



*Field Guides Tour Report*  
**Yellowstone in Winter 2014**

Jan 17, 2014 to Jan 25, 2014  
Terry & Karen McEneaney

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



*Barrow's Goldeneyes, by guide Terry McEneaney*

The 2014 Field Guides Yellowstone In Winter tour materialized into a wonderful experience, right up there as one of the best. 2014 also marked the 15th anniversary of our inception of the YIW tour. We think it offers a perfect Yellowstone winter experience, combining Yellowstone birds and mammals with the field experience of your guides, former rangers in the park.

Snow and cold are necessary for good wildlife viewing results, and we managed to have both. The lowest temperatures on this trip reached only -17F, but the conditions were amazing. We basically had eight days of incredibly unseasonable weather, and we can never recollect seeing Yellowstone so photogenic. The diamond dust (ice crystals) in the air slightly blocked out the direct sun, allowing for incredible shadows on the landscape. Some of us even got to see a rare phenomenon known as a fogbow or steambow, in others words an arch of steam surrounding the sun and mimicking a rainbow. We also found rare ice crystals that resembled bird feathers, hence the term "feather crystals." In spite of the mild conditions in the valleys, we ended up tallying 52 species of birds and 16 species of mammals, similar to our 2013 tallies. These are expected numbers for birds and slightly above expected numbers of mammals for a YIW tour. Bird highlights included super looks at three Prairie Falcons at separate locations. We also found two cooperative Merlins (both females, one taiga form of columbarius race and one prairie or Northern Great Plains form, richardsonii).

Additionally we found the following birds worthy of note: 130 Bohemian Waxwings, 56 American Dippers, and super looks at a total of 7 Red Crossbills on two separate occasions. Other highlight birds included one Canvasback and one Tundra Swan. Our biggest bird numbers were: 55 Trumpeter Swans, 180 Barrow's Goldeneyes, 210 Common Goldeneyes, 25 Golden Eagles, 70 Bald Eagles, 60 Rough-legged Hawks, 25 Red-tailed Hawks (which included one dark morph Harlan's), 140 Eurasian Collared-Doves, 48 Pinyon Jays, 45 Townsend's Solitaires, and 5 Pine Grosbeaks. And surprisingly, 4 Wild Turkeys in isolated Silver Gate, Montana, a first ever in this heavy snow area (they were being fed by locals).

We watched some wonderful wildlife behaviors as well: dozens of ravens attacking two adult Golden Eagles on the Madison River; close views of Red Crossbills at West Thumb; close-up views of diving dippers; a male otter surfacing in a thermal hole only to mark its territory; two Red Foxes hunting for voles.

Our mammal list was quite impressive: 2 Gray Wolves, 16 Coyotes, 700 Elk, 240 Mule Deer, 1100 White-tails, 140 Pronghorn, 2,000+ Bison, 1 White-tailed Jackrabbit, 2 Red Foxes, and 67 Bighorn Sheep. The rarest mammals on this tour were a NA River Otter, a Pine Marten, and two bull Moose (they are becoming a rarity). Very few groups came in contact with these last three species. Being at the right place at the right time helps immensely.

We saw very few visitors during our stay, in fact probably fewer than 800 people in YNP. Our group dynamics were fabulous, and the group jelled from the get go. We shared a lot of great experiences with wildlife, telling personal stories, and laughing. The wildlife was sensational, but the Yellowstone thermal features stole the show. Yellowstone continues to be a magical place in the winter, a wonderland like no other. Our Field Guides Yellowstone In Winter tour continues to be one of North America's best-kept secrets.

Thanks so much for traveling with us, and for letting us share with you this unique experience. Take good care until we meet again!

--Terry and Karen

## 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*) – Found 6 out of 8 days in the field. Est. approx. 350 observed. MT and WY.
- TRUMPETER SWAN** (*Cygnus buccinator*) – Found 6 out of 8 days in the field. Est. approx. 65 observed (MT and WY).
- TUNDRA SWAN** (*Cygnus columbianus*) – One lone individual in Montana on day one.
- WOOD DUCK** (*Aix sponsa*) – On day one located approx. 12 individuals in Montana.
- GADWALL** (*Anas strepera*) – Found days one and seven. Found about 8 individuals.
- AMERICAN WIGEON** (*Anas americana*) – Found 4 out of 8 days in field in MT and WY, about 18 wigeon total.
- MALLARD** (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Found every day--est. 1,000.
- NORTHERN PINTAIL** (*Anas acuta*) – Found days one and eight. Total 8.
- GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN)** (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) – Found on days 5 and 6, YNP MT, 4 individuals.
- CANVASBACK** (*Aythya valisineria*) – Found one lone individual-a male or drake-on day one.
- RING-NECKED DUCK** (*Aythya collaris*) – Found about a dozen individuals on days 1 and 2 and 8.
- LESSER SCAUP** (*Aythya affinis*) – 1-2 individuals on day 8.
- BUFFLEHEAD** (*Bucephala albeola*) – Found about 10 individuals total on six out of the eight days in the field.
- COMMON GOLDENEYE** (*Bucephala clangula*) – Found every day--approximately 150 total.
- BARROW'S GOLDENEYE** (*Bucephala islandica*) – Super views at this attractive duck. Found many drakes and hens of different age classes. Observed every day--120 total.
- HOODED MERGANSER** (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) – Found three different individuals on days 2 and 3 on the Madison and Yellowstone rivers in YNP, and on day 6 in YNP MT on Gardner R.
- COMMON MERGANSER** (*Mergus merganser*) – Found six (3 and 3) individuals total on days 2 and 4 all in YNP.
- RUDDY DUCK** (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – One lone individual on the Gibbon River-YNP.

