



Field Guides Tour Report

Colorado Grouse I 2016

Apr 2, 2016 to Apr 12, 2016

Chris Benesh & Tom Johnson

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



This Greater Prairie-Chicken strutted atop one of our tour vans at a lek near Wray, Colorado. See below for a video of the roof chicken experience! Photo by guide Tom Johnson.

April marks one of the most interesting birding months of the year in Colorado, and we were there to see a LOT of it. On this giant figure eight of the state (plus the two unexpected, bonus states of Kansas and Nebraska), we became acquainted with five species of lekking grouse and found plenty of the region's specialty resident and migrant species along the way. Overall, the weather held quite nicely for us, and the tour went off without a hitch.

On our first full day, we drove east along the Arkansas River corridor, stopping first in desert habitat near Pueblo to see Scaled Quail, Mountain Plovers, and Sage and Curve-billed thrashers. Farther east, we birded several large reservoirs, finding a large assortment of waterfowl and grebes and a marsh full of Red-winged and Yellow-headed blackbirds.

After receiving some bad news about the Colorado Lesser Prairie-Chicken leks, we decided to head farther east than planned, rising early to get to the area north of Dodge City, Kansas (!) before dawn. We enjoyed a good morning experience with several Lesser Prairie-Chickens at a lek, and also scored some Greater Roadrunners and a delicious breakfast buffet before we "got out of Dodge".

A long afternoon drive sent us back into Colorado by way of Nebraska, and we met Bob Bledsoe at Bledsoe Cattle Company in the evening to learn about his ranching practices and scout out the Greater Prairie-Chicken lek for the following morning. The next day dawned clear and still, and we had an absolutely fantastic experience with nearly 30 chickens at their lek. We even had one fly up onto the roof of my van, so close that we could hear its toenails clicking on the roof above our heads (check out the video below). Leaving Wray on a major bird high, we stopped at Bonny Reservoir, picking up several eastern landbirds like Yellow-shafted Flicker, Eastern Phoebe, and Eastern Bluebird. A storm front blew across the plains in the afternoon, and our visit to the agricultural fields of Arriba was ill-timed to coincide with the most blustery part of the day. However, we quickly found a hurricane of McCown's Longspurs (over 4,000 - easily the most that Chris and I have ever seen!) and some very confiding Mountain Plovers.

The next morning, we ate a hearty Rocky Mountains breakfast in Idaho Springs before ascending to nearly 12,000 ft in elevation at Loveland Pass. There we were met by some terribly cold and windy weather, but tenacious searching helped us find our target -- two White-tailed Ptarmigan popped out of a snow cave and fed in a patch of willows for some amazing views. What an experience! We warmed up and headed for Silverthorne, where we enjoyed all three species of rosy-finches as well as Clark's Nutcrackers and a Gray Jay. The afternoon drive was marked by vistas of some incredible Rocky Mountain peaks. A flock of Pinyon Jays interrupted our drive to Gunnison, but we got in to town in time to enjoy a nice dinner and an early bedtime.

Another early start found us going east of Gunnison to the famous Wuanita Hot Springs lek, the only publicly accessible Gunnison Sage-Grouse lek in Colorado. From the bench seats of a trailer blind, we scoped these rare grouse on a distant ridge, and also enjoyed some good views of local predators like Golden Eagle, Red Fox, and Coyote. The afternoon took us north of Gunnison to Crested Butte, and we found American Dipper, Red-naped Sapsucker, and a whole bunch of finches. Feeders in Crested Butte held all three species of rosy-finches (great looks at Black), Cassin's Finches, and even two Pine Grosbeaks! We retraced our steps to Monarch Pass and turned up a female American Three-toed Woodpecker, another Pine Grosbeak, and a soaring pair of Golden Eagles.

The tour's sixth full day took us from Gunnison to Grand Junction, with some scenic stops and driving along the way. First, we scoped Barrow's Goldeneye at Blue Mesa Reservoir, and then we looked for Dusky Grouse (no dice) at Black Canyon of the Gunnison, finding enchanting, snow-covered rocks, Evening Grosbeaks, and Townsend's Solitaires instead. Continuing on to Grand Junction, we tracked down five Lewis's Woodpeckers before touring the majestic Colorado National Monument in the golden sunlight of late afternoon.

