



*Field Guides Tour Report*

**Owlberta: Alberta's Owls & More 2020**

Feb 15, 2020 to Feb 21, 2020

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



*Although it wasn't the biggest owl, or the rarest, this little Northern Pygmy-Owl provided one of the best moments of the tour. When some chickadees began mobbing it, the owl transformed into this upright, ear-tufted creature... Who knew they could do that! Participant Andrew Kenny captured the amazing appearance.*

With social distancing and self-isolation the new reality of our lives at the moment, it feels very nostalgic to look back on this tour, and think wistfully of the freedom we had to travel, eat in restaurants, and not have to worry about keeping 6 feet apart from each other at all times. It was all just a little over 5 weeks ago, and yet it feels like a completely different world now. But we can look back and remember what it was like before the threat of the virus encompassed the world, and maybe even appreciate that freedom we had even more.

We started things off in the provincial capital of Edmonton, and dove right in to looking for owls, which, of course, were the main reason we were there. Our initial morning in the Opal region was decidedly owl-less, but was livened up by a bunch of other great winter specialties. Northern Shrike was one of the first northern targets to be seen, and we enjoyed great scope views of our first one perched up on the edge of a farmyard along the road. Later that morning, some other key winter birds brought some cheer to the group at the feeders at Halfmoon Lake. Lovely Evening and Pine grosbeaks feeding side by side were a real treat to see, as was our first Boreal Chickadee. The afternoon found us a little further to the east of Edmonton, where we notched our first owls of the tour- a distant Snowy, a close, glaring Great Horned, and our primary target, Short-eared Owl. One of the three Short-eared Owls we saw put on a wonderful show as it coursed low over a marshy pasture, winging its way closer and closer to our position until it was right next to the road, yellow eyes fixing us in an icy glare. A superb end to our first day afield!

Next day found us braving a bone-chilling wind to make the walk into Grey Nun's Park, where a female American Three-toed Woodpecker foraged meticulously on the trunk of a dying spruce tree, a young Northern Goshawk sat stoically in the open while we snapped pictures and admired its powerful build, and another Great Horned Owl dozed peacefully on an exposed perch near the trail. Then it was off to Calgary, with another Snowy Owl along the main highway coming as something of a surprise. A late afternoon vigil at a site that had been hosting many Mallards and the odd hungry Gyrfalcon did not pay off, though a brief view of a Gray Partridge was some consolation.

The following morning began at Shannon Terrace in the wooded valley along Fish Creek, where our two main targets eluded us, but a flock of Bohemian Waxwings landed nearby and gave us long scope views, making our efforts there worthwhile despite the setbacks. From there we hightailed it to High River, where we soon found ourselves in the company of one of 3 Northern Hawk-Owls known to be in the Calgary region this winter. Though

the owl started off quite distant, we waited it out, and eventually had the kind of looks we were hoping for, as it perched right next to the road, allowing us all the time we wanted to admire and photograph this wonderful bird. After a welcome, delicious hot lunch at the delightful Chuckwagon Cafe, we headed up the scenic Grand Valley Road, Great Gray Owls in our sights. And after some driving and searching, suddenly our quarry was in our grasp, and we enjoyed a long session of watching this magnificent creature make a series of pounces into the snow in search of a meal, though it came up empty each time.

We switched things up a bit the next day, focusing on overwintering waterfowl in the fast-flowing waters of the Bow River at Carburn Park. Here we had textbook studies of male Greater and Lesser Scaup side by side, along with lovely Redheads, Buffleheads, and Common Goldeneye, and we picked out a small group of stubby-billed Cackling Geese from amidst the throngs of Canadas. We also enjoyed the hybrid swarm of Northern Flickers at the park, with some birds clearly showing traits of both Yellow-shafted and Red-shafted varieties. Next up was a return to Shannon Terrace, where the Black-backed Woodpecker continued to elude us, but we finally tracked down the long-staying Northern Pygmy-Owl. Watching its transformation from round and fluffy to sleek and slim, complete with ear tufts, was one of the most amazing moments of the tour! With the pygmy-owl in the bag, we turned our attentions back to Snowy Owls, as to that point our observations had all been fleeting or distant. We soon changed that with some stellar close views of several birds, including one brilliant, white mature male.

