

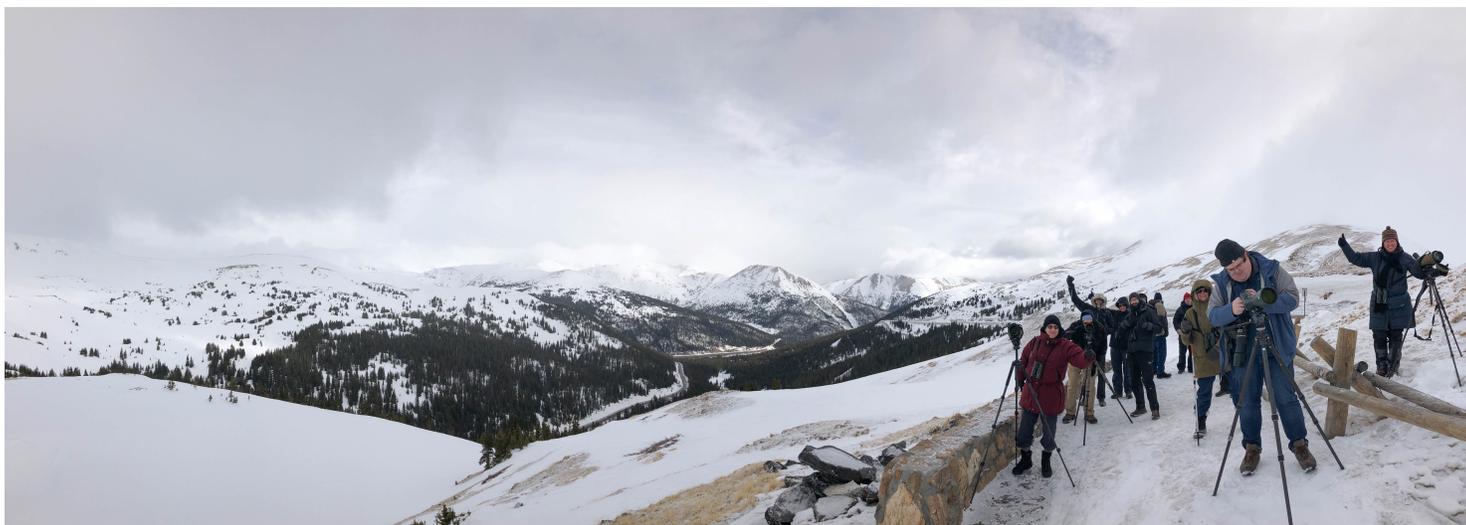


*Field Guides Tour Report*

**Colorado Grouse II 2019**

Apr 13, 2019 to Apr 23, 2019  
Doug Gochfeld & Cory Gregory

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



*Although this tour spends plenty of time face-to-face with prairie-chickens and grouse in the lowlands, we also rise into the thin air of Loveland Pass. Here's our group after a successful search for the epic White-tailed Ptarmigan! Photo by guide Doug Gochfeld.*

Sometimes you just get lucky. At least that's how we felt on this Colorado grouse excursion. We lucked into wonderful weather most of the time, we luckily skipped some of the rainy spells, and we even lucked into some amazing targets (like the "scenery" up at Loveland Pass). With showings from ptarmigan, all of our grouse targets, and even some bonus songbirds like Gray Vireo, it was a great trip!

We started in Denver and although our weather was less than ideal for our first stop, things cleared up and we safely made it into Pueblo for our first night. The next day though had us heading east where we saw targets like Curve-billed Thrasher, Say's Phoebe, and even a stellar show from a Scaled Quail!

Our predawn experience at the Lesser Prairie-Chicken lek was downright magical. First, we started to hear them softly just outside the blind. A few minutes later, we could start to make out shapes in the predawn light. Finally, before long, we were face to face with these popping, dancing, calling, and darting prairie-chickens.

The show for the Greater Prairie-Chickens was also exceptional! Near Wray, we had the lek to ourselves and we were able to view the birds from the comfort of our vans. I hope you never forget the booming sounds and the funny cackles this prairie specialist makes; it's one of the finest shows in North America.

A visit to the high elevations of Loveland Pass also proved to be fruitful. Doug picked out our main target, the White-tailed Ptarmigan, sitting like two lumps in the snow with beady black eyes. Awesome! Just downhill from there, we had our first taste of rosy-finches and got to sort through the several taxa before a Merlin came swooping in!

Getting to watch sage-grouse on the leks was another treat. Although we saw how they are a bit more restrained in their darting and squabbling, their displays are still other-worldly. We successfully saw both the rare Gunnison Sage-Grouse and their more common cousin, the Greater Sage-Grouse as they strutted around on the high prairie.

Another of the main targets on this trip were the many rosy-finches and I think we'd all agree we couldn't have asked for more! We saw hundreds including dozens of Black Rosy-Finches and even a couple of the "Hepburn's" subspecies of Gray-crowned. The vote is in... and the finch show near Telluride was a winner.

The scenery on this trip was phenomenal and we hope everyone enjoyed the amazing views of the mountains in Telluride with Evening Grosbeaks and American Dippers in the background, the reddish canyons at the Colorado National Monument with White-throated Swifts overhead and a Gray Vireo in song, and the breath-taking canyon at Black Canyon of the Gunnison with the displaying Dusky Grouse nearby. What luck we had!