On our morning out of Grand Junction, we first searched for Gambel's Quail (quick success!) before spending time in the rocky canyons of Cameo. Here, among the boulder-strewn slopes, we found Rock and Canyon wrens and our target chicken, the introduced Chukar. A long drive north to Craig gave us some extra time in the afternoon to search for grouse. While we struck out on late-in-the-day Dusky Grouse, we DID see a porcupine up in a tree.

Coming down to the wire for Dusky Grouse, we made a predawn stop near Hayden, and THERE HE WAS! A male Dusky Grouse was strutting in the middle of the road in our headlights, and we enjoyed some solid views of this low-density chicken before our main stop of the morning, a Sharp-tailed Grouse lek south of Hayden. Here we got to see the wing-rattling, cocked-tail displays of these acrobatic chickens, and even saw a bonus Greater Sage-Grouse crouched in the lek. After a filling breakfast in Steamboat Springs, we drove east over Rabbit Ears Pass into North Park. Due to some deep snow near our target Greater Sage-Grouse lek, we did some afternoon scouting, finding over a dozen sage-grouse that ended up strolling right across the road between the two vans. Lucky!

The final full day of the tour started quite early with a trip up to the lower reaches below Rabbit Ears Pass to a spot where we heard a spontaneously singing Boreal Owl. Despite our best efforts, we couldn't see this bird because he was too far off the road, but we did have a nice listen. Heading back into North Park for dawn, we were soon parked alongside a large lek of more than 50 Greater Sage-Grouse fanning their spiked tails and popping their egg-yolk colored air sacs in the sunny morning light. These huge birds courted, mated, and even fought each other while we watched in awe at close range. Incredible! The trip back to Denver was a bit of a blur after that amazing sage-grouse experience, but we did see a group of 63+ Barrow's Goldeneye on Windy Gap Reservoir, and Red Crossbills and a Williamson's Sapsucker at Genesee Park to wrap up our final afternoon.

Though we ended up driving even farther than originally anticipated due to our unexpected side trip through Kansas and Nebraska, Chris and I thoroughly enjoyed this tour, both for the outstanding birds and the great group. Whether it was the lekking grouse, the spiffy ducks, the thousands of longspurs, or any of the varied mammals along the way, there was a lot for everyone. It was wonderful to spend time with all of you, and I hope that you had some memorable experiences during this exciting loop through Colorado (and adjacent states).

Thanks, and good birding!

Tom

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)

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE (*Anser albifrons*) – One was lingering in a small pond near Bonny Reservoir in the eastern plains.

SNOW GOOSE (*Chen caerulescens caerulescens*) – At least a few dusky immatures were discernible within the distant white goose flock at Verhoeff Reservoir.

ROSS'S GOOSE (*Chen rossii*) – Most of the lingering white goose flock at Verhoeff Reservoir appeared to be made up of these small geese, though distance made it hard to tell for sure.

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) – Common and widespread. Seen every day.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*) – Common - seen most days.

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*) – Seen on several occasions, including about 20 near the Greater Sage-Grouse lek near Coalmont.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Common and widespread.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Anas discors*) – We saw a few of these small, migrant ducks on our first days in the eastern plains.

CINNAMON TEAL (*Anas cyanoptera*) – These lovely ducks (including plenty of beautifully red males) were seen throughout the tour, including at sites like Walden Reservoir and Windy Gap Reservoir.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*) – A few were at the large reservoirs on the eastern plains.

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – We found very small numbers at Bonny Reservoir, Walden Reservoir, and Windy Gap Reservoir.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN) (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) – These migrants were scattered throughout the state. The largest groups we found were 75 at Windy Gap Reservoir and 18 at Bonny Reservoir.

REDHEAD (*Aythya americana*) – Just a few, including good looks at 5 at Windy Gap Reservoir on our final day.

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*) – Scattered at a few sites throughout the state; our largest count was 40 at Windy Gap Reservoir.

LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*) – Small groups were found at large bodies of water, mostly in the mountains (Blue Mesa, Walden, and Windy Gap Reservoirs).

BUFFLEHEAD (*Bucephala albeola*) – These were mixed with a large duck flock at Lake Meredith on our first day in the plains. In the mountains, a handful were also on Walden and Windy Gap Reservoirs.

COMMON GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala clangula*) – 6 were at Blue Mesa Reservoir, and 28 were at Windy Gap Reservoir.

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala islandica*) – 4 were at Blue Mesa Reservoir, and an amazing 63 were at Windy Gap Reservoir on our final day, with some excellent scope views. At the later site, Barrow's outnumbered Common about 3:1.

COMMON MERGANSER (*Mergus merganser*) – Around 200 were on Lake Henry in the plains, and then we saw more on several reservoirs in the mountains too.

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – Flocks were on Lakes Henry and Meredith in the plains, and more were at Windy Gap Reservoir too.

Odontophoridae (New World Quail)

SCALED QUAIL (*Callipepla squamata*) – We had a few flocks cross the road in front of us in the desert grasslands east of Pueblo.

GAMBEL'S QUAIL (*Callipepla gambelii*) – At least 3 males were along the road along the western edge of Grand Junction. One sat up on a fence and called for us from right next to the vans!

NORTHERN BOBWHITE (*Colinus virginianus*) – A few coveys flushed up while we were in Kansas and NE Colorado. One group snuck along a sand road at the Bledsoe Cattle Company. They were tough to see until they exploded into flight.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

CHUKAR (*Alectoris chukar*) – A careful search of the rocky canyon slopes of Cameo eventually yielded a small group of these introduced gamebirds. We had some wonderful scope views as they chased each other around the boulders. [I]

RING-NECKED PHEASANT (*Phasianus colchicus*) – Quite common on the eastern plains. [I]

GREATER SAGE-GROUSE (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) – We spent an afternoon and a morning around Coalmont watching these splendid, huge grouse strutting around against the awesome mountain backdrop ringing North Park. In the afternoon, the birds strolled around the sagebrush and even crossed the road between our vans. The next morning, we arrived in the gloaming to an incredible scene of >50 males displaying to a handful of females within mere yards of our vehicle blinds. This lek experience was an incredible way to wrap up this year's grouse sweep!

GUNNISON SAGE-GROUSE (*Centrocercus minimus*) – We watched twelve of these rare and range-restricted grouse as they courted on a ridgetop across a valley from us. Though they weren't close, we were able to use our scopes to watch the males tossing their bushy filoplume ponytails back and forth as they boomed.

WHITE-TAILED PTARMIGAN (*Lagopus leucura altipetens*) – Conditions were rather grim when we arrived on the Continental Divide at Loveland Pass to search for Ptarmigan. The wind was howling and temperatures were well below freezing, and our optimism dimmed a bit. However, after surveying the situation, Chris and I set out on foot to check a few willow patches that were peeking above the snow crust. Luckily, when we arrived at the second patch of willows, a pair of ptarmigan popped up out of the snow within a few feet of my boots! In famous ptarmigan fashion, they stayed put, munching on willow tips while everyone in the group admired them - either from the parking lot through scopes or by walking down the snow-covered slopes to enjoy the birds up close. We were fairly thrilled with the whole experience!

DUSKY GROUSE (*Dendragapus obscurus obscurus*) – A male was strutting along a road near Hayden in the predawn half-light. Leaving our headlights on, we all got out of the vans and enjoyed an unusual look at this scarce grouse.

SHARP-TAILED GROUSE (*Tympanuchus phasianellus columbianus*) – After we left the Dusky Grouse behind, we motored on over to a nearby Sharp-tailed Grouse lek where we parked along the roadside and waited for the action to heat up. Then, a head stuck up above the nearby ridgeline - a grouse! Hold on, that's a sage-grouse head! Oddly, a female Greater Sage-Grouse was crouched in the middle of the Sharp-tailed Grouse lek. Shortly thereafter, a group of male Sharp-taileds arrived and we watched about 8 birds shaking and rattling their feathers. One male even chased a rival on foot right past us, coming within about 20 feet!

