



Field Guides Tour Report

Colorado Grouse II 2015

Apr 12, 2015 to Apr 22, 2015

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



Our focus on this tour was clearly grouse, but we enjoyed so many other wonderful birds, mammals, and landscapes along the way. One of the undeniable signs of spring was this male Broad-tailed Hummingbird buzzing around us in Colorado National Monument. (Photo by guide Eric Hynes)

Mother Nature threw everything she had at us this year: a dust storm, howling winds, two feet of snow, even a lifer precipitation for some: graupel. Despite her best efforts, we still managed a clean sweep of the native grouse, observed more than two dozen mammal species and 150+ bird taxa, and had a tremendous amount of fun along the way. The birds and their behaviors will be ingrained in our memories for years to come.

We launched our avian adventure from Denver International Airport. Day One was a meet-and-greet travel day but we managed to squeeze in some birding en route to Pueblo. Our loop east of Colorado Springs, principally birding along Squirrel Creek Road, turned up some real gems. Point-blank views of Swainson's Hawk, Mountain Plover, Burrowing Owl, Scaled Quail, and Loggerhead Shrike kicked off the tour with a bang. Black-tailed Jackrabbit and Pronghorn were the mammalian highlights that first afternoon.

Day Two was spent birding our way east along the Arkansas River Valley from Pueblo to Lamar. First stop was IL Road, where we scored our targets pretty quickly: Scaled Quail, Mountain Plover, Sage Thrasher, Curve-billed Thrasher, and Loggerhead Shrike. The immature Ferruginous Hawk we studied in the scope turned out to be the only one we saw all tour. A mid-air prey exchange between a pair of Northern Harriers was a behavioral highlight. After a pit stop in Ordway, we scanned Lake Henry and saw Clark's Grebe as well as you could ever hope to see. At Lake Meredith, we all remarked that the concentration of Gadwall (several thousand at least) was more than we had ever seen in one spot. The flock of Yellow-headed Blackbirds at the feedlot was trumped by the neon pink bellies of the Franklin's Gulls. Our afternoon birding was focused around Holbrook Reservoir, where we turned up two pairs of Snowy Plovers, a Western Sandpiper, American Avocets, Black-necked Stilts, and a close, perched Bald Eagle.

Our first lek experience was with the scarce and declining Lesser Prairie-Chicken at dawn on Day Three. We had a particularly cozy viewing situation thanks to a double-booking snafu made by the local operator, but it worked out fine in the end. Colorado Division of Wildlife biologists were on hand trying to trap chickens, but it didn't seem to disturb the birds in any way. Our journey north to Wray was marked by countless Horned Larks and Western Meadowlarks, an odd concentration of Swainson's Hawks standing in a field, and an intentional detour through Simmons State Wildlife Area where we scoped a nesting Great Horned Owl. The raccoon reaching its paw into the cottonwood cavity was pretty cool, too. Our conversation with Bob Bledsoe always ends up a major talking point the rest of the tour. He is a real character.

The strutting, stomping, inflating of air sacs, and flashing of erect pinnae of the displaying Greater Prairie-Chickens were amazing, but even more memorable were the bizarre wails, cackles, clucks, moans, and hoots. Day Four was a huge success even before the sun was up. Our out-and-back in Pawnee National Grassland produced the target: McCown's Longspur. Screaming winds and pelting dust at Lower Latham Reservoir kept us in the vans, but we still picked out Cinnamon Teal, a Long-billed Dowitcher, and Baird's Sandpipers in the marsh.

A forecast of heavy snow for the Rockies had us up and out the door early on Day Five. We beat rush hour around Denver and enjoyed a great breakfast at Marion's in Idaho Springs. Normally we spend this day traveling down through the mountains but the weather quickly deteriorated and we prioritized safety. It meant a long detour and some white-knuckle moments but eventually we made it unscathed to Gunnison.