Our final day was pretty relaxed, as all our main owl targets had been achieved, so we headed up to Waiparous Village and some incredible feeders, where Blue, Canada, and Steller's jays fed side by side with several Clark's Nutcrackers, and all three chickadee species put in appearances, as did a Brown Creeper, the first I'd ever seen using a feeder! Another run up Grand Valley Road failed to produce any more Great Grays, but a pair of Golden Eagles perched on a rocky outcrop were a nice reward for our efforts. On our way back into Cochrane for lunch, half the group got lucky with brief, but decent looks at a gray morph Gyrfalcon perched on a roadside power pole, though unfortunately it took off before we could safely pull off for a better look. A return visit to Carburn Park that afternoon allowed us to catch everyone up with a stunning pair of Harlequin Ducks, and a bonus Merlin, and a final foray east of the city produced our final owls, another couple of Snowies, and a distant Northern Hawk-Owl.

All in all, this was a fun five days of winter birding, and I'm so glad you all chose to join us for the trip. It was a real pleasure getting to know each of you, and when all this Covid-19 mess is finally over, I look forward to meeting you all again on another tour somewhere. Special thanks to my co-leader Dan for all of his insider knowledge and local contacts, which aide so much in the successfulness of this tour, as well as to Wayne and Lynn at Halfmoon Lake, and Rick and Maureen at Waiparous Village, for their hospitality in allowing us to descend onto their properties and enjoy their wonderful feeders. Till we meet again, keep your hands clean, and keep your distance!

--Jay

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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)

**ACKLING GOOSE** (*Branta hutchinsii*) – Amid the hundreds of Canada Geese on the Bow River at Carburn Park, we picked out at least 5 of these, easily told by their small body size compared to the adjacent Canadas, as well as their short, stubby bills.

**CANADA GOOSE** (*Branta canadensis*) – Plenty were overwintering along the river in Calgary, with an estimated 600+ at Carburn Park as our high count.

**MALLARD** (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Those flocks of several hundred of these swirling around at dusk north of Calgary were a sight to see, even if the Gyrfalcon failed to come by to pick one off for dinner.

**REDHEAD** (*Aythya americana*) – The light on these birds at Carburn Park was wonderful, and the drakes looked especially handsome in it. We counted 19 or 20 of them, most of them males, among the other overwintering ducks.

**RING-NECKED DUCK** (*Aythya collaris*) – At least two males and a female were among the other ducks at Carburn Park. Interestingly, most of the *Aythya* ducks spent their time in pretty close proximity to each other.

**GREATER SCAUP** (*Aythya marila*) – Two drakes in the flock of *Aythya* ducks on the Bow River showed exceptionally well, and gave us a great opportunity to compare them with the lone drake Lesser Scaup that was also there, as they swam by us pretty much side by side. The whiter flanks of this species are especially noticeable as can be seen in Barry's excellent photo of them.

**LESSER SCAUP** (*Aythya affinis*) – The different head shape, purplish sheen to the head (rather than green in Greater) and especially the duller gray flanks were all easy to see on our lone male as it swam with a couple of male Greaters on the Bow River.

**HARLEQUIN DUCK** (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) – Only a few of the group got on these birds on our first visit to Carburn before they flew off down the river and out of sight. We were more successful on our return visit, when we found the pair in the same area as all the *Aythya*, and had excellent studies of them as they swam in, then hopped out of the water onto a partially submerged cement culvert.

**BUFFLEHEAD** (*Bucephala albeola*) – An estimated 50+ of these lovely little ducks were on the river at Carburn Park. Among diving ducks, only the next species was more numerous there.

**COMMON GOLDENEYE** (*Bucephala clangula*) – Lots on the Bow River, with many of the males displaying to nearby females, throwing their heads way back and giving a buzzy call note. Though we searched hard for Barrow's Goldeneyes which were reportedly around, we never managed to find one, though Dan and a few of the group did see a hybrid between the two goldeneyes.

**COMMON MERGANSER** (*Mergus merganser*) – There are always a few of these hanging around when there's open water, and we saw about a dozen of them along the river.

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

**RING-NECKED PHEASANT** (*Phasianus colchicus*) – Nate spotted a male in an open area along the shore, opposite from where we were watching ducks at Carburn Park, but it slipped away out of sight before he could get any of the rest of us on it. [I]

**GRAY PARTRIDGE** (*Perdix perdix*) – A bit of a mixed bag with this species, with some folks getting great looks, others only seeing them fly off.