GREATER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN (PINNATUS) (*Tympanuchus cupido pinnatus*) – Up to 29 of these fine prairie grouse arrived at a beautiful, open lek site at the Bledsoe Cattle Company near Wray, Colorado. Perhaps the pinnacle experience of our lek visits this year, we had the chance to watch the entire pageant play out in front of us on a sunny morning. Dominant males danced in the center of the lek and satellite males patrolled the periphery hoping to get lucky with any arriving females. I can still hear the hooting and cackling of these marvelous birds echoing through my head - and how could we possibly forget the rather ostentatious male prairie-chicken that flew up onto the roof of one of the vans and walked around, calling?

LESSER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*) – This bird was the source of much consternation and excitement in the first few days of the tour, eventually leading us fully out of Colorado! When we checked in with our local contacts at the beginning of the tour, we were dismayed to learn that our target leks in Colorado hadn't attracted any chickens yet! Fortunately, we knew about some active leks over in Kansas, and so we hatched a plan to wake up even earlier than normal in order to arrive at a lek near Dodge City, KS in the moments just before dawn. Fortunately, we ended up with good scope views of Lesser Prairie-Chickens and some exciting lekking action (though the birds were certainly more subdued than the Greaters that we saw the very next morning!). This was also a great excuse to visit Kansas and even Nebraska en route to our next destination in Colorado!

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – These small grebes were on Lake Meredith on our first day in the plains.

HORNED GREBE (*Podiceps auritus*) – Just a few were mixed in with other grebes and ducks at Lake Meredith.

EARED GREBE (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – We were able to compare these dark, slim grebes directly with Horned Grebes on Lake Meredith.

WESTERN GREBE (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) – Quite common on a few lakes out in the Plains, including Lakes Henry and Meredith.

CLARK'S GREBE (*Aechmophorus clarkii*) – We had great views of these white-faced, orange-billed grebes at Lakes Henry and Meredith, and were pleased to compare them directly to Westerns.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Seen several times on large lakes.

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) – Good views in the plains and again on Walden Reservoir, where we got to see these huge black-and-white birds soaring against snow-covered mountains.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*) – Common; seen on most days of the tour.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – Seen almost every day of the tour.

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – We saw a few near the end of the tour - one was at Good Spring Creek Lake and another was near Windy Gap Reservoir.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – These huge raptors put in several appearances, and we visited an area near Craig where we'd found a nest in 2015 only to find a big, occupied nest even closer to the road than last year! Great scope views let us see the golden nape on this massive bird.

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*) – Common; seen almost every day of the tour.

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*) – One flap-flap-glided by at a considerable distance when we were scanning Lake Meredith on the plains.

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*) – One flew over when we were driving near Grand Junction.

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – We had a few sightings along the way, including an immature perched roadside east of Monarch Pass that ended up tipping us off to the presence of Pinyon Jays. We also found a nest along the highway north of Grand Junction and enjoyed some close views of two adults there.

SWAINSON'S HAWK (*Buteo swainsoni*) – Common in the eastern plains and also near North Park. These long-winged Buteos arrived back in numbers a bit on the early side this year.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – Common; seen every day.

RED-TAILED HAWK (HARLAN'S) (*Buteo jamaicensis harlani*) – One dark morph bird with a white-spotted chest and gray-mottled tail was perched along the Arkansas River east of Pueblo.

ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK (*Buteo lagopus*) – Seen occasionally, including a few on the plains and up to 6 in a day in North Park.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*) – Fairly common on lakes throughout the state.

Gruidae (Cranes)

SANDHILL CRANE (*Grus canadensis*) – We saw several pairs in northwestern Colorado. The two that were jumping around, flying laps, and calling at Good Spring Creek Lake were particularly fun to watch.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*) – Common; seen on almost every day.

MOUNTAIN PLOVER (*Charadrius montanus*) – Five were on the IL Road east of Pueblo, though views were fairly distant. More impressive were the two close birds along the edge of the McCown's Longspur fields near Arriba that were hunkered down during the strong windstorm.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – One flew around calling near Lake Meredith.