The continued snow meant we had to postpone our Gunnison Sage-Grouse experience, but we made the most of it. The snow seemed to concentrate the birds and perhaps drove some down from higher elevation. Our Day Six morning spent in the East Elk Creek section of Curecanti National Recreation Area, along the shore of Blue Mesa Reservoir, was outstanding. Two species of rosy-finches at our feet, a flock of 31 Mountain Bluebirds, a perched Golden Eagle, a Black Phoebe, a Green-tailed Towhee, and hundreds of the "Gray-headed" subspecies of Dark-eyed Junco were just some of the highlights. In the afternoon we were thrilled to watch an American Dipper do its thing, then we cruised up Taylor Canyon. American Robins and "Gray-headed" Juncos lined the road by the thousands. We picked up Clark's Nutcracker and many Mule Deer and Bighorn Sheep.

Day Seven was much less snowy and the Gunnison Sage-Grouse came and did their thing, thank goodness. Our excitement over a mixed flock of rosy-finches along Blue Mesa Reservoir was heightened when a hunting Prairie Falcon slammed into the flock and came away with a meal. As we worked our way west, a roadside "Slate-colored" Fox Sparrow was a nice pick-up. Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park is spectacular, but you will have to take my word for it since the weather obscured the views. Besides scenery, we always try to visit the park for Dusky Grouse. It wasn't until we were moments from giving up when that female appeared -- phew! Sweitzer Lake State Park was noteworthy for a Peregrine Falcon making a pass at a Mourning Dove, a soaked Golden Eagle ID challenge, Bank Swallows, plus Marsh Wrens and a calling Virginia Rail in the cattails. Our last stop on our way to Fruita was Fruit Growers Reservoir. The north-end causeway was bird rich but the rain really dampened our efforts there.

The habitat in Colorado National Monument is conspicuously different than anywhere else on our route, so Day Eight always brings about a dozen or more new birds. Highlights included the dramatic flight of many White-throated Swifts, a buzzy little Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Pinyon Jays, Juniper Titmouse, three wren species, and Black-throated Gray Warbler to name a few. After studying a Golden Eagle on a nest, we landed in Craig for the evening.

An overnight coating of fresh snow accentuated the scene at the Sharp-tailed Grouse lek outside of Hayden the morning of our penultimate day. Those guys are clearly the best dancers. Heck, a few of them were in such a frenzy that they battled in the road. After a scrumptious breakfast at Winona's in Steamboat Springs, we drove over Rabbit Ears Pass and reached Walden midday. Lake John was quiet, but Walden Reservoir was absolutely loaded. We cleaned up some missing waterbirds and then headed to the mountains. At the Moose Visitor Center in State Forest State Park we watched some feeders for a bit. On our climb toward Cameron Pass, we were pelted by a flash downpour of graupel.

Our last full day together began at a Greater Sage-Grouse lek. The fact that it was selected as the top species of the tour is a reflection of the awe-inspiring experience we took in that morning. With perma-grins on our face and weather on our side, we ascended up to Loveland Pass. Once again, Jason was the first to spy our target: White-tailed Ptarmigan. We marvelled at their incredible camouflage as we slowly realized there were a total of seven birds in front of us. White-tailed Ptarmigan was a close second on the favorite bird voting, so our last day truly was a grand finale. A quick visit to Genesee Park added Pygmy Nuthatch to our list, and then it was down to Denver.

Thank you all once again for choosing Field Guides for your Colorado Grouse adventure. Jesse and I had a blast birding with all of you, and we would love to do it again some day. Until then, take care and good birding.

--Eric Hynes

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)

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) – Almost an everyday bird

WOOD DUCK (*Aix sponsa*) – Thank goodness we turned around to get a better look at the Cliff Swallows working the irrigation canal because otherwise, we would have missed the only pair of the tour.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*) – None of us could recall seeing so many Gadwall in one place as we did at Lake Meredith -- several thousand at least.

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*) – Seen more days than not but never in big numbers

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – An everyday bird

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Anas discors*) – We savored some great looks at this handsome dabbler.

