostre oberholseri*) – Our best views came along the IL Ranch road, where several pairs sat together on scruffy bushes. This species is larger than the next, with a longer beak, less distinct breast markings, a plainer back and orangish eyes.

SAGE THRASHER (*Oreoscoptes montanus*) – A little gang of five or six swarmed through brush along the IL Ranch road, looking particularly streaky compared to nearby Curve-billed Thrashers. Some of the group got quick glimpses of a couple of others slinking through the sagebrush near Blue Mesa Reservoir.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Common throughout, particularly around cities and towns (and grain silos). [H]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

AMERICAN PIPIT (*Anthus rubescens*) – A quintet pattered along the edges of a lake near Meeker, showing their brighter breeding plumage nicely before flying off across the fields.

Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings)

LAPLAND LONGSPUR (*Calcarius lapponicus*) – Rusty and I had brief scope views of one with a big flock of Horned Larks near Lake John. Unfortunately, the flock was spooked and flew off before anybody else got a look, and we never relocated it.

MCCOWN'S LONGSPUR (*Rhynchophanes mccownii*) – We were pleased with our views of a couple of males in the Pawnee National Grasslands -- until we got up close and personal with a handful of birds under the feeders at the Moose Visitor's Center, that is! We had many others swirling along the roads en route to Walden, and more around Lake John, all forced down by the fierce weather.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (AUDUBON'S) (*Setophaga coronata auduboni*) – Gabriel and Michael found several in the riverside park just up the road from our Fruita hotel, seen during our late afternoon break there.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

SPOTTED TOWHEE (*Pipilo maculatus*) – Seen particularly well in Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP, where several males were perched up singing in the early morning sunshine, with others in Jimmy Dunn gulch. How about that ruby red eye?

VESPER SPARROW (*Pooecetes gramineus*) – A couple of birds made a brief appearance on a fence line with some White-crowned Sparrows on IL Ranch road, but our best views came near the Sharp-tailed Grouse lek, where several singing birds perched atop nearby bushes.

BLACK-THROATED SPARROW (*Amphispiza bilineata*) – Fine views of this handsome sparrow singing near the entrance to the Colorado National Monument.

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*) – A few perched up, singing, in the bushes in front of the blind at the Gunnison Sage-Grouse lek, and some of the group saw others at the Neversink picnic grounds east of Gunnison.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) – Abundant throughout, with many singing as they foraged, particularly along IL Ranch road and the entrance into the Colorado National Monument.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (SLATE-COLORED) (*Junco hyemalis hyemalis*) – Gray spotted one in the melee under the feeders at the Moose Visitor's Center.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (OREGON) (*Junco hyemalis oregonus*) – Our best views came at the Moose Visitor's Center, where a few foraged conveniently close to the next two subspecies right outside the plate glass windows. We saw others in a driveway in Silverthorne.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (PINK-SIDED) (*Junco hyemalis mearnsi*) – Easily the most common junco of the tour, seen daily in the mountains, often in good numbers. Those around the feeders in Silverthorne allowed particularly good study.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (GRAY-HEADED) (*Junco hyemalis caniceps*) – Also quite common in the mountains, with good numbers seen around the Silverthorne feeders, Crested Butte and the Moose Visitor's Center.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – Common and widespread throughout, including many perched in the tiniest of roadside wetlands.

WESTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella neglecta*) – Seen daily, though particularly common in the extensive grasslands of the eastern plains. Their serenades were especially enjoyable on that frosty morning in the Gunnison's Sage-Grouse blind, where several birds were singing from the bushes in front of us.

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) – A handful among big mixed blackbird flocks along Route 50 were easy to pick out, thanks to those bright heads.

COMMON GRACKLE (BRONZED) (*Quiscalus quiscula versicolor*) – Very common in the flat lowlands of the east (where we found some massive flocks around feedlots and in fields along the roadsides) but largely missing from the more mountainous west.

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – Seen in the lowlands in smaller numbers than the previous species, with our best views coming at the Doubletree pond (where several sang from treetops) or along the highways we traveled toward Lamar.

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*) – We found a few big flocks around roadside feedlots while en route to Lamar.

Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)

GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH (*Leucosticte tephrocotis*) – A couple of "interior" birds, which show a broad silvery eyebrow rather than a completely gray crown, lurked among the masses of Brown-capped Rosy-Finches in Silverthorne.

BROWN-CAPPED ROSY-FINCH (*Leucosticte australis*) – Dozens swarmed over the feeders at Silverthorne and the Moose Visitor's Center, with others decorating nearby trees in both locations.

HOUSE FINCH (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – Fairly common around Schweitzer Lake and the Colorado National Monument (where males sang from rocky outcrops) with others seen in Dillon and heard around Denver and Pueblo.

CASSIN'S FINCH (*Haemorhous cassinii*) – Regular at higher elevations, with a handful around the feeders at Silverthorne (including one young male singing quietly from a tree just across the road), a couple in some scrawny pine trees near some condos in Crested Butte, and a quartet in a dead snag

along the South Rim road at Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP.