WILSON'S SNIBE (*Gallinago delicata*) – At the marsh with the Greater White-fronted Goose near Bonny Reservoir, we found 18 of these cryptic shorebirds and had some quality scope views.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BONAPARTE'S GULL (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*) – These small gulls were flying around in small groups on Lake Henry.

FRANKLIN'S GULL (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*) – A few migrants circled overhead at Lake Cheraw, and we saw a flock of 20 more flying past in Arriba that we also caught up to farther west along I-70.

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*) – Seen at scattered locations on lakes.

CALIFORNIA GULL (*Larus californicus*) – Around 50 were at Walden Reservoir.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Common around towns and cities throughout the state. [I]

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – Very common in towns and agricultural areas throughout the state.

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*) – Common and widespread, but not seen in nearly as many locations as Eurasian Collared-Dove.

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

GREATER ROADRUNNER (*Geococcyx californianus*) – A pair of these awesome cuckoos paused along the roadside just outside of Dodge City, Kansas.

Strigidae (Owls)

GREAT HORNED OWL (*Bubo virginianus*) – We saw several occupied nests all along the tour route.

BURROWING OWL (*Athene cunicularia*) – One was along the Squirrel Creek Rd. near Colorado Springs, and then we saw at least 3 more at the Greater Prairie-Chicken lek at Bledsoe Cattle Company.

BOREAL OWL (*Aegolius funereus*) – Before we visited the Greater Sage-Grouse lek near Coalmont, we headed up toward Rabbit Ears Pass and heard the rapid tooting series of a male Boreal Owl. Due to the deep snow, we weren't able to trek off the road to see it. [*]

Apodidae (Swifts)

WHITE-THROATED SWIFT (*Aeronautes saxatalis*) – Flocks of these handsome cliff-dwellers zoomed overhead at Colorado National Monument.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – Seen at widely scattered locations through the state.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

LEWIS'S WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes lewis*) – Five of these beautiful, dark woodpeckers were flycatching from trees and utility poles near the small town of Glade Park, southwest of Colorado National Monument.

WILLIAMSON'S SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*) – We kept adding new and exciting mountain species right up until the last afternoon of the tour! A barred female Williamson's Sapsucker posed atop a utility pole near the restrooms at Genesee Mountain Park west of Denver.

RED-NAPED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*) – A male showed nicely in streamside cottonwoods at the Roaring Judy Fish Hatchery between Gunnison and Crested Butte.

LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER (*Picoides scalaris*) – One perched up and called several times along the Arkansas River at the site east of Pueblo where we saw the Harlan's Red-tailed Hawk.

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*) – One was on the eastern plains on our first day, and then another was in the mountains near Silverthorne.

HAIRY WOODPECKER (ROCKY MTS.) (*Picoides villosus orius*) – We saw a few up in the mountains, including at Silverthorne and at Genesee Mountain Park.

AMERICAN THREE-TOED WOODPECKER (ROCKY MTS.) (*Picoides dorsalis dorsalis*) – One showed very well just west of Monarch Pass, and we heard at least two others in the same area.

NORTHERN FLICKER (*Colaptes auratus*) – Common throughout the state. We saw two readily identifiable subspecies.

NORTHERN FLICKER (YELLOW-SHAFTED) (*Colaptes auratus auratus*) – Around Bonny Reservoir on the eastern plains, this was the dominant subspecies of flicker. We also saw a few birds that appeared to be intergrades, showing bits of yellow and red in their wings and tails.

NORTHERN FLICKER (RED-SHAFTED) (*Colaptes auratus cafer*) – Very common in the mountains in central and western Colorado.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*) – Quite common; seen almost every day.

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – One flew over us during a gas stop on our first afternoon; another, apparently a pale Prairie Merlin, was chasing longspurs and larks over agricultural fields near Arriba.

PRAIRIE FALCON (*Falco mexicanus*) – We saw these large falcons at four widely spaced locations throughout the state, including near Pueblo, Silverthorne, Coalmont, and Walden.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

EASTERN PHOEBE (*Sayornis phoebe*) – A pair put on a good showing at Bonny Reservoir.