CINNAMON TEAL (*Anas cyanoptera*) – This gorgeous duck was never numerous but we saw some more days than not.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*) – We saw these big-billed ducks in good numbers on the eastern plains

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – We encountered surprisingly few this year, likely a result of an "early" spring

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN) (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) – Lots

CANVASBACK (*Aythya valisineria*) – Walden Reservoir held the biggest numbers

REDHEAD (*Aythya americana*) – Also most conspicuous at Walden Reservoir

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*) – The isolated cove of Blue Mesa Reservoir at East Elk Creek held the highest concentration

LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*) – Almost an everyday bird and in good numbers on a couple of the reservoirs

BUFFLEHEAD (*Bucephala albeola*) – A hard bird to come by this year

COMMON GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala clangula*) – Another duck species we saw very few of this year, likely owing to mild spring and the advanced state of waterfowl migration

COMMON MERGANSER (*Mergus merganser*) – Seen more days than not but never numerous

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*) – We scored an immature male at Sweitzer Lake State Park

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – Most bodies of water held some but they were most numerous at Lake Meredith

Odontophoridae (New World Quail)

SCALED QUAIL (*Callipepla squamata*) – Wow, what great looks we had! One of the highlights from the very first day and we saw them again as we

headed east from Pueblo.

GAMBEL'S QUAIL (*Callipepla gambelii*) – Teed up and calling away at the entrance to Colorado National Monument

NORTHERN BOBWHITE (*Colinus virginianus*) – Some people in Eric's van saw one flush out of the corn stubble as we departed the Greater Prairie-Chicken lek. It's been a few years since this species was found on this tour.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

RING-NECKED PHEASANT (*Phasianus colchicus*) – Flushed a few on the drive out of Holly, on our way up to Wray [H]

GREATER SAGE-GROUSE (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) – The Grand Finale. The lek outside of Walden lived up to its billing. We marvelled at about 60 birds. It will be interesting to see where the Feds go with species in terms of the ESA.

GUNNISON SAGE-GROUSE (*Centrocercus minimus*) – The snowstorm put our chances of seeing this scarce species in jeopardy but we had distant looks at a fair number of birds on our second attempt.

WHITE-TAILED PTARMIGAN (*Lagopus leucura altipetens*) – Just incredible. What an amazing experience we savored up at Loveland Pass -- talk about camouflage

DUSKY GROUSE (*Dendragapus obscurus obscurus*) – Only moments before having to declare this species a miss, we finally came upon that cooperative female in the campground at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.

SHARP-TAILED GROUSE (*Tympanuchus phasianellus columbianus*) – Clearly the best dancers of all the lekking birds we visited. They were even displaying in the road at times.

GREATER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN (PINNATUS) (*Tympanuchus cupido pinnatus*) – Runner-up to the Greater Sage-Grouse for best overall lek experience; their vocalizations are wonderfully bizarre

LESSER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*) – Thanks again for being so agreeable to this scheduling snafu. We packed it into the old bus and learned a little extra from the biologist with Colorado Division of Wildlife.

WILD TURKEY (*Meleagris gallopavo*) – We picked out a few on our drive around Simmons State Wildlife Area.

Gaviidae (Loons)

COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*) – We saw individuals at Blue Mesa Reservoir and Sweitzer Lake.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – Another species we had our best looks at Sweitzer Lake State Park

EARED GREBE (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – The lighting was perfect for viewing the breeding plumage of this small grebe at Walden Reservoir.

WESTERN GREBE (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) – The largest concentration of this grebe was on Blue Mesa Reservoir but they were way out. Lake Henry probably provided the best views.

CLARK'S GREBE (*Aechmophorus clarkii*) – We enjoyed super close views of this elegant grebe at Lake Henry.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Sightings were scattered throughout the tour

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) – That feeding flotilla along the shore at Walden Reservoir was fun to watch

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*) – Plenty of good looks at this towering wader

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – Great spotting Jason! We picked this up at Fruit Growers Reservoir; a species we don't see every year.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

WHITE-FACED IBIS (*Plegadis chihi*) – Our best looks were at Fruit Growers Reservoir, despite the rain shower

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – An everyday bird, even the snowstorm day

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – Several pairs were nesting along the Blue River as we approached Silverthorne our last day.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – Once we entered the Rockies, we enjoyed this majestic raptor on a daily basis. Scoping the bird on the nest outside Craig was a treat. After discussing structural differences from Bald Eagle, we serendipitously had an adult Golden Eagle and an immature Bald Eagle soaring together directly overhead.

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*) – One marsh east of Pueblo seemed to be attractive to multiple breeding pairs; one of non-grouse behavioral highlights of the tour was the prey exchange in flight of a small mammal from a male to a female.