Thanks to Sharon for all her hard work in preparing this trip from our home office in Austin, and thanks to you all for coming along on this grouse adventure! We hope you made memories that will last you a lifetime. Perhaps we'll cross paths again someday. Until then, good birding to owl of you. :-)

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## 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

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## BIRDS

### *Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)*

- SNOW GOOSE** (*Anser caerulescens caerulescens*) – North Gateway Park in Lamar provided a couple of fun waterbirds including a nice selection of geese. Included in that flock were several of these white geese alongside at least one "blue" morph.
- ACKLING GOOSE** (*Branta hutchinsii*) – Included in that flock at North Gateway Park were a few Cackling Geese that provided a nice side-by-side study alongside the following species.
- CANADA GOOSE** (*Branta canadensis*) – Common and seen daily.
- TUNDRA SWAN** (*Cygnus columbianus*) – This was a great bird to see on our trip. Usually a rare bird in these parts, this was a long-staying individual that was seen at North Gateway Park in Lamar on our 2nd day.
- WOOD DUCK** (*Aix sponsa*) – We only saw one of these attractive ducks and it happened to be at a wastewater treatment plant in Kansas.
- BLUE-WINGED TEAL** (*Spatula discors*) – Fairly common on ponds and lakes. We tallied this attractive dabbler in both Colorado and Kansas.
- CINNAMON TEAL** (*Spatula cyanoptera*) – Pretty duck! This tour was great for having looks at this stunning dabbling duck and we saw them on more than half of our days.
- NORTHERN SHOVELER** (*Spatula clypeata*) – A fairly common big-billed species we enjoyed at most of the wetlands we visited.
- GADWALL** (*Mareca strepera*) – This is another dabbler we saw many times throughout the tour. The black on the butts always stood out on the drakes.
- AMERICAN WIGEON** (*Mareca americana*) – Seen on various ponds and wetlands throughout the tour. Like many of the other dabblers we saw on this tour, these were seen on more than half of our birding days.
- MALLARD** (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – This common and familiar duck was seen every day of the tour.
- GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN)** (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) – Although they're the smallest dabbler in North America, they couldn't hide from us! We tallied these several times from various wetlands.
- CANVASBACK** (*Aythya valisineria*) – We added this attractive diving species at Waden Reservoir where we appreciated their white, canvas-like backs.
- REDHEAD** (*Aythya americana*) – This Aythya was spotted a couple of days including at Waden Reservoir and then again at Robert Easton Regional Park on our final afternoon.
- RING-NECKED DUCK** (*Aythya collaris*) – One of the more poorly named species, but that didn't keep us from enjoying this handsome species at spots like Sweitzer Lake and Walden Reservoir.
- GREATER SCAUP** (*Aythya marila*) – Generally a rare bird on this tour, but we lucked into one at our final birding stop of the tour, Robert Easton Park in Denver.
- LESSER SCAUP** (*Aythya affinis*) – One of the most common Aythya for us, these were tallied on nearly half the days. At Walden Reservoir, at least 100 of these were present.
- BUFFLEHEAD** (*Bucephala albeola*) – A tiny but sharply-marked duck, these were seen on ponds and lakes in both Colorado and Kansas.
- COMMON GOLDENEYE** (*Bucephala clangula*) – This diving species was seen at Walden Reservoir and then very nicely at Windy Gap Reservoir.
- BARROW'S GOLDENEYE** (*Bucephala islandica*) – This attractive montane duck species was seen very nicely alongside the previous goldeneye at Windy Gap Reservoir on our final day. We were able to appreciate the more extensive black on the back, the black spur, and the different face pattern.
- HOODED MERGANSER** (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) – Although rather uncommon, these small mergansers were seen a couple of times including at Sweitzer Lake and Robert Easton Park in Denver.
- COMMON MERGANSER** (*Mergus merganser*) – Seen various times in Colorado and our first ones were at Stalker Lake.
- RUDDY DUCK** (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – These bluebills were present in large numbers at Lake Meredith early in the tour. We saw them again late in the tour at Walden Reservoir and Windy Gap Reservoir.

### *Odontophoridae (New World Quail)*

- NORTHERN BOBWHITE** (*Colinus virginianus*) – We heard this quail near Wray but it stayed out of view. [\*]
- SCALED QUAIL** (*Callipepla squamata*) – Wow, what a beautiful show by this specialty. Chosen as a favorite moment by some people, this spiffy quail crossed the road right between the vans, perched up on a fence, and even started singing!
- GAMBEL'S QUAIL** (*Callipepla gambelii*) – Towards the end of our trip, in the dry neighborhoods around Grand Junction, we encountered a group of these cool-looking quail.

### *Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)*

- RING-NECKED PHEASANT** (*Phasianus colchicus*) – A common introduced species that we encountered several times in Kansas and eastern Colorado. [I]
- GREATER SAGE-GROUSE** (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) – Our final morning of the tour was spent on a ridgetop, amongst the sage, where we watched as dozens of these magnificent birds strutted around, displaying, and squabbling for females. What a fitting close to our tour!
- GUNNISON SAGE-GROUSE** (*Centrocercus minimus*) – This rare and localized grouse was split out from the Greater Sage-Grouse back in 2000 and is now limited to small pockets in Utah and Colorado. Visually, they have longer dark plumes off the back of the head, more white in the tail, and are considerably smaller. We were lucky to see some males displaying in their native sage habitat one morning.
- WHITE-TAILED PTARMIGAN** (*Lagopus leucura altipetens*) – Success! This difficult-to-find and sought after species was spied high above us at Loveland Pass. The scenery was beautiful!
- DUSKY GROUSE** (*Dendragapus obscurus*) – We were stunned to find one of these on the side of the snowy road up to Loveland Pass! Later in the tour, we had repeated looks at this chunky grouse at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. One of them even did some booming!

**SHARP-TAILED GROUSE** (*Tympanuchus phasianellus columbianus*) – We encountered a number of these near one of their mobile leks in northern Colorado towards the end of the tour. At one point, we could even hear them booming and displaying over a nearby ridge.