SAY'S PHOEBE (*Sayornis saya*) – Common in open areas, especially near farms; seen on about half of the days of the tour.

Laniidae (Shrikes)

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (*Lanius ludovicianus*) – We saw quite a few of these attractive predators, including 7 on our first evening on the Squirrel Creek Road near Colorado Springs.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

GRAY JAY (ROCKY MTS.) (*Perisoreus canadensis capitalis*) – One came in to feeders in Silverthorne.

PINYON JAY (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*) – About 20 were along a pine-covered roadside slope east of Monarch Pass. We might have missed this flock if we hadn't stopped to check out a perched Bald Eagle. While we were admiring the eagle, one of these dusty blue jays came in and started to harass the raptor!

STELLER'S JAY (INTERIOR) (*Cyanocitta stelleri macrolopha*) – Surprisingly, our only one was near feeders in Silverthorne.

BLUE JAY (*Cyanocitta cristata*) – Fairly common in the eastern plains, especially along forested river bottoms like the Arkansas River. We had good views in a farmyard near Lake Cheraw.

WESTERN SCRUB-JAY (WOODHOUSE'S) (*Aphelocoma californica woodhouseii*) – Over 15 of these jays were at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Monument. In July 2016, the AOU split Western Scrub-Jay, elevating this taxon to full species status as "Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay".

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE (*Pica hudsonia*) – Common in the plains near the Front Range and also throughout the mountainous areas of the state.

CLARK'S NUTCRACKER (*Nucifraga columbiana*) – Two flew in and perched up in treetops near the finch feeders in Silverthorne.

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Common.

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*) – Common; seen every day.

Alduidae (Larks)

HORNED LARK (*Eremophila alpestris*) – Quite common, especially in the eastern plains where we saw hundreds on a few days.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – The only swallow we saw this time - in some years, other swallow species have arrived back in Colorado by early April, but this year, things were running a bit later.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE (*Poecile atricapillus*) – A few were seen in deciduous river corridors in the mountain west.

MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE (*Poecile gambeli*) – Common in conifer forests in the central and western part of the state. Our first was at the feeders in Silverthorne.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*) – Two were at Genesee Park on our final day.

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta carolinensis*) – At least 6 were in the forest at Genesee Park west of Denver.

PYGMY NUTHATCH (*Sitta pygmaea*) – We saw these small, cute nuthatches in Silverthorne and at Genesee Park.

Certhiidae (Treecreepers)

BROWN CREEPER (*Certhia americana*) – One was with the nuthatches and crossbills at Genesee Park.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

ROCK WREN (*Salpinctes obsoletus*) – We scoped a few of these trilling wrens at the Chukar spot near Cameo.

CANYON WREN (*Catherpes mexicanus*) – The cascading, melodic song of this small wren tipped us off to its presence near Cameo.

MARSH WREN (PLESIUS GROUP) (*Cistothorus palustris plesius*) – Two were chattering in the marsh at Good Spring Creek Lake on our drive to Craig from Grand Junction.

Cinclididae (Dippers)

AMERICAN DIPPER (*Cinclus mexicanus*) – Two were working on a nest at a bridge at the Roaring Judy Fish Hatchery north of Gunnison; another was feeding in a rocky stream south of Walden on our final day.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EASTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia sialis*) – A male was singing vigorously near the park buildings at Bonny Reservoir.

WESTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia mexicana*) – Our first sighting was near Glade Park; the small flock at Genesee Mountain Park provided much better views for the whole group.

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia currucoides*) – Common on the second half of our tour up in higher elevation areas. Most notable were about 25 flying north past the Sharp-tailed Grouse lek near Hayden.

TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE (*Myadestes townsendi*) – Two of these striking thrushes showed quite well for us at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*) – Common and widespread.

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

CURVE-BILLED THRASHER (CURVIROSTRE GROUP) (*Toxostoma curvirostre oberholseri*) – Three of these desert birds were in the scrub east of Pueblo north of the Arkansas River. One even sang at length from a roadside utility wire.