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*) – Snuck onto the list with a bird flying over the road on the last day

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*) – The speed of the ascent of the soaring adult in an updraft in Colorado National Monument was almost as impressive as the swarm of agitated White-throated Swifts escorting the avian predator.

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – We came upon a fair number of nesting birds toward the end of the tour. Our first good look at a perched bird was at Holbrook Reservoir.

SWAINSON'S HAWK (*Buteo swainsoni*) – An everyday bird we saw lots of this year; how curious was that dozen or so just standing in the field on the way north to Wray?

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – An everyday bird we saw on nests throughout the tour

FERRUGINOUS HAWK (*Buteo regalis*) – The immature bird perched on the utility pole our first full day in the field turned out to be the only one we saw. Thankfully we enjoyed good scope views and saw it in flight.

ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK (*Buteo lagopus*) – Fewer than most years; like the waterfowl, I strongly suspect most had already migrated farther north toward their tundra breeding grounds; we did study one close bird near Walden

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

VIRGINIA RAIL (*Rallus limicola*) – We heard one grunt close to us from the cattails around Sweitzer Lake but we couldn't tease it out into the open for a view. [*]

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*) – Plenty

Gruidae (Cranes)

SANDHILL CRANE (*Grus canadensis*) – The Yampa River Valley between Craig and Hayden is always a reliable area.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*) – Our closest view of this graceful shorebird was in the marsh at Lower Latham Reservoir.

AMERICAN AVOCET (*Recurvirostra americana*) – Seen well at Holbrook Reservoir and again at Walden Reservoir

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

SNOWY PLOVER (SNOWY) (*Charadrius nivosus nivosus*) – We soaked in killer looks at this gorgeous shorebird (two pairs) at Holbrook Reservoir.

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*) – An everyday bird

MOUNTAIN PLOVER (*Charadrius montanus*) – We enjoyed some outstanding views of this subtle beauty east of Colorado Springs our first afternoon together. The next morning, east of Pueblo, we watched what appeared to be nest site selection and pair bonding.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – Very few this year; the most memorable bird was the one calling and flying around overhead at Sweitzer Lake State Park

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*) – We came upon individuals or small flocks about every other day

MARbled GODWIT (*Limosa fedoa*) – For such a large shorebird, the group of five foraging at the north end of Fruit Growers Reservoir were really tough to pick out in the rain -- great spotting Jesse!

BAIRD'S SANDPIPER (*Calidris bairdii*) – About a half dozen of these long distance migrants were foraging in the marsh at the south end of Lower Latham Reservoir.

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*) – A lone male (judging by bill length) at Holbrook Reservoir was a pleasant surprise.

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – Just one bird in the marsh at the south end of Lower Latham Reservoir

WILSON'S SNIPE (*Gallinago delicata*) – Hearing the winnowing display while we huddled in the blind at the Gunnison Sage-Grouse lek was special.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BONAPARTE'S GULL (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*) – Fruit Growers Reservoir was the only place we encountered this species with certainty, as a group

FRANKLIN'S GULL (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*) – Those neon pink bellies on a few individuals near the feedlot in Ordway were spectacular!

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*) – Seen on a number of days

CALIFORNIA GULL (*Larus californicus*) – Wonderful, close study of many birds at Walden Reservoir

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – An everyday bird [H]

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – An everyday bird now but it wasn't even in CO not that long ago

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*) – Plenty

Strigidae (Owls)

GREAT HORNED OWL (*Bubo virginianus*) – Unlike other areas in North America, spring in CO is an easy time to come across this impressive raptor. The pair nesting near our hotel in Walden seemed completely indifferent to our presence.

BURROWING OWL (*Athene cunicularia*) – We had great luck with curious species the first couple of days on the eastern plains

Apodidae (Swifts)

WHITE-THROATED SWIFT (*Aeronautes saxatalis*) – The aerial performance they put on at Colorado National Monument was mesmerizing. I don't recall seeing them in such large numbers on this tour before.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

BROAD-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD (*Selasphorus platycercus*) – The male buzzing his way around us as he foraged in roadside flowers at Colorado National Monument was an early arrival.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon*) – Just a few

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

LEWIS'S WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes lewis*) – Great spotting Mike! We scoped this outlier of the *Melanerpes* genus near Fruit Growers Reservoir.