PINE SISKIN (*Spinus pinus*) – Dozens -- scores -- hundreds? -- sang and foraged and flitted from tree to tree around the houses with feeders in Silverthorne. We saw others in Crested Butte and at the Moose Visitor's Center.

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*Spinus tristis*) – A few in the Crow Valley campground picnic area were among the only birds on a quiet early afternoon, seen by some while Pepe and I made lunch.

EVENING GROSBEAK (*Coccothraustes vespertinus brooksi*) – A few in the spruces around both the Silverthorne and the Moose Visitor's Center feeders, with others seen foraging "in the wild" in bushes along the road into Jimmy Dunn gulch.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Common and widespread, missed only on the final day of the tour -- and we undoubtedly just didn't notice them that day! [I]

MAMMALS

NUTTALL'S (MOUNTAIN) COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus nuttalli*) – Best seen at Black Canyon of the Gunnison, where we spotted a couple sitting motionless along the roadside, with others at the Colorado National Monument and along the snowy highway south of Walden on our last day.

DESERT COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus audubonii*) – A few scampered off the roadsides as we raced towards the Greater Prairie-Chicken lek on the Bledsoe Ranch, and we saw others near our airport hotel in Denver.

WHITE-TAILED JACKRABBIT (*Lepus townsendi*) – A few bounded across the snowy plains near the Greater Sage-Grouse lek on our last chilly morning.

BLACK-TAILED JACKRABBIT (*Lepus californicus*) – A few of the jackrabbits that bounced off the roadsides between Walden and Silverthorne were this species.

LEAST CHIPMUNK (*Tamias minimus*) – Seen especially well at Black Canyon of the Gunnison, where many of these tiny chipmunks scurried around in and under roadside bushes.

WYOMING GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus elegans*) – Two lounging near the cattle guard at the start of the road near Lake John were obliging, posing for long minutes in the sunshine.

ROCK SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus variegatus*) – One rummaged along the roadside by one of the overlooks at Black Canyon of the Gunnison, showing nicely the tiny white spots on its pelage; we saw others at the Colorado National Monument.

BLACK-TAILED PRAIRIE DOG (*Cynomys ludovicianus*) – Daily on the first half of the tour, with good scope studies of several along Tower Road near the Denver Airport. The prairie dog town along the IL Ranch was particularly extensive, with DOZENS of mounds.

WHITE-TAILED PRAIRIE DOG (*Cynomys leucurus*) – One sitting near its mound by Lake John was a nice consolation prize, to make up for the fact that the lake was almost completely frozen over. The black mark on its face is distinctive.

GUNNISON PRAIRIE DOG (*Cynomys gunnisoni*) – A little active gang of them, poking through the snow and scurrying along the edges of the road up to Crested Butte were a bit of a surprise, given the weather; we saw others en route to Craig. This is the smallest of the prairie dogs that we see on the tour.

FOX SQUIRREL (*Sciurus niger*) – One in a big cottonwood in a Holly side yard (good spotting, Michael), but our best views came at those busy feeders at the Moose visitor's center.

ORD'S KANGAROO RAT (*Dipodomys ordii*) – A few bounced across the in front of our vans as we drove in the predawn darkness to both prairie-chicken leks.

MUSKRAT (*Ondatra zibethica*) – One paddled along the back side of the pond south of Meeker, its skinny tail trailing along behind it.

RED FOX (*Vulpes vulpes*) – Those in Pepe's van spotted one along the IL Ranch road, some of the group saw one at the Lesser Prairie-Chicken lek, and Claire spied one on the drive back to Denver our final day.

COYOTE (*Canis latrans*) – One trotted past the back edge of the Gunnison Sage-Grouse lek, flushing the birds even more effectively than the Rough-legged Hawk did!

AMERICAN MINK (*Mustela vison*) – One racing along the edge of the stream where we found our American Dipper was a nice surprise. It stayed in view for a long time, rummaging along the snowy banks and then swimming across to the other side.

ELK (*Cervus canadensis*) – The big group right in the middle of the road as we drove towards the Black Canyon of the Gunnison (in the half-light) were a bit close for comfort -- but fortunately smart enough to get out of the way! We saw others on the ridge beyond the Gunnison Sage-Grouse lek, and still others distantly near the Sharp-tailed Grouse lek.

MULE DEER (*Odocoileus hemionus*) – Regular throughout, with particularly close views of the gang thinking about crossing the road near our Wray hotel, and others along the highway south of Craig. Unlike the White-tailed Deer, this species has a black tip to its tail.

PRONGHORN (*Antilocapra americana*) – Reasonably common, from our first (walking slowly along a ridge on the IL Ranch road) to a group streaking across the Pawnee National Grasslands, to our last (grazing on a ridge not far from some Elk and Mule Deer for long distance comparisons).

BIGHORN SHEEP (*Ovis canadensis*) – A foraging group on a ridiculously steep cliff near the Colorado National Monument entrance were entertaining, but our best views came on the drive to Crested Butte, when a trio trotted across the road in front of our vans.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 138 bird taxa and 20 mammal taxa