SAGE THRASHER (*Oreoscoptes montanus*) – We found over a dozen of these small, streaky thrashers. Six were along a small stretch of the IL Road east of Pueblo.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Common and widespread. Seen every day. [I]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

AMERICAN PIPIT (*Anthus rubescens*) – A few were walking along the edge of Lake Meredith on our first full day of the tour.

Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings)

CHESTNUT-COLLARED LONGSPUR (*Calcarius ornatus*) – A few were mixed in with the big flocks of McCown's Longspurs near Arriba, but we had better looks at a water hole near the Greater Prairie-Chicken lek near Wray.

MCCOWN'S LONGSPUR (*Rhynchophanes mccownii*) – Holy smokes! We caught up with a veritable cloud of McCown's Longspurs, with over 4000 birds flocking in some stubble fields in the plains near Arriba. Though the real spectacle was the amorphous cloud of birds moving through the air (they were whirling FAST, as it was quite windy and dusty here), we did eventually catch up with some close birds on the ground that allowed good views.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*) – An early migrant was perched in a roadside hedge near Lake Cheraw.

FOX SPARROW (SLATE-COLORED) (*Passerella iliaca schistacea*) – Several of these large, gray-and-rust sparrows were around the campground at Black Canyon of the Gunnison.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (OREGON) (*Junco hyemalis oregonus*) – At least one was at the Bledsoe Cattle Company near Wray.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (PINK-SIDED) (*Junco hyemalis mearnsi*) – This was a fairly common subspecies seen in the mountains. The pale blue-gray heads and pink sides make the males fairly distinctive.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (GRAY-HEADED) (*Junco hyemalis caniceps*) – This is the common breeding junco subspecies in the mountains of our tour area.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (ORIANTHA) (*Zonotrichia leucophrys oriantha*) – The dark-lore'd White-crowned Sparrows we saw near Cameo were of this mountain-breeding subspecies.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (GAMBEL'S) (*Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*) – This was the widespread, pale-lore'd subspecies seen widely on the tour.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – We saw just a few on the eastern plains, including in the windy longspur fields near Arriba.

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*) – We saw a few along riparian corridors during the tour, including at Roaring Judy near Gunnison.

SPOTTED TOWHEE (*Pipilo maculatus*) – Very common at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – Common; seen every day of the tour.

WESTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella neglecta*) – Common; seen every day of the tour.

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) – At least 35 were in the marsh adjacent to Verhoeff Reservoir west of Lamar.

BREWER'S BLACKBIRD (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) – We saw our first at IL Road near Pueblo on the first full day, and saw a few more at other scattered locations, mostly on the plains.

COMMON GRACKLE (BRONZED) (*Quiscalus quiscula versicolor*) – Seen at widely scattered locations through the tour, mostly in and around towns.

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – Several were seen along the roadside in the eastern plains during our drives, including 5 near the longspur fields at Arriba.

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*) – A few were mixed in with other blackbirds on the eastern plains on the first half of the tour.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH (HEPBURN'S) (*Leucosticte tephrocotis littoralis*) – We saw this large, gray-cheeked subspecies at Silverthorne and Crested Butte.

GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH (GRAY-CROWNED) (*Leucosticte tephrocotis tephrocotis*) – Slightly more common than Hepburn's - seen at both Silverthorne and Crested Butte.

- BLACK ROSY-FINCH** (*Leucosticte atrata*) – We had brief views at one male in Silverthorne, but then had memorable time with several birds mixed in with other rosy-finches in a neighborhood in Crested Butte.
- BROWN-CAPPED ROSY-FINCH** (*Leucosticte australis*) – This was the most common rosy-finch taxon seen, with over 100 at both Silverthorne and Crested Butte.
- PINE GROSBEAK** (*Pinicola enucleator montana*) – Two were at feeders in Crested Butte, and another posed on a treetop in front of us at close range at Monarch Pass.
- HOUSE FINCH** (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – Common; seen almost every day.
- CASSIN'S FINCH** (*Haemorhous cassinii*) – Seen each day in the mountains, with some particularly nice views at feeding stations in Crested Butte.
- RED CROSSBILL** (*Loxia curvirostra*) – A dozen were flying around and calling at the top of Genesee Park. A few showed nicely in the scope.
- PINE SISKIN** (*Spinus pinus*) – These streaky finches were fairly common in montane forests.
- AMERICAN GOLDFINCH** (*Spinus tristis*) – A few were on the eastern plains, including 4 at Bonny Reservoir.
- EVENING GROSBEAK** (*Coccothraustes vespertinus brooksi*) – Six birds dropped into some short treetops in front of us in the campground at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. These uncommon finches were an unexpected treat!