We'd spotted some as we drove across a little gully northeast of Calgary, so we turned around and backtracked, and saw a couple of birds flying away.

When we slowed down to turn around again, folks in my van spotted a pair crouched down next to the fence, looking a little nervous. While we had good views, the birds flew off before Dan's van managed to get in a good position to view them. [I]

#### Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) – Seen daily, with hundreds at the Edmonton Grain Terminals, but sadly, nothing hunting them there. [I]

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

**GOLDEN EAGLE** (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – Our drive along the beautiful, sweeping vistas of Grand Valley Road was interrupted when one of these magnificent eagles appeared briefly alongside the vans before soaring away in the direction we'd just come from. We quickly turned around, found a safe place to pull off the road, and started scanning for the bird. To our surprise, we soon spotted a pair of them sitting atop a rocky outcrop, and though they were distant, the wonderful lighting and our scopes gave us great studies of them, golden napes and all.

**NORTHERN GOSHAWK** (*Accipiter gentilis*) – While we searched for woodpeckers at Gray Nuns Park in Edmonton, a large raptor flew in and perched in a mostly obscured spot in a nearby spruce. It didn't sit for long, but soon winged off further into the forest. At that point, I ventured off on a side track, where I found a Great Horned Owl, and while most of us were off looking at that bird, Andrew wandered along the track in the direction the hawk had flown in, and managed to relocate the bird perched out in the open in a dead tree. He hurried back to let the rest of us know, and luckily, the hawk stayed put for long enough that we all got to enjoy unobscured views of this powerful bird.

**BALD EAGLE** (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – As long as there's some open water and ducks, Bald Eagles are happy to spend the winter up here. We didn't see large numbers of them, but had a couple nearly every day, including one carrying a stick (presumably to a nest under construction) along the Bow River, and another on a roadside fencepost next to where a swarm of ravens was gathered on a deer carcass.

**ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK** (*Buteo lagopus*) – This species really seems to favor the eastern edge of the foothills to the west of Calgary, and virtually all of our sightings (8-10 birds) came from that region, with most being seen on roadside power poles.

#### Strigidae (Owls)

**GREAT HORNED OWL** (*Bubo virginianus*) – Alberta's most common owl species, and its Provincial bird. We found two of these owls in the Edmonton region, the first was perched on a fence on a rural property in the late afternoon. It flew back into a nearby stand of cottonwoods when we stopped, and it was pretty impressive how it melted into the backdrop, even though it remained in plain sight. I stumbled across the second bird perched out in the open in Grey Nun's Park, and it sat completely unperturbed as we quietly admired it and snapped pictures. In this region of Alberta, only the pale subspecies subarcticus is likely to occur, though the first bird appeared to have some rufous coloring in its plumage, particularly in the facial disk. Apparently, though it isn't unusual for some individuals to show some rufous.

**SNOWY OWL** (*Bubo scandiacus*) – Not a bad year for this magnificent owl, as we found at least 8 different birds with a minimum amount of effort. Our first was a quite distant one east of Edmonton, and the second was seen along Highway 2 as we headed south to Calgary. But it was around Calgary that we finally got some truly satisfying views. A spin around the back roads northeast of the city one afternoon saw us tally 4 Snowies, including a nearly pure white male teed up on a fencepost and a younger, and much closer bird on a roadside power pole. Not surprisingly, this owl always garners a few votes as bird of the trip, but only Leslie chose it as her top bird overall.

**NORTHERN HAWK OWL** (*Surnia ulula*) – Three different hawk-owls had been located on winter territories in the Calgary region this winter, which was excellent news as this species can be hard to find some winters. We headed down to the most reliable one near the town of High River on our first morning out of the city, and Molly did a good job to spot the bird initially, as it was a long way from the road, and not very visible. Even in the scope, it was just barely countable at first, but we had it in sight, so we simply stayed put and waited it out. Eventually, the bird flew somewhat closer to the road, where it sat atop a tree for a bit before dropping from its perch and winging low and fast over the ground. It then pounced into a ditch, out of our sight, and shortly afterward, reappeared and returned to its perch with a vole in its grasp. This was better, though the bird was still quite distant, but shortly after swallowing its prey, the owl was on the move again, this time angling towards a stand of tall trees near the road. We hurriedly made our way up the road, and found it sitting up at very close range, completely unconcerned with all of us admiring it from the roadside. Lengthy scope views commenced, as did loads of photographs, as the bird simply posed for us. We eventually pulled ourselves away, and just as we were about to leave, it flew once again, crossing the road, and perching up in even better light, though by this time we were all pretty satisfied with our encounter. Despite only getting a single first place pick on behalf of Jim, this owl was the overall 2nd favorite bird of the trip.