RED-NAPED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*) – Good looks in downtown Gunnison and at East Elk Creek

NORTHERN FLICKER (YELLOW-SHAFTED) (*Colaptes auratus auratus*) – We saw one of these eastern forms on our first full day of birding -- working the cottonwoods along the shore of Holbrook Reservoir.

NORTHERN FLICKER (RED-SHAFTED) (*Colaptes auratus cafer*) – A daily occurrence once we got into the Rockies

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

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

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – The big female perched then in high gear after a Mourning Dove at Sweitzer Lake State Park was very exciting.

PRAIRIE FALCON (*Falco mexicanus*) – We caught up to this uncommon raptor on three separate occasions. The most startling observation was the one that seemed to come out of nowhere and blasted into the rosy-finch flock at Blue Mesa Reservoir, coming away with a meal before we even could grasp what was happening.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

BLACK PHOEBE (*Sayornis nigricans*) – One foraging along the shore at East Elk Creek was a pleasant surprise and one of the many highlights that morning. It might be a first for this tour.

SAY'S PHOEBE (*Sayornis saya*) – Easy to come by in many parts of Colorado in spring

Laniidae (Shrikes)

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (*Lanius ludovicianus*) – We enjoyed some stellar views the first few days of the tour.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

GRAY JAY (ROCKY MTS.) (*Perisoreus canadensis capitalis*) – Jesse spotted a teed up individual in State Forest State Park

PINYON JAY (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*) – This unusual jay showed up consistently in pairs in the campground at Colorado National Monument.

STELLER'S JAY (INTERIOR) (*Cyanocitta stelleri macrolopha*) – Truly a handsome Corvid

BLUE JAY (*Cyanocitta cristata*) – We bumped into this eastern species several times in the southeast corner of the state

WESTERN SCRUB-JAY (WOODHOUSE'S) (*Aphelocoma californica woodhouseii*) – We had superb looks in the snow at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park and then in brilliant sunlight in Colorado National Monument

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE (*Pica hudsonia*) – An everyday bird

CLARK'S NUTCRACKER (*Nucifraga columbiana*) – we caught up to this uncommon Corvid up in Taylor Canyon

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Another everyday bird

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*) – Plenty

Alaudidae (Larks)

HORNED LARK (*Eremophila alpestris*) – Did anyone keep a tally while we were out on the eastern plains? This species is clearly not struggling in that landscape.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – An everyday bird on the second half of the tour

VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW (*Tachycineta thalassina*) – I did a lousy job of getting people on this dazzling swallow. A few were tough to pick out of the swirling mass of White-throated Swifts at Colorado National Monument.

BANK SWALLOW (*Riparia riparia*) – Sweitzer Lake is a reliable spot for this species.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – Seen more days than not

CLIFF SWALLOW (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) – We lingered at an irrigation canal bridge to study this colonial nester outside Holly.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE (*Poecile atricapillus*) – A few stops in the Rockies

MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE (*Poecile gambeli*) – We enjoyed frequent encounters in the Gunnison - Taylor Canyon area

JUNIPER TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus ridgwayi*) – We finally scared up a singing bird at the end of the campground loop in Colorado National Monument.

Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)

BUSHTIT (INTERIOR) (*Psaltriparus minimus plumbeus*) – One was clearly working on a nest in the Devil's Kitchen picnic area at Colorado National Monument.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (INTERIOR WEST) (*Sitta carolinensis nelsoni*) – We had the most obliging individual singing away at Colorado National Monument. The voice alone was the clincher for this subspecies but we could also observe the darker back and the thinner black crown.

PYGMY NUTHATCH (*Sitta pygmaea*) – We scored this squeaky sprite at Genesee Park on our way back to Denver.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

ROCK WREN (*Salpinctes obsoletus*) – This pale wren sang in the open for us at Colorado National Monument.

CANYON WREN (*Catherpes mexicanus*) – This species had me nervous until we finally had a responsive bird at Devil's Kitchen picnic area.

MARSH WREN (INTERIOR WEST) (*Cistothorus palustris plesius*) – The marshy edge of Sweitzer Lake held several singing individuals, one of which was close and in the open for excellent views.