**GREATER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN (PINNATUS)** (*Tympanuchus cupido pinnatus*) – What a fantastic show! This classic grassland grouse gave us stunning displays near Wray, Colorado where they squabbled, jabbed, jumped, darted, and dodged. The day before, some folks saw a couple of these at the Lesser Prairie-Chicken lek in Kansas as well!

**LESSER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN** (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*) – Voted a favorite grouse of the trip, our encounter with this uncommon and declining grouse species was magical. As we quietly divided up into our blinds in the predawn darkness, the Milky Way glowed above us. We sat quietly and before long, we started to hear these displaying near the blinds. As the sun rose up behind us, we all enjoyed an awesome morning show as these displayed, popping up like popcorn, from right in front of us.

**WILD TURKEY** (*Meleagris gallopavo*) – It was hard to predict where and when these would pop up but we ended up seeing this large species on almost half of our days.

#### Podicipedidae (Grebes)

**PIED-BILLED GREBE** (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – We saw good numbers of these small grebes at Stalker Lake and Goodland WTP.

**EARED GREBE** (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – At this time of year, some of these were sporting some nice colors! We first found them at Lake Meredith but went on to see more at Stalker Lake, Walden Reservoir, Windy Gap, etc.

**WESTERN GREBE** (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*) – This is an attractive, black-and-white grebe that we saw at Lake Meredith on our second day. We saw more at Neenoshe Reservoir, Sweitzer Lake, and Walden Reservoir.

**CLARK'S GREBE** (*Aechmophorus clarkii*) – Although similar to the previous species, this large grebe has more white in the face, cleaner white flanks, and a brighter orange bill. We saw them at two spots: Lake Meredith and Neenoshe Reservoir.

#### Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) – Tallied daily in urban areas. [I]

**EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE** (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – This introduced species has done very well in this part of the country and we tallied them nearly every day. [I]

**MOURNING DOVE** (*Zenaida macroura*) – Fairly common and widespread throughout the trip.

#### Apodidae (Swifts)

**WHITE-THROATED SWIFT** (*Aeronautes saxatalis*) – Although they were initially seen fairly distantly at Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP, these were eventually seen very well at spots like Colorado National Monument. What an amazing flying machine!

#### Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

**BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD** (*Archilochus alexandri*) – Although seeing hummingbirds seemed like a far-fetched idea when we began the tour, we eventually did see a couple including this western species in Grand Junction.

**BROAD-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD** (*Selasphorus platycercus*) – Not typically seen on this tour, it was a special treat to find this species in Grand Junction. However, the Black-chinned seemed to chase this guy away whenever possible.

#### Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

**AMERICAN COOT** (*Fulica americana*) – A familiar staple in most ponds and wetlands we visited in both Colorado and Kansas.

#### Gruidae (Cranes)

**SANDHILL CRANE** (*Antigone canadensis*) – Several of these majestic giants kept us company as we spent a crisp morning with Sharp-tailed Grouse in northern Colorado.

#### Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

**BLACK-NECKED STILT** (*Himantopus mexicanus*) – Lake Meredith and Sweitzer Lake both hosted this lanky, black-and-white shorebird.

**AMERICAN AVOCET** (*Recurvirostra americana*) – Sometimes gas station stops can be well worth it! Besides the ones we saw at the Love's near Brush, we saw some more at Walden Reservoir and Windy Gap. At this time of year, they were in nice colors too!

#### Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

**KILLDEER** (*Charadrius vociferus*) – This noisy plover was common wherever we found shoreline habitat.

**MOUNTAIN PLOVER** (*Charadrius montanus*) – Over the course of three days, we found this shortgrass specialty at three different spots! Although our first views were fairly distant, we made up for that by having excellent looks at the Pawnee National Grasslands.

#### Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

**LONG-BILLED CURLEW** (*Numenius americanus*) – Our largest shorebird, a couple of these flushed up from the shores of Neenoshe Reservoir. A milestone bird for Derek too!

**MARbled GODWIT** (*Limosa fedoa*) – This big, uncommon wader was picked out on our final day at Walden Reservoir. Not seen on every trip, it was a treat to snag this one.

**LEAST SANDPIPER** (*Calidris minutilla*) – Our smallest shorebird, these tiny peeps were seen twice; first at Lake Meredith and then at Robert Easton Park in Denver. With a proper look, the legs on this species are yellow.

**WILSON'S SNIPE** (*Gallinago delicata*) – Sitting motionless in a stream in Telluride, this sneaky shorebird did its best not to be seen!

**SPOTTED SANDPIPER** (*Actitis macularius*) – Seen at our final birding stop of the tour, at Robert Easton Park in Denver.

**SOLITARY SANDPIPER** (*Tringa solitaria*) – This *Tringa* was also a pretty rare find for this tour. Our final birding stop of the entire trip, at Robert Easton Park in Denver, hosted one of these on the far side of the pond.

**GREATER YELLOWLEGS** (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – Our very first birding stop, in the snow, yielded three of these lanky *Tringa* in a wet meadow at Clear Spring Ranch.

**WILLET (WESTERN)** (*Tringa semipalmata inornata*) – A rare shorebird on this tour, these were first seen at the Goodland WTP in Kansas where one was scoped poking along the edge of the pond.

#### Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

**BONAPARTE'S GULL** (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*) – A beautiful, sleek gull! These were spotted twice, first at Lake Meredith and then at Sweitzer Lake where one was keeping a Franklin's Gull company.

**FRANKLIN'S GULL** (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*) – Sporting that attractive black hood given the time of the year, these were downright handsome gulls! These were seen at a variety of ponds and lakes such as Lake Meredith, Sweitzer Lake, Lions Park, Walden Reservoir, and others.

**MEW GULL** (*Larus canus*) – Wow, this is a pretty rare bird in Colorado! We found this continuing rarity at Robert Easton Park in Denver on our final day. Compared with the following species, these are smaller with smaller, thinner bills. Additionally, the wingtips are brownish in color, not black.