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

- HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus*) – Common in towns, cities, and agricultural areas. [I]
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MAMMALS

- NUTTALL'S (MOUNTAIN) COTTONTAIL** (*Sylvilagus nuttalli*) – We saw this rabbit at Black Canyon of the Gunnison.
- DESERT COTTONTAIL** (*Sylvilagus audubonii*) – This is the common small rabbit in the plains of eastern Colorado.
- WHITE-TAILED JACKRABBIT** (*Lepus townsendi*) – A few put in brief roadside appearances in the northern half of the state.
- BLACK-TAILED JACKRABBIT** (*Lepus californicus*) – One was seen on the roadside during our final day of driving on the plains on the first half of the tour.
- HOPI CHIPMUNK** (*Tamias rufus*) – These washed-out chipmunks were seen very well near the visitor center at Colorado National Monument.
- YELLOW-BELLIED MARMOT** (*Marmota flaviventris*) – One posed out in the open just north of Gunnison on our drive to Crested Butte.
- WYOMING GROUND SQUIRREL** (*Spermophilus elegans*) – This was the common, plain brown ground squirrel seen in the western parts of Colorado.
- ROCK SQUIRREL** (*Spermophilus variegatus*) – A few were around Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.
- GOLDEN-MANTLED GROUND SQUIRREL** (*Spermophilus lateralis*) – We saw this chipmunk look-alike at the side of the park road at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.
- BLACK-TAILED PRAIRIE DOG** (*Cynomys ludovicianus*) – This is the common prairie dog in the eastern plains of Colorado.
- WHITE-TAILED PRAIRIE DOG** (*Cynomys leucurus*) – We saw these prairie dogs near Walden in North Park.
- GUNNISON PRAIRIE DOG** (*Cynomys gunnisoni*) – These range-restricted prairie dogs are found only in the Gunnison Basin, and we saw some near the Wuanita Hot Springs sage-grouse lek and also north of Gunnison on the road to Crested Butte.
- FOX SQUIRREL** (*Sciurus niger*) – A few were in towns on the eastern plains.
- RED SQUIRREL** (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) – A few showed up around the bird feeders at Silverthorne.
- ORD'S KANGAROO RAT** (*Dipodomys ordii*) – These were the long-tailed kangaroo rats that we saw in the sandy areas of the road at Bledsoe Cattle Company as we drove in to the Greater Prairie-Chicken lek before daybreak.
- NORTH AMERICAN PORCUPINE** (*Erethizon dorsatum*) – During our first attempt at finding Dusky Grouse near Hayden, we came upon this spikey surprise up in a tree.
- RED FOX** (*Vulpes vulpes*) – During our blind sit at the Wuanita Hot Springs lek near Gunnison, at least one Red Fox loped through the bottom of the valley in front of us.
- COYOTE** (*Canis latrans*) – These large canids showed well along the way, including near the Wuanita Hot Springs and Coalmont leks.
- AMERICAN BADGER** (*Taxidea taxus*) – One of these stout mustelids was along the side of the highway through Arapahoe NWR near Walden, but unfortunately we only had brief views before it disappeared down a hole.
- ELK** (*Cervus canadensis*) – Common around North Park.
- MULE DEER** (*Odocoileus hemionus*) – Quite common in the montane west.
- PRONGHORN** (*Antilocapra americana*) – Seen routinely in the vast open areas that we visited on the tour, both in the plains and in the mountains. One group that we saw near Coalmont included over 150 individuals!
- BIGHORN SHEEP** (*Ovis canadensis*) – A few of these large, curl-horned sheep were along the side of the road on our final day as we drove back toward Denver from the northwest.
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ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 147 bird taxa and 23 mammal taxa