BEWICK'S WREN (*Thryomanes bewickii*) – Another Colorado National Monument only bird

Poliophtilidae (Gnatcatchers)

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (*Poliophtila caerulea*) – Ditto

Cinclidae (Dippers)

AMERICAN DIPPER (*Cinclus mexicanus*) – How did Jesse spot that bird in the shadows? Seeing it fly out and float the rapids before submerging was a thrill.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus satrapa*) – The agitated individual at the Devil's Kitchen picnic area was an unexpected surprise.

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*) – Several locations mid-tour

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia currucooides*) – Seeing that flock of 31 lining the shore at East Elk Creek was shocking and fantastic.

TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE (*Myadestes townsendi*) – We first caught up to this species at East Elk Creek.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*) – The numbers lining the snowy shoulder of the road in Taylor Canyon were impressive.

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

CURVE-BILLED THRASHER (EASTERN) (*Toxostoma curvirostre oberholseri*) – We had a number of good looks along IL Road, east of Pueblo.

SAGE THRASHER (*Oreoscoptes montanus*) – We encountered several the first couple of days of the tour but my favorite was the singing bird at the Greater Sage-Grouse lek the last morning.

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*) – We saw a couple birds in the morning as we headed east from Pueblo.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

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

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

AMERICAN PIPIT (*Anthus rubescens*) – We had marvelous scope views along the shore of Blue Mesa Reservoir.

Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings)

MCCOWN'S LONGSPUR (*Rhynchophanes mccownii*) – We came upon this target in Pawnee Grassland quickly but it took a bit to catch up to a cooperative pair.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (AUDUBON'S) (*Setophaga coronata auduboni*) – We had two individuals foraging along the shore of Blue Mesa Reservoir.

BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER (*Setophaga nigrescens*) – Great looks in the campground loop of Colorado National Monument

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE (*Pipilo chlorurus*) – It was a nervous moment while we sifted through all the juncos but eventually we all saw the Green-tailed Towhee on the slope above East Elk Creek. I think Mike gets credit for that find.

SPOTTED TOWHEE (*Pipilo maculatus*) – We saw a male at East Elk Creek and a few more birds at Colorado National Monument.

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*) – Singing away in Gunnison and in a few other locations

VESPER SPARROW (*Pooecetes gramineus*) – More days than not

BLACK-THROATED SPARROW (*Amphispiza bilineata*) – The singing bird at the entrance to Colorado National Monument was a real treat. This has to be one of North America's sharpest sparrows.

FOX SPARROW (SLATE-COLORED) (*Passerella iliaca schistacea*) – On our drive over Cerro Summit en route to the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, we pulled off with alight snow falling and managed to call in a very responsive individual of this darker race.

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*) – Mostly during the second half of the tour

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (GAMBEL'S) (*Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*) – Lots early on

DARK-EYED JUNCO (OREGON) (*Junco hyemalis oreganus*) – Just a couple of this hooded subspecies

DARK-EYED JUNCO (PINK-SIDED) (*Junco hyemalis mearnsi*) – We saw quite a few of this subspecies

DARK-EYED JUNCO (GRAY-HEADED) (*Junco hyemalis caniceps*) – The numbers lining the road up into Taylor Canyon were staggering. We literally saw thousands of juncos that afternoon. Unforgettable

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – Common

WESTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella neglecta*) – An everyday bird, the highest numbers were definitely out on the eastern plains

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) – The most memorable sightings were at the feedlot outside Ordway and then up at Walden Reservoir.

BREWER'S BLACKBIRD (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) – Only a few small flocks or individuals were encountered this year. The one male on the ground on our way out to Lake John was our best look.

COMMON GRACKLE (BRONZED) (*Quiscalus quiscula versicolor*) – An everyday bird

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – Mostly in the SE section of the state

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*) – Not too many

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH (HEPBURN'S) (*Leucosticte tephrocotis littoralis*) – This gray-faced subspecies, which breeds in the Pacific Northwest, was seen in the large rosy-finch flock briefly before the Prairie Falcon attacked at Blue Mesa Reservoir.

GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH (GRAY-CROWNED) (*Leucosticte tephrocotis tephrocotis*) – We also picked out a few of this widespread subspecies in the large flock at Blue Mesa Reservoir.