**NORTHERN PYGMY-OWL** (*Glaucidium gnoma*) – We had an incredible encounter with this little owl on our second visit to Shannon Terrace in Calgary's Fish Creek Provincial Park after striking out the first time. Thanks to a tip from some friends of Dan's, we managed to track down this owl for some nice views, then, as with the hawk-owl, had the bird fly closer to us, giving us even better looks! Better yet, the owl, seemingly in response to the presence of some chickadees that had just noticed it, transformed itself from a rotund, fluffy looking ball of feathers into a sleek, stretched-out version of itself. It also raised the feathers above its eyes so that they appeared to be ear tufts as in some of the larger owls. I had never seen this before, and had no idea pygmy-owls even did that! It was truly impressive to watch this transformation happen in just a couple of seconds, then to see it relax again and return to its original form. Wow! Though we were all impressed, Jan and Donna (and Dan) were perhaps, most impressed of all, as they chose this as their favorite bird of the trip.

**GREAT GRAY OWL** (*Strix nebulosa*) – The undisputed bird of the trip! Barry gets credit for spotting this one, picking it out atop a bare tree in an open pasture along Grand Valley Road. Once again, good luck was with us, as the bird, after sitting for a while, took off and flew in our direction, stopping on a much closer tree in the same pasture. It then proceeded to hunt, first flying up into the air, then pouncing down into the snow, each time coming up empty, though it did appear to be trying to get a better grip on something on one attempt. Watching this magnificent owl was certainly a highlight for us all, even those of us who have seen plenty of them. Who could tire of seeing these gorgeous gray ghosts? Half of the group--Barry, Teri, Andrew, Nate, and David--picked this as their favorite bird of the trip.

**SHORT-EARED OWL** (*Asio flammeus*) – Spotting distant owls and then having them fly in closer to us was almost a theme of the trip, as this was yet another species that behaved in this manner. It was near dusk on our first day when folks in Dan's van, out in the lead, spied one of these flying away from the road over an open marshy area. By the time I pulled up in my van, the bird was quite distant, though still easily identifiable, but we were hoping for more, and so we stood and watched as it continued to course low over the grasses. Eventually it appeared to be working its way back in our direction, and before long, it had almost reached the road. Finally, it made a couple of close passes, seemingly looking right at us at one point, and giving us all a truly satisfying encounter. We also saw a couple of others at the same site, though they were much further away than this original bird. This was Molly's favorite bird of the tour.

#### Picidae (Woodpeckers)

**AMERICAN THREE-TOED WOODPECKER** (*Picoides dorsalis*) – Black-backed Woodpecker is usually the regular *Picoides* woodpecker in Grey Nun's Park, but this winter, a female of this species had been somewhat more reliable. It didn't really take us too long to track down this woodpecker either and she was pretty nonplussed by our presence as she continued to hammer away at the tree trunk she was working on as we enjoyed our views

from a short distance away. After we'd left her to continue our walk, a couple of us had a brief look at another Picoides, which may have been a Black-backed, but it took off before we could improve our views, and we couldn't find it again.

**DOWNY WOODPECKER** (*Dryobates pubescens*) – By far the most commonly seen woodpecker, with 30+ birds seen over the 5 days of the tour.

**HAIRY WOODPECKER** (*Dryobates villosus*) – Larger, and generally less common than the Downy; though we also recorded this species daily, we only had about 1 half dozen of them in total. We had an especially good chance to compare the two species at the feeders in Waiparous Village that we visited on our final morning.

**PILEATED WOODPECKER** (*Dryocopus pileatus*) – We didn't fare too well with this big guy, getting just a poor fly by on our first morning, as we drove a bunch of back roads northeast of Edmonton.

**NORTHERN FLICKER** (*Colaptes auratus*) – One of the truly cool things about birding in Alberta is that many closely-related species pairs, or subspecies pairs have their ranges meet here in the province. In the case of the flickers, that means a fair bit of hybridization between the western, Red-shafted form and the eastern Yellow-shafted form. In fact, most, if not all, the flickers we saw in Calgary were probably hybrids. We certainly saw some with yellow feather shafts, others with red shafts, and some that definitely had traits of both forms, including one male with yellow feather shafts and the red nape patch of yellow-shafted and the red malar stripe of the red-shafted form.

#### Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

**MERLIN** (*Falco columbarius*) – Only two birds were seen, the first only by Dan's van after we'd split up to cover more ground on our first morning out of Edmonton. Our second, a female, was seen by all as she sat up on a treetop along the Bow River at Carburn Park.

**GYRFALCON** (*Falco rusticolus*) – Our vans had gotten separated due to dropped cell signals on our last morning northwest of Calgary, so, not knowing where Dan was, and as it was nearing lunchtime, I decided we'd head towards the restaurant in the town of Cochrane. Just before reaching the town, though, we drove past a raptor perched on a power pole, and, though I'd had a poor, backlit view, something about it made me want to check it out, so we quickly turned around and drove back towards it. Still well away from the bird, we stopped on the highway for a look, and quickly realized it was a gray morph Gyr! Unfortunately, right at that moment, two vehicles came, one from each direction, and I had to move the van as I was blocking the road. Even worse luck, the falcon flew off just as we were driving past again, and by the time I managed to pull off the highway, it was nowhere to be seen. We drove around for a while hoping to relocate it, but it could easily have flown miles away.

#### Laniidae (Shrikes)

**NORTHERN SHRIKE** (*Lanius borealis*) – This winter specialty was around in fair numbers in the Edmonton region, and almost all of our sightings came on our first day out of the city, as we saw 4 of our 5 birds that day, with great scope looks at our first perched in the windrow of a rural property. Our only sighting after that day was a single bird northwest of Calgary on our final day.

#### Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

**CANADA JAY** (*Perisoreus canadensis*) – Four or five of these iconic boreal forest birds visited Maureen and Rick's feeders in Waiparous Village on our final morning.

**STELLER'S JAY** (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) – This jay reaches the eastern edge of its range along the western border of Alberta, and it is generally quite scarce in the province, other than at Waterton Lakes National Park in the southwest corner. In fact, the bird we had at the Waiparous Village feeders was my first in the province away from Waterton. It also gave us a clean sweep of the province's Corvids, and a sweep of the three jays at those feeders!

**BLUE JAY** (*Cyanocitta cristata*) – This widespread and familiar jay of the east seems to have expanded its range in Alberta quite a bit since I was growing up here. We saw them primarily at feeders, with up to 8 of them at Rick and Maureen's feeders alongside the Canada and Steller's jays.

**BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE** (*Pica hudsonia*) – Though many Albertans aren't too enamored with magpies, as they are both noisy and aggressive, I have always loved these birds since the day my family first arrived in the province back in 1976. A very common bird throughout, and we saw bunches of them every day.

**CLARK'S NUTCRACKER** (*Nucifraga columbiana*) – This dapper Corvid gave us another good reason to visit Waiparous Village, and we had excellent close views of several of them that joined the throngs of other birds at the feeders.

**AMERICAN CROW** (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Most crows leave the province in winter, though there are usually a handful that hang out in Calgary each year. We saw 10+ in the Shannon Terrace area of the city.

**COMMON RAVEN** (*Corvus corax*) – Ravens were once found mainly in the northern forests and the mountains, but in the past couple of decades they have become increasingly common in the province away from these areas, too. We had plenty of them daily.

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

**BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE** (*Poecile atricapillus*) – The most catholic of the chickadees in terms of their habitat preference, this species can be found virtually throughout the province and they were by far the most numerous chickadee seen on the tour.

**MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE** (*Poecile gambeli*) – As the name suggests, this is primarily a montane species, though a few birds do move into the Calgary region each winter in places such as Fish Creek PP, where we saw our first ones among a group of other birds mobbing in response to our pygmy-owl imitations. We also had a few at the Waiparous Village feeders.

**BOREAL CHICKADEE** (*Poecile hudsonicus*) – How many places do you know where you can see three species of chickadees in one spot? We had this happen a couple of times, both at Shannon Terrace and Rick and Maureen's feeders, though we encountered our first Bo-Chicks in the Edmonton area at Halfmoon Lake.

