

Field Guides Tour Report
YELLOWSTONE IN WINTER

Jan 14, 2012 to Jan 22, 2012
Terry & Karen McEneaney



The group enjoys an invigorating stroll alongside one of Yellowstone's magnificent thermal features, without the crowds of summer! (Photo by guide Terry McEneaney)

Our 2012 Yellowstone In Winter tour met expectations and in some cases exceeded expectations. First of all the winter conditions were perfect. Since everyone was well prepared and dressed for the occasion, no one felt cold on this adventure, and a "Yellowstone In Winter" adventure it was! We set Field Guides "Yellowstone In Winter" numerical wildlife records for Gyrfalcon, Bohemian Waxwing, Common Redpoll and Townsend's Solitaire, but our greatest experience of all was finding 30 Gray Wolves! We watched wolf territorial interactions as the Mollie's pack (19 individuals) came into contact with the Lamar Valley pack (11 individuals). Our most memorable sighting was the pack of 19 individual wolves traveling a snow-corniced ridge, following each other's footsteps to save energy in the deep snow. It was a classic "Yellowstone in Winter" Field Guides experience.

Thanks for joining us on this winter adventure, and we look forward to seeing you on another tour someday soon.

-Terry & Karen

For more information about this tour, including future departures, please visit our website at www.fieldguides.com

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) – Seen 5 out of 8 days, mainly at lower elevations.

TRUMPETER SWAN (*Cygnus buccinator*) – Saw over 100 of these majestic birds; 122 to be exact. Also heard them make their bugle or trumpet calls.

TUNDRA SWAN (*Cygnus columbianus*) – Saw a family group of 5 (2 adults, 3 cygnets) on water and in flight. Heard their calls as well.

WOOD DUCK (*Aix sponsa*) – Saw 50 or so on day 1. One of the most beautiful ducks in the world.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*) – Saw 25 on days 1, 2, and 6.

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*) – Saw 4 out of 8 days, including a few on the Madison River in YNP.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Seen over a thousand individuals total and found everyday of the tour.

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – Surprisingly large numbers (200+) quite unusual for this time of year.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN) (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) – Small numbers found primarily on the first day.

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*) – Found on first two days and in small numbers.

BUFFLEHEAD (*Bucephala albeola*) – Found 4 out of 8 days, the first four to be exact, and in small numbers.

COMMON GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala clangula*) – Found on all 8 days. Excellent comparisons with Barrow's Goldeneye on 1st day.

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala islandica*) – Found on all 8 days. Excellent comparisons with Common Goldeneye on 1st day.

COMMON MERGANSER (*Mergus merganser*) – Found in small numbers on the first three days.



A small sampling of the 1000+ Mallards seen on the tour. The males are truly stunning in their fresh breeding plumage. (Photo by guide Terry McEneaney)

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

RUFFED GROUSE (*Bonasa umbellus*) – Found two separate individuals at two different locations. One was an excellent view looking down on the bird, the other just glimpses of a feeding bird

WILD TURKEY (*Meleagris gallopavo*) – Saw them on 3 out of the 8 days. Some tom's even strutting or displaying.

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*) – A lone individual near Belgrade. Very unusual to see an Am. White Pelican this time of year. It's coloration and behavior suggests the bird was perhaps sick or even lead-poisoned.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – We saw approximately 55 individuals, most of them being adults.

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*) – Had a close encounter as this bird flew in front of the first van in Livingston. Then all participants got great views of the perched bird thru the scope.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – Had over a dozen varied Red-tailed Hawks including a dark morph and a Harlan's race.

ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK (*Buteo lagopus*) – Saw 60 plus individuals of all colors and persuasions. The most beautiful being a nearly completely blonde individual. No winter tour is complete without Rough-legged Hawks. [b]

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*)

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

GYRFALCON (*Falco rusticolus*) [b]

PRAIRIE FALCON (*Falco mexicanus*) – We got to see Prairie Falcons on three out of the eight days. We saw no more than 2 individuals at once. On one encounter a male was eating what appeared to be a gray partridge. Anyway excellent views of Prairie Falcons.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Seen four out of eight days.

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – Saw in excess of 50 individuals near Belgrade.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon*) – Got to see at least 4 individuals near Belgrade and on Madison River in YNP.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*) – Seen and heard on days 7 and 8.

NORTHERN FLICKER (*Colaptes auratus*) – Got to see nearly a dozen particularly on day 7.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

GRAY JAY (*Perisoreus canadensis*) – Saw one individual at Cooke City.

STELLER'S JAY (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) – Saw 2-3 individuals coming to feeders on day 5.

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE (*Pica hudsonia*)

CLARK'S NUTCRACKER (*Nucifraga columbiana*) – Found them 6 out of 8 days. 2-3 dozen individuals.

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Found several murders of crows at Belgrade, Bozeman, Paradise Valley, and in Gardiner (45-YNP MT).

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*) – Hundreds of mischievous ravens-mainly in the Paradise Valley and in Bozeman. Numbers in Gardiner and in YNP seemed to be lower than normal.

Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE (*Poecile atricapillus*) – Found 2 out of 8 days. Less than a dozen. Fairly good looks.

MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE (*Poecile gambeli*) – Found 2 out of 8 days. Half dozen. Good looks.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*) – Only one individual at a feeder.

Cinclidae (Dippers)

AMERICAN DIPPER (*Cinclus mexicanus*) – Figured we saw 30-40 dippers, mainly in YNP.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE (*Myadestes townsendi*) – Saw dozens of solitaire's (perhaps 80 plus), 7 out of 8 days.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*) – Only saw them 3 out of 8 days, mainly out of the park.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Several flocks on the first day (under 300 individuals)

Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

BOHEMIAN WAXWING (*Bombycilla garrulus*) – Counted over 4,000 individuals for the trip. This was a FG Yellowstone In Winter record. Seen 6 out of 8 days. Unbelievable views. [b]

CEDAR WAXWING (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) – Seen days 1 and 6. A flock of 50 and 55.

Emberizidae (Buntings, Sparrows and Allies)

AMERICAN TREE SPARROW (*Spizella arborea*) – Seen days 1 and 7. Less than 6 individuals.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (*Junco hyemalis*) – Only one individual of the pink-sided race in Gardiner.

Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)



Though often referred to as an antelope, the Pronghorn is in a family all its own, and seems to be most closely related to the giraffes! (Photo by guide Terry McEneaney)

GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH (*Leucosticte tephrocotis*) – Saw over 1300 individuals, for some reason very flighty. Got great close-up views of both the gray-crowned and Hepburn race to compare details.

PINE GROSBEAK (*Pinicola enucleator*) – Seen days 3 and 5. Close to two dozen individuals (males, females). Great bird.

HOUSE FINCH (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) – Observed on day 6. A half dozen in Gardiner.

RED CROSSBILL (*Loxia curvirostra*) – These were flyovers on day 3. Dozen or so.

COMMON REDPOLL (*Acanthis flammea*) – Surprisingly large numbers of individuals, another FG Yellowstone In Winter record. Found days 3, 4, and 6 and totaling 180 plus individuals. [b]

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Seen 4 out of 8 days.

MAMMALS

RED SQUIRREL (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) – One individual on day 2.

MUSKRAT (*Ondatra zibethica*) – Two individuals on day 1.

COYOTE (*Canis latrans*) – Over 20 individuals. Some were approaching denning period and showed courtship behavior. Saw a few feeding on elk carcasses and one mousing.

GRAY WOLF (*Canis lupus*) – Saw a whopping 30 individuals from two different packs (11 Lamar Valley and 19 Mollie's). This is another FG Yellowstone In Winter record. We also had wonderful comparison of wolves versus coyote both in sight and in sound. The best were the wolves howling at close range.

ELK (*Cervus canadensis*) – Observed over 1500 elk.

MULE DEER (*Odocoileus hemionus*) – Observed over 400 mule deer.

WHITE-TAILED DEER (*Odocoileus virginianus*) – Counted over 800 white-tails.

PRONGHORN (*Antilocapra americana*) – Over 200 found. Beautiful grassland mammal.

AMERICAN BISON (*Bison bison*) – Found over 1300 bison.

BIGHORN SHEEP (*Ovis canadensis*) – Found over 130 bighorns—both ewes and lambs of year and large rams in 5 herds.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

The FG Yellowstone in Winter tour went very well. Although winter was slow in coming we made up for it with cold temperatures and by experiencing 2 ground blizzards. Thank goodness. It was a real Yellowstone in Winter experience for the entire trip. We had sun the first, second, and last couple days. Although we did not experience the snow events of last year, our experience was equally grand. Everyone appeared to have a wonderful time, and greeted the blizzard as a unique experience of a lifetime.

We ended up with approximately 52 species of birds and 10 species of mammals—not bad considering the blizzards and stormy skies. Numerical bird highlights of the trip included: one rare Gyrfalcon to start off the trip, over 3-4,000 Bohemian Waxwings to end the trip, 100+ Cedar Waxwing, 150+ Common Redpoll, over 1,300 Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches (including Hepburn race), 60 Townsend's Solitaire, 60 Golden Eagle, 50 Bald Eagles, 60 Rough-legged Hawk, 40 American Dipper, and 2 Prairie Falcon. For mammals the numerical highlights were equally impressive: over 1300 elk, over 800 white-tailed deer, over 400 mule deer, over 1300 bison, approximately 150 bighorn sheep, 200 pronghorn, 2 muskrat, 20 coyotes, and a whopping total of 30 wolves (a FG Yellowstone In Winter tour record).

But the wildlife interactions and inter-relationships of various prey and predators in a winter environment really made this a great memorable trip. Thanks for allowing us the opportunity to show you Yellowstone In Winter. It has been a pleasurable experience. Take good care! And we hope to see you again!

Terry and Karen McEneaney

Totals for the tour: 52 bird taxa and 10 mammal taxa