BLACK ROSY-FINCH (*Leucosticte atrata*) – Wow were we lucky to have this species foraging below our feet at East Elk Creek

BROWN-CAPPED ROSY-FINCH (*Leucosticte australis*) – Wonderful looks this year and not just at feeders

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

CASSIN'S FINCH (*Haemorhous cassinii*) – Plenty of singing birds in Gunnison

RED CROSSBILL (*Loxia curvirostra*) – We could not have asked for more cooperative birds in downtown Gunnison.

PINE SISKIN (*Spinus pinus*) – Mostly just calling birds in flight over Gunnison

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Daily **[I]**

MAMMALS

NUTTALL'S (MOUNTAIN) COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus nuttalli*) – This is the high elevation cottontail in Colorado. We saw it best from the blind for the Gunnison Sage-Grouse.

DESERT COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus audubonii*) – This is the default cottontail for most of Colorado. There were lots in the Denver area.

WHITE-TAILED JACKRABBIT (*Lepus townsendi*) – We watched a few of this giant rabbits bound across the road predawn en route to the Greater Sage-Grouse lek outside Walden.

BLACK-TAILED JACKRABBIT (*Lepus californicus*) – Our best look was on the loop east of Colorado Springs

LEAST CHIPMUNK (*Tamias minimus*) – Quite a few sightings of this tiny, long-tailed ground squirrel

COLORADO CHIPMUNK (*Tamias quadrivittatus*) – We saw a few on the rocks at Colorado National Monument and probably a few other stops I am forgetting

YELLOW-BELLIED MARMOT (*Marmota flaviventris*) – The two basking on the rock during our drive from Montrose over to Gunnison turned out to be the only ones we saw all tour

WHITE-TAILED ANTELOPE SQUIRREL (*Ammospermophilus leucurus*) – Several of these gorgeous small mammals were working the little ridge at the Devil's Kitchen picnic area at the end of Colorado National Monument.

WYOMING GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus elegans*) – The plain light brown ground squirrel we observed in loose colonies daily the second half of the tour

ROCK SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus variegatus*) – Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park is a reliable spot to see this long-tailed critter.

GOLDEN-MANTLED GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus lateralis*) – On our drive up Taylor Canyon

BLACK-TAILED PRAIRIE DOG (*Cynomys ludovicianus*) – The prairie dog on the east side of the Rockies; we saw lots right from the start as we left Denver International Airport

WHITE-TAILED PRAIRIE DOG (*Cynomys leucurus*) – This is the paler prairie dog with the contrasting black face that we saw frequently the last third of the tour.

GUNNISON PRAIRIE DOG (*Cynomys gunnisoni*) – Only a few sightings in the Gunnison area

FOX SQUIRREL (*Sciurus niger*) – A few at the beginning of the tour

RED SQUIRREL (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) – One in a roadside conifer up in Taylor Canyon

ORD'S KANGAROO RAT (*Dipodomys ordii*) – A few predawn on our way to leks out on the eastern plains

MUSKRAT (*Ondatra zibethica*) – A few people spotted one

RED FOX (*Vulpes vulpes*) – Everyone got on one or two on our drive back to town after the Gunnison Sage-Grouse lek

COYOTE (*Canis latrans*) – We heard more than we saw; twice there was a dawn chorus of yips and howls at leks

NORTHERN RACCOON (*Procyon lotor*) – Barbara spotted two for us investigating cavities in cottonwoods at Simmons SWA

ELK (*Cervus canadensis*) – The largest herd we observed was probably the one in the background beyond the Sharp-tailed Grouse lek.

MULE DEER (*Odocoileus hemionus*) – Sightings were a daily occurrence during the second half of the tour. The largest concentration was up in Taylor Canyon.

WHITE-TAILED DEER (*Odocoileus virginianus*) – A few in the willows in Walden

MOOSE (*Alces alces*) – Just one this year lying in the field as we returned to Walden from State Forest State Park

PRONGHORN (*Antilocapra americana*) – We enjoyed numerous good looks at this impressive creature

BIGHORN SHEEP (*Ovis canadensis*) – Those roadside rams in Taylor Canyon were mighty.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 156 bird taxa and 27 mammal taxa