**RING-BILLED GULL** (*Larus delawarensis*) – Although they were the common gull at Lake Meredith and Neenoshe Reservoir, there were only a couple at Walden Reservoir where the following species was more common.

**CALIFORNIA GULL** (*Larus californicus*) – Our most common gull at Walden Reservoir where more than 200 were present on our visits. In comparison with the previous species, we could appreciate the dark eye, slightly darker mantle, and different bill pattern.

**HERRING GULL** (*Larus argentatus*) – This was a surprise visitor that flew over us at Neenoshe Reservoir.

#### Gaviidae (Loons)

**COMMON LOON** (*Gavia immer*) – Always a popular bird, this attractive black-and-white diver was spotted at Walden Reservoir on our first visit.

#### Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

**NEOTROPIC CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) – A rare bird in Colorado, one of these small cormorants had been present at Robert Easton Park in Denver and so we swung by and had a look on our final day.

**DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Fairly common around big bodies of water like Lake Meredith, Neenoshe Reservoir, Walden Reservoir, and Robert Easton Park.

#### Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

**AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN** (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) – Tallied on about half of our days, these black-and-white giants were often seen soaring near large bodies of water like Walden Reservoir.

#### Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

**GREAT BLUE HERON** (*Ardea herodias*) – A familiar and classic heron, these big guys were seen nearly every day.

**BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – Although they were hunkered down and probably sleeping the day away, it didn't stop us from finding these in a tree on an island at Walden Reservoir!

#### Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

**WHITE-FACED IBIS** (*Plegadis chihi*) – Our only sighting came from Telluride where one of these played hide-and-seek from the backside of a marsh.

#### Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

**TURKEY VULTURE** (*Cathartes aura*) – Common and widespread.

#### Pandionidae (Osprey)

**OSPREY** (*Pandion haliaetus*) – Although not seen on the first several days of our trip, these fish-eaters ended strong and we tallied them daily on the second half.

#### Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

**GOLDEN EAGLE** (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – Not only did we have repeated looks at this majestic bird of prey in flight, but we also saw one perched right outside the van! Stellar views! Leah was especially bitten by the eagle bug.

**NORTHERN HARRIER** (*Circus hudsonius*) – This distinctive raptor was fairly common in marshy or grassy habitats.

**SHARP-SHINNED HAWK** (*Accipiter striatus*) – This tiny Accipiter was seen only once, distantly at Colorado National Monument where it was in view at the same time as the following species.

**COOPER'S HAWK** (*Accipiter cooperii*) – We had mixed luck with this bird-eating hawk. Although hard to predict where and when one might pop up, we ended up tallying these on about half of our days.

**BALD EAGLE** (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – This classic eagle was seen at the Lake Meredith feedlots and again at Walden Reservoir. A couple of the ones we saw were adults sporting the white heads and white tails.

**SWAINSON'S HAWK** (*Buteo swainsoni*) – Recently back from their wintering grounds, this classy western Buteo ended up being fairly common. We saw both light and dark morphs which was a treat as well.

**RED-TAILED HAWK** (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – Our classic Buteo, these were common and tallied every day.

**ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK** (*Buteo lagopus*) – This gorgeous northern Buteo was seen on our way in to Walden late in the tour. It eventually joined another and we watched as they flew side-by-side for a bit.

**FERRUGINOUS HAWK** (*Buteo regalis*) – It's a bird... it's a plane... oh, nope, it's actually a Ferruginous Hawk! We enjoyed one of these high over the sage flats of Utah. Except the bird was well into Colorado!

#### Strigidae (Owls)

**GREAT HORNED OWL** (*Bubo virginianus*) – Although we were given a bit of stink-eye from the adult on the nest near Wray, we enjoyed watching it hunkered down into the broken stump.

**BURROWING OWL** (*Athene cunicularia*) – One of the vacant lots near the Lake Meredith feedlots was loaded with these little ground-dwelling owls. We saw them again at the Greater Prairie-Chicken lek and also at Pawnee.

#### Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

**BELTED KINGFISHER** (*Megaceryle alcyon*) – A couple were seen at Stalker Lake early in the tour and we went on to see more randomly here and there around streams and other bodies of water.

#### Picidae (Woodpeckers)

**WILLIAMSON'S SAPSUCKER** (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*) – Certainly a highlight of the final day and perhaps the entire trip! We visited Genesee Park in hopes of finding this specialized woodpecker and sure enough, success! The males and females exhibit some of the most extreme sexual dimorphism within woodpeckers.