#### Sittidae (Nuthatches)

**RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH** (*Sitta canadensis*) – Though we encountered White-breasted Nuthatches more widely on the tour, this is the more widespread and common nuthatch in the province. So it was a bit surprising to not see any at all in the Edmonton region. We finally caught up with a couple of these at Carburn Park and Shannon Terrace.

**WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH** (*Sitta carolinensis*) – More a species of deciduous and mixed forest types than the conifer-loving Red-breasted. We had small numbers of these at most of the forested areas visited.

#### Certhiidae (Treecreepers)

**BROWN CREEPER** (*Certhia americana*) – Just a couple of records, with one at Carburn Park in a flock with our first Red-breasted Nuthatches. The other was at Rick and Maureen's feeders, and not just nearby, but actually feeding on their feeders! I had never before heard of or seen a creeper at any feeders anywhere, so this was quite a surprise!

#### Sturnidae (Starlings)

**EUROPEAN STARLING** (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Most starlings leave the province for the winter, though some do overwinter in favorable locations, including at farms with livestock. A horse farm northeast of Edmonton had about 20 of these, which were pretty much the only ones we saw. [I]

*Bombycillidae (Waxwings)*

**BOHEMIAN WAXWING** (*Bombycilla garrulus*) – This boreal specialty varies in number from winter to winter depending on food availability. They also wander quite widely and are often seen only as large flocks passing overhead. And most of our encounters were exactly that, flocks flying past, often while we were driving. But we did have one great encounter with a flock of 39 birds that flew in and landed in the top of a tall spruce just above where we were walking along the path at Shannon Terrace.

*Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)*

**HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus*) – Mainly seen in and around Calgary, but we also saw a number among the many starlings at a horse farm northeast of Edmonton. [I]

*Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)*

**EVENING GROSBEAK** (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*) – There seem to be few reliable spots for this species nowadays in Alberta, but luckily, one of them is on our tour route. The feeders at Halfmoon Lake had about 15 of these gorgeous birds, and we enjoyed some wonderful studies of them alongside the next species.

**PINE GROSBEAK** (*Pinicola enucleator*) – More widespread than the Evening Grosbeaks, and in addition to a dozen or so at Wayne and Lynn's Halfmoon Lake feeders, we also saw 10-20 of these lovely birds daily in the Calgary region. If you recall, this is the species that was pictured on the old (pink) Canadian \$1000 bill!

**COMMON REDPOLL** (*Acanthis flammea*) – It wasn't an especially good finch year in Alberta this winter (with crossbills being notably absent) but the Edmonton region still had some fair numbers of these redpolls, and we had several flocks of 15-30 birds over our two days around Edmonton.

**PINE SISKIN** (*Spinus pinus*) – A dozen or so each at both the Halfmoon lake and Waiparous Village feeders. At the latter site we were particularly entertained by one male that sat nearby and sang a long and varied song. I guess spring was in the air!

*Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings)*

**SNOW BUNTING** (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) – Although we had a group of 30+ birds east of Edmonton, and another 70-80 northeast of Calgary, we never really got amazing views of any of them, though we did manage to get some scope looks at the latter group after they sat up in some tall, rather distant cottonwoods.

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## MAMMALS

**WHITE-TAILED JACKRABBIT** (*Lepus townsendi*) – This large hare is quite common in the prairies, and they are quite striking in their white, winter pelage. As a group we saw just one in an industrial area near the Mallard gathering spot in Calgary, though some folks also saw one around our hotel in the city.

**EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL** (*Sciurus carolinensis*) – For unknown reasons, this species was introduced to Calgary and is now pretty common throughout the city.

**RED SQUIRREL** (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) – The common arboreal squirrel through most of the province. We saw them almost daily.

**COYOTE** (*Canis latrans*) – Coyotes are a familiar sight in Alberta, and we saw more than a dozen of them over the 5 days, including a group of 4 together on the outskirts of Cochrane.

**MULE DEER** (*Odocoileus hemionus*) – Both deer are numerous in the province, though we saw more of the next species, with this one seen mainly in the regions west of Calgary, closer to the mountains.

**WHITE-TAILED DEER** (*Odocoileus virginianus*) – Plenty were seen, including some very tame ones in Carburn Park.

**MOOSE** (*Alces alces*) – The Opal area always seems to be good for moose, and we saw all 5 of our moose on that first day around Opal, including one female (accompanied by a yearling) that appeared to be blind.

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## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

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**Totals for the tour: 53 bird taxa and 7 mammal taxa**