- RED-NAPED SAPSUCKER** (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*) – We encountered this attractive western sapsucker a couple of times including with Eric in Telluride and then another higher up near Rabbit Ears Pass.
- LEWIS'S WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes lewis*) – What a fine bird! We lucked into intel about one of these cool woodpeckers and we found the bird right where we expected, along a country road near Wiley, Colorado.
- RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes carolinus*) – One of the more unexpected additions to our list of woodpeckers was this eastern species that we saw just over the state line in Nebraska!
- AMERICAN THREE-TOED WOODPECKER (ROCKY MTS.)** (*Picoides dorsalis dorsalis*) – We couldn't have asked for a better, longer show from this sometimes difficult woodpecker. We put scopes on it near Monarch Pass and enjoyed it until we eventually moved on to other birds.
- DOWNY WOODPECKER** (*Dryobates pubescens*) – This tiny woodpecker wasn't uncommon and we had scattered sightings from Colorado and Kansas.
- HAIRY WOODPECKER (ROCKY MTS.)** (*Dryobates villosus orius*) – The bigger cousin of the previous species, this sharply-marked woodpecker was seen near the feeders in Wildernest and also our snowy stop at Clear Spring Ranch.
- NORTHERN FLICKER** (*Colaptes auratus*) – Although we saw quite a few flickers, we were usually able to separate them into the two following subspecies. However, there were times where we only heard the flicker and those were put in this broader category.
- NORTHERN FLICKER (YELLOW-SHAFTED)** (*Colaptes auratus auratus*) – The only pure-looking Yellow-shafted was one at Keller Lake in Kansas on our second day. The males have black malar stripes instead of the red on the Red-shafted.
- NORTHERN FLICKER (RED-SHAFTED)** (*Colaptes auratus cafer*) – Most of the flickers we saw looked to be of this subspecies, a primarily western taxa. The males have red malar stripes and neither sex has black on the nape like the previous subspecies.
- Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras).*
- AMERICAN KESTREL** (*Falco sparverius*) – Common and widespread.
- MERLIN** (*Falco columbarius*) – We saw this quick falcon zoom through Wildernest where it took a swipe at some rosy-finches! Lucky for us, it perched up and we were able to study it through the scope before it went on its way.
- PEREGRINE FALCON** (*Falco peregrinus*) – A truly magnificent bird of prey, this speedster was seen in Telluride and then overhead at Colorado National Monument.
- PRAIRIE FALCON** (*Falco mexicanus*) – Perched behind some boulders high on a ridge above the highway, one of these falcons sat motionless. Although our views were limited to mostly the head, it was a distinctive look!
- Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers).*
- EASTERN PHOEBE** (*Sayornis phoebe*) – This eastern flycatcher was spotted a couple of times despite this tour being mostly in Colorado; we saw them just over the state line in Nebraska and then at Stalker Lake in Colorado as well.
- SAY'S PHOEBE** (*Sayornis saya*) – A flycatcher of dry, open country, these turned out to be fairly common and we tallied them nearly every day.
- WESTERN KINGBIRD** (*Tyrannus verticalis*) – Just recently returned from their wintering grounds, it was fun to catch up with these a few times as they arrived back. We saw these yellow-bellied flycatchers at the Colorado National Monument and Lions Park in Rifle.
- Laniidae (Shrikes).*
- LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE** (*Lanius ludovicianus*) – This black, gray, and white predatory songbird was tallied on more than half of our days, usually perched up high on a fence post or power line.
- Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis).*
- GRAY VIREO** (*Vireo vicinior*) – This was a real treat! We found a very early individual back on the breeding grounds; so early, in fact, that it was one of the ten earliest records for Colorado! The bird we found, along the Devil's Kitchen Trail in the Colorado National Monument, was actively singing and everyone got good looks at this somewhat plain vireo.
- Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies).*
- CANADA JAY (ROCKY MTS.)** (*Perisoreus canadensis capitalis*) – It took a bit of patience but we were eventually rewarded with looks at this cute corvid on our final day. This species has gone through a recent name change, from Gray Jay back to its original name.
- PINYON JAY** (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*) – This cool western species was seen nicely in a neighborhood near Buena Vista. Even one of the residents came out and commented how they were everywhere! We saw more of these at spots like Black Canyon of the Gunnison and Colorado National Monument.
- STELLER'S JAY (INTERIOR)** (*Cyanocitta stelleri maculophya*) – A gorgeous bird of the montane west, these crested jays were seen at spots like Black Canyon of the Gunnison, Steamboat Springs, Moose Visitor Center, and Telluride.
- WOODHOUSE'S SCRUB-JAY** (*Aphelocoma woodhouseii*) – We ended up catching up with these very nicely at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park where we saw them both along the roadsides and from one of the overlooks. Up until ~5 years ago, this was part of the Western Scrub-Jay complex before it was split out.
- BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE** (*Pica hudsonia*) – A common (but very beautiful) species on this trip, they were seen nearly every day. Seeing this long-tailed corvid perched on old, wooden fence posts along montane pastures is such a classic scene of rural Colorado.
- CLARK'S NUTCRACKER** (*Nucifraga columbiana*) – Although somewhat rare, a couple of these did present themselves nicely in the snow at Monarch Pass.
- AMERICAN CROW** (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – One of the two common black corvids on the trip. Typically though, these were probably less numerous than the following species.
- COMMON RAVEN** (*Corvus corax*) – This large corvid was our most numerous on the trip, especially in the montane regions of Colorado.
- Alaudidae (Larks).*
- HORNED LARK** (*Eremophila alpestris*) – A bird of open country and vast fields, these were numerous in a variety of habitats we visited from the Pawnee grasslands to the montane meadows.
- Hirundinidae (Swallows).*
- NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW** (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) – Typically a rather rare bird on this tour, a couple of these popped up at Stalker Lake and then again near the Utah border.

**TREE SWALLOW** (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – By the time the tour was wrapping up, this migratory species was back in full force. We saw more than 200 at Robert Easton Park in Denver!

**VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW** (*Tachycineta thalassina*) – A nicely-marked western swallow, these were seen several times at Colorado National Monument, Lions Park, and Robert Easton Park in Denver. These have more white on the rumps and face compared to the previous species.

**BANK SWALLOW** (*Riparia riparia*) – An uncommon swallow on this trip, these were seen only at Lions Park in Rifle and again at Robert Easton Park in Denver.

**BARN SWALLOW** (*Hirundo rustica*) – We saw this familiar swallow species on more days than any other swallow. Graceful in flight, the forked-tail is a very diagnostic way to tell them apart.

**CLIFF SWALLOW** (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) – We managed a handful of sightings of this short-tailed, stocky swallow. Sometimes flying around bridges and overpasses (where they nest), other times around parks like Lions Park and Robert Easton Park.

#### Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

**BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE** (*Poecile atricapillus*) – This tour had a couple of species of chickadees on the list and this species was the more local of the two. Limited more to willow riparian areas compared with the following species, these were seen in Telluride, Black Canyon of the Gunnison, Steamboat Springs, etc.

**MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE** (*Poecile gambeli*) – A distinctive western chickadee with a white eyebrow, these were fairly common in montane habitats and we saw them at Wildernest, Buena Vista, Telluride, Black Canyon, and many other spots.

**JUNIPER TITMOUSE** (*Baeolophus ridgwayi*) – A target species for some on this trip, this plain gray titmouse showed very nicely on our morning around Grand Junction and Colorado National Monument.

#### Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)

**BUSH TIT (INTERIOR)** (*Psaltriparus minimus plumbeus*) – The Devil's Kitchen Trail at the Colorado National Monument gave us our best looks at this tiny, gray species. Other than that, though, numbers were pretty sparse on this trip.

#### Sittidae (Nuthatches)

**RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH** (*Sitta canadensis*) – Tiny but distinctive, this sharply-marked nuthatch was seen in Telluride and again the following morning at Black Canyon of the Gunnison. The tiny toot-like calls are a great way to detect these conifer-loving nuthatches.

**WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (EASTERN)** (*Sitta carolinensis carolinensis*) – With these different subspecies being potentially split in the future, it's good to pay attention to what you're hearing in the field (they sound very different). This eastern subspecies was found during our stop in Nebraska near Haigler.

**WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (INTERIOR WEST)** (*Sitta carolinensis nelsoni*) – This montane subspecies was tallied at Black Canyon of the Gunnison.

**PYGMY NUTHATCH** (*Sitta pygmaea*) – Surprisingly uncommon on this trip, one of the only spots we saw these well was at the feeders in Wildernest alongside the rosy-finches.

#### Troglodytidae (Wrens)

**ROCK WREN** (*Salpinctes obsoletus*) – The Devil's Kitchen Trail in the Colorado National Monument was a great-looking place for this species and so it was hardly surprising when one perched atop a boulder and sang for us!

**CANYON WREN** (*Catherpes mexicanus*) – We heard the beautiful cascading song of this wren at the Colorado National Monument. The bird, however, stayed out of view. [\*]

**HOUSE WREN** (*Troglodytes aedon*) – Heard singing from a roadside in Nebraska was our first detection. We later saw one briefly at the Devil's Kitchen Trail in the Colorado National Monument. This is not a species we typically see on this tour but since we had that nice warm up on the second run, we encountered them right after they returned.

**MARSH WREN (PLESIUS GROUP)** (*Cistothorus palustris plesius*) – Just recently back to their breeding grounds, these were amped up and singing in full force. We saw them very nicely at Sweitzer Lake.

#### Poliophtidae (Gnatcatchers)

**BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER** (*Poliophtila caerulea*) – This was another recent arrival that we saw along the Devil's Kitchen Trail in the Colorado National Monument.

#### Cinclidae (Dippers)

**AMERICAN DIPPER** (*Cinclus mexicanus*) – The creek running through Telluride had this fantastic western species and we all enjoyed getting point-blank looks as it fed, perched up on rocks, and even did a little singing.

#### Regulidae (Kinglets)

**RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET** (*Regulus calendula*) – With their ruby crested open and exposed, a couple of these in Telluride looked pretty riled up!

#### Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

**EASTERN BLUEBIRD** (*Sialia sialis*) – A pretty rare bird this far west, seeing these just over the state line in Nebraska was a nice snag.

**MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD** (*Sialia currucoides*) – This was our common bluebird for most of the trip. The sky blue color offset the browns and whites of the montane pastures beautifully!

**TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE** (*Myadestes townsendi*) – Our first glimpse of this mostly-gray songbird was across the pond at Stalker Lake. Thankfully, we saw more at spots like Placerville, Telluride, and Black Canyon of the Gunnison.

**AMERICAN ROBIN** (*Turdus migratorius*) – Familiar, common, and widespread, these thrushes were tallied every day.

#### Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

**CURVE-BILLED THRASHER (CURVIROSTRE GROUP)** (*Toxostoma curvirostre oberholseri*) – One of our first stops on Day 2 took us out the IL Road where we saw a variety of sparrows and thrashers. This uncommon thrasher is range-restricted within Colorado and this was our only chance. Thankfully, we saw them singing atop various bushes and hilltops.

**SAGE THRASHER** (*Oreoscoptes montanus*) – A denizen of the sage flats in much of the West, these were seen first along the IL Road but then again during our time along the Colorado/Utah state line. Lastly, one of these was singing at the Greater Sage-Grouse lek as well.

*Sturnidae (Starlings).*

**EUROPEAN STARLING** (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Common and widespread, often in urban areas. [I]

*Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits).*

**AMERICAN PIPIT** (*Anthus rubescens*) – Rummaging around at the waters edge at Lake Meredith, this ground-loving songbird was seen nicely there as well as Neenoshe Reservoir and Robert Eastern Park in Denver.

*Bombycillidae (Waxwings).*

**CEDAR WAXWING** (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) – At least 7 of these were spotted at the Goodland WTP in Kansas. Turns out those would be our only ones of the trip!

*Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies).*

**EVENING GROSBEAK** (*Coccothraustes vespertinus brooksi*) – What a trip for this attractive black, white, and yellow finch! We saw flocks at spots like Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park as well as Anglers Drive in Steamboat Springs. Quite a showing for this nomadic and uncommon species.

**PINE GROSBEAK (ROCKY MTS.)** (*Pinicola enucleator montana*) – It took several stops to finally cross paths with this beautiful northern finch. Finally, at the cabins between Walden and the Moose Visitor Center, we found a couple perched up high in some bare trees.

**GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH (HEPBURN'S)** (*Leucosticte tephrocotis littoralis*) – This subspecies, with the completely gray head, was seen nicely at the feeders in Wilderndest and Telluride. This subspecies breeds far to the north and west and so we know it undertook a sizable migration to reach the wintering grounds here in Colorado.

**GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH (GRAY-CROWNED)** (*Leucosticte tephrocotis tephrocotis*) – A few of these nominate birds were mixed in with the mega flock near Telluride. However, they weren't very numerous and it took careful studying to pick them out.

**BLACK ROSY-FINCH** (*Leucosticte atrata*) – Wow! This distinctive rosy-finch species was a favorite finch for many of us on this trip. We had awesome looks in Wilderndest and again near Telluride. In fact, it would be hard to see these any closer!

**BROWN-CAPPED ROSY-FINCH** (*Leucosticte australis*) – This rosy-finch, which is nearly endemic to the state of Colorado, was seen very well in both Wilderndest and near Telluride. This was the most numerous rosy-finch present and numbers were easily into the multiple hundreds!

**HOUSE FINCH** (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – Numerous and widespread, this was our most common finch on a daily basis.

**CASSIN'S FINCH** (*Haemorhous cassinii*) – This tour continues to be a stellar one for seeing this western species. We had awesome, point-blank looks at these at the Moose Visitor Center where dozens were attending the feeders mere feet from us.

**RED CROSSBILL** (*Loxia curvirostra*) – A rare bird on this tour, this distinctive finch was seen nicely at the feeders in Wilderndest and nowhere else.

**PINE SISKIN** (*Spinus pinus*) – A small, streaky, and somewhat common finch through the montane portions of our tour. We had great looks of these alongside the rosy-finches near Telluride.

**LESSER GOLDFINCH** (*Spinus psaltria*) – Similar to other goldfinches but with a distinctively dark back. These small finches were seen in the Colorado National Monument, near the parking area for the Devil's Kitchen Trail.

**AMERICAN GOLDFINCH** (*Spinus tristis*) – A rare bird on this tour, one was heard (and maybe seen?) at Keller Lake in Kansas. [\*]

*Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings).*

**MCCOWN'S LONGSPUR** (*Rhynchophanes mccownii*) – It took a bit of looking but we were eventually rewarded with a mega flock of 100-200 of these shortgrass specialists. They liked to stay hidden in veg on the ground but we all eventually saw them through the scope.

*Passerellidae (New World Sparrows).*

**GRASSHOPPER SPARROW** (*Ammodramus savannarum*) – Heard and then seen near the lek in Wray, this secretive little sparrow has a thin buzz for a song.

**CHIPPING SPARROW** (*Spizella passerina*) – Not a very abundant sparrow on this tour, this little *Spizella* was seen best at the visitor center at the Colorado National Monument.

**BREWER'S SPARROW** (*Spizella breweri*) – Although typically a rare species on this tour, our visits out to the sage flats in Utah have been reliable for this somewhat drab *Spizella*.

**BLACK-THROATED SPARROW** (*Amphispiza bilineata*) – A beautiful sparrow (yes, they do exist!), this desert specialist was seen very well at the Devil's Kitchen Trail in the Colorado National Monument.

**LARK SPARROW** (*Chondestes grammacus*) – An attractive sparrow, but one that wasn't common on this trip, one of these was spotted along a roadside in western Colorado.

**FOX SPARROW (SLATE-COLORED)** (*Passerella iliaca schistacea*) – Our best look at this montane subspecies was at the Black Canyon of the Gunnison campground where one was in full song, exposed on the top of a barren tree.

**DARK-EYED JUNCO** (*Junco hyemalis*) – All of the juncos we saw were this species. However, this broad category is helpful for tough-to-identify individuals where the subspecies wasn't obvious.

**DARK-EYED JUNCO (SLATE-COLORED)** (*Junco hyemalis hyemalis*) – This subspecies, the one most Eastern birders would recognize, was tough to find on this trip. Our best look was at one at Stalker Lake along the entrance road.

**DARK-EYED JUNCO (PINK-SIDED)** (*Junco hyemalis mearnsi*) – This is a western subspecies and we saw them at spots like Telluride, Black Canyon of the Gunnison, and the Devil's Kitchen Trail. The blush on the flanks along with the dark lores are helpful things to focus on.

**DARK-EYED JUNCO (GRAY-HEADED)** (*Junco hyemalis caniceps*) – A beautiful western subspecies, the reddish patch on the back was a dead giveaway. These were common at locations like Wilderndest, Telluride, and the Moose Visitor Center.

**WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW** (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) – A common sparrow in much of the west. This category was used when we weren't able to identify individuals down to subspecies level.

**WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (GAMBEL'S)** (*Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*) – All of the White-crowns that we studied critically were this subspecies. These have pale lores.

**SAGEBRUSH SPARROW** (*Artemisiospiza nevadensis*) – Success! This sage specialist is a rare bird on this itinerary but we did encounter a couple near the Utah/Colorado state line during our visit there. If your bird book is older than a couple years old, this will be called "Sage Sparrow".

**VESPER SPARROW** (*Poocetes gramineus*) – One of our first birding stops, along the IL Road, yielded this sparrow of open country. When it flushed, we could see the white outer tail feathers that this species is known for.

- SAVANNAH SPARROW** (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – It was a bit of an odd location to see this species, but a tiny island in the middle of the small stream in Telluride was the only spot we saw this little guy!
- SONG SPARROW** (*Melospiza melodia*) – Fairly common and widespread throughout the trip.
- LINCOLN'S SPARROW** (*Melospiza lincolni*) – Our best looks came from Sweitzer Lake where a couple of these migrants had sought refuge in some waterside shrubs.
- SPOTTED TOWHEE** (*Pipilo maculatus*) – The western counterpart of the Eastern Towhee, these were rather common at the Black Canyon of the Gunnison where we saw ten or so. The Colorado National Monument also hosted several.

*Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)*

- YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD** (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) – This distinctive blackbird is a real treat to see so nicely. We encountered quite a bunch near Lake Meredith, Walden Reservoir, and a few other spots.
- WESTERN MEADOWLARK** (*Sturnella neglecta*) – A vocal denizen of western grasslands, these were quite common in open-country and we tallied them nearly every day.
- RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD** (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – Widespread, familiar, and tallied every day.
- BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD** (*Molothrus ater*) – Our first, and maybe our best, views were at the feedlots near Lake Meredith.
- BREWER'S BLACKBIRD** (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) – Although not the flashiest of blackbirds, these were seen nicely in a roadside flock near Wray late in the tour.
- COMMON GRACKLE (BRONZED)** (*Quiscalus quiscula versicolor*) – Common during the eastern portions of our tour including nearly all the stops in Kansas and Nebraska.
- GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE** (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – This huge, long-tailed grackle was fairly common during our time in Kansas where we saw them at Greeley, at various roadside stops, and rest areas.

*Parulidae (New World Warblers)*

- YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (MYRTLE)** (*Setophaga coronata coronata*) – It wasn't until our final stop of the tour, at Robert Easton Park in Denver, that we saw this subspecies. These have bright white throats.
- YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (AUDUBON'S)** (*Setophaga coronata auduboni*) – We had nice side-by-side views of this yellow-throated subspecies at Robert Easton Park in Denver. Will these ever be split out again into separate species? Time will tell.
- BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER** (*Setophaga nigrescens*) – Recently back to the breeding grounds, this attractive western warbler was heard first and then seen nicely at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park and then again at Colorado National Monument.

*Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)*

- HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus*) – Common around urban areas, these were tallied daily. [I]

## MAMMALS

- NUTTALL'S (MOUNTAIN) COTTONTAIL** (*Sylvilagus nuttalli*) – Some of the cottontails we saw around Black Canyon of the Gunnison were probably this species.
- DESERT COTTONTAIL** (*Sylvilagus audubonii*) – We tallied these on our final day.
- SNOWSHOE HARE** (*Lepus americanus*) – In the mountains near Walden in northern Colorado, we encountered a few of these along the roadsides. Some of them still were pretty white on the belly and hind legs.
- BLACK-TAILED JACKRABBIT** (*Lepus californicus*) – At least one of these was spotted at a gas station along our route.
- LEAST CHIPMUNK** (*Tamias minimus*) – A few of the tiny chipmunks we saw, ones that stick their tail up when running, were this species.
- YELLOW-BELLIED MARMOT** (*Marmota flaviventris*) – For being a pretty rare mammal on this tour, we were lucky to encounter these a couple of times.
- WYOMING GROUND SQUIRREL** (*Urocyon elegans*) – The plain ground squirrels we saw on our final three days, the ones up in northern Colorado, were this species.
- THIRTEEN-LINED GROUND SQUIRREL** (*Spermophilus tridecemlineatus*) – This nicely-patterned ground squirrel was seen near Wray, Colorado.
- ROCK SQUIRREL** (*Spermophilus variegatus*) – Although they almost appear to be a tree squirrel type, these are usually seen sitting on fence posts and rock piles.
- GOLDEN-MANTLED GROUND SQUIRREL** (*Spermophilus lateralis*) – An attractive ground squirrel, these were seen a couple of times near Telluride.
- BLACK-TAILED PRAIRIE DOG** (*Cynomys ludovicianus*) – These were the common prairie dogs we saw early in the trip during our time in Kansas and eastern Colorado.
- WHITE-TAILED PRAIRIE DOG** (*Cynomys leucurus*) – A couple of these were seen in western Colorado during the second half of the trip.
- GUNNISON PRAIRIE DOG** (*Cynomys gunnisoni*) – The only prairie dog in the Gunnison Valley, these were seen on two back-to-back days during our time there.
- FOX SQUIRREL** (*Sciurus niger*) – Seen as we were leaving Robert Easton Park in Denver on our final day.
- RED SQUIRREL** (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) – Although it was on our checklist as heard-only at first, we eventually did see some high up near Rabbit Ears Pass.
- ORD'S KANGAROO RAT** (*Dipodomys ordii*) – A few of these were bouncing around as we drove to the lek predawn near Wray.
- MUSKRAT** (*Ondatra zibethica*) – Seen in a pond near Mack.
- RED FOX** (*Vulpes vulpes*) – We saw these cute guys a couple of times, including in Wildernest and high up at Loveland Pass.
- COYOTE** (*Canis latrans*) – Scattered sightings included one high up in one of the snowy passes that we stopped to check out. Other times, we watched as one strolled through a sage-grouse lek (having nearly no response from the birds!).
- NORTHERN RACCOON** (*Procyon lotor*) – One of these bolted across the road for the first van.
- ELK** (*Cervus canadensis*) – This is a good tour for enjoying this huge, western species. We had looks on almost half of our days.
- MULE DEER** (*Odocoileus hemionus*) – Our most common deer, these were tallied on all but two days.
- WHITE-TAILED DEER** (*Odocoileus virginianus*) – A few of these were seen in Kansas and those would remain our only ones of the trip.

**MOOSE** (*Alces alces*) – One of these giants was spotted near a willow-filled stream on our second-to-last day. The Moose in Colorado have been reestablished thanks to human efforts.

**PRONGHORN** (*Antilocapra americana*) – Such a classic species of the open country of the west! We had a plethora of looks throughout the tour and I think we'll all remember the sight of them trotting through the dry, sage flats with mountains looming in the background.

**BIGHORN SHEEP** (*Ovis canadensis*) – Eric pointed us in the direction of a whole herd of these near Telluride. They didn't seem too bothered by us though.

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## **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

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**Totals for the tour: 186 bird taxa and 26 mammal taxa**