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

- RING-NECKED PHEASANT** (*Phasianus colchicus*) – Found about a dozen individuals total- seen on days 1 and 8. All in MT.
- WILD TURKEY** (*Meleagris gallopavo*)

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

- GREAT BLUE HERON** (*Ardea herodias*) – Found 1-2 individuals on day 8.

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

- GOLDEN EAGLE** (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – Had a heyday watching this king of birds. Found approx. 25 individuals. Some involved wonderful study of eagles in different age classes. Found 5 out of 8 days in the field.
- BALD EAGLE** (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – Found about 70 individuals of different age classes, and seen every day.
- RED-TAILED HAWK** (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – Found about 20 different colored individuals, including one Harlan's Hawk. Found on days 1, 7, and 8.
- ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK** (*Buteo lagopus*) – Found about 60 individuals of many color persuasions. Found days 1, 7, and 8.

### Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

- ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) – Under the most recent classification these are essentially feral. Nonetheless we found 120 individuals total on 4 out of 8 days.
- EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE** (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – Regardless of how it got to NA, it is still a beautiful bird with a wonderful cooing sound. Found 140 individuals total, encompassing days 1 and 8.

### Strigidae (Owls)

- GREAT HORNED OWL** (*Bubo virginianus*) – Calling in the Paradise Valley. [\*]

### Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

- BELTED KINGFISHER** (*Megasceryle alcyon*) – Found 2 individuals total on days 4 and 7 --all in YNP (Gardner and Firehole rivers).

### Picidae (Woodpeckers)

- DOWNY WOODPECKER** (*Picoides pubescens*) – Probably same individual 2 days in a row-days 5 and 6.
- HAIRY WOODPECKER** (*Picoides villosus*)
- NORTHERN FLICKER** (*Colaptes auratus*) – Found lone individuals on days 1, 6, and 7.

### Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

- MERLIN** (*Falco columbarius*) – Found two individuals, both were females, one of the columbarius race, the other of the richardsonii race. Found days 1 and 8.
- PRAIRIE FALCON** (*Falco mexicanus*) – Found 3 individuals total on days 7 and 8. Wonderful views of this fast avian predator.

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

- GRAY JAY** (*Perisoreus canadensis*) – Found only two individuals, one super look on Norris Hill in YNP WY, the other outside YNP in MT.
- PINYON JAY** (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*)

**STELLER'S JAY** (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) – Found several individuals in Montana.  
**BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE** (*Pica hudsonia*) – Found 5 out of the 8 days in the field and about 90 individuals.  
**CLARK'S NUTCRACKER** (*Nucifraga columbiana*) – Found about a dozen or so, on days 3-7.  
**AMERICAN CROW** (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Found about 60 individuals on days 1 and 8.  
**COMMON RAVEN** (*Corvus corax*) – Found every day, and counted in excess of 115 individuals.

*Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)*

**BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE** (*Parus atricapillus*) – Found 4 total on days 6 and 7.  
**MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE** (*Parus gambeli*) – Found about 30 individuals on days 2-6.

*Sittidae (Nuthatches)*

**RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH** (*Sitta canadensis*) – Found 4 near Fishing Bridge (YNP)

*Certhiidae (Treecreepers)*

**BROWN CREEPER** (*Certhia americana*) – Found 2 at Old Faithful on day 2.

*Cinclidae (Dippers)*

**AMERICAN DIPPER** (*Cinclus mexicanus*) – Found a whopping 56 individuals. A great dipper year with incredible views. Found days 1-7.

*Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)*

**TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE** (*Myadestes townsendi*)

*Sturnidae (Starlings)*

**EUROPEAN STARLING** (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – 220 individuals on days 1, 5, and 8.

*Bombycillidae (Waxwings)*

**BOHEMIAN WAXWING** (*Bombycilla garrulus*) – After careful searching found 130 individuals total, on days 2, 5 and 8. In MT and in YNP WY.  
Very windy, finally got super views.

*Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)*

**PINE GROSBEAK** (*Pinicola enucleator*) – Only 5 seen, all in MT and outside YNP.  
**RED CROSSBILL** (*Loxia curvirostra*) – Seven seen total (3 and 4 respectively) at W Thumb and Norris Hill in YNP.

*Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)*

**HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus*) – Est. about 110 seen.

---

## MAMMALS

**NUTTALL'S (MOUNTAIN) COTTONTAIL** (*Sylvilagus nuttalli*) – One individual on day 7.  
**WHITE-TAILED JACKRABBIT** (*Lepus townsendi*) – One individual seen in the headlights on day 6.  
**RED SQUIRREL** (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) – Found two different individuals on day 4.  
**MUSKRAT** (*Ondatra zibethica*) – Two individuals one in YNP and one in MT, days 2 and 7.  
**RED FOX** (*Vulpes vulpes*) – Found 2 colorful individuals, one on Fountain Flats another in Hayden Valley (YNP).  
**COYOTE** (*Canis latrans*) – Saw over 16 coyotes--near Bozeman and in YNP. Seen 7 of 8 days.  
**GRAY WOLF** (*Canis lupus*) – Found a black and another gray wolf that formed a small pack. Found them on two different days. Given the weather conditions, were fortunate for many others had not seen wolves at all.  
**AMERICAN PINE MARTEN** (*Martes americana*) – Saw 2 pine martens, one in YNP near Nymph Lake another outside YNP in MT.  
**NORTH AMERICAN RIVER OTTER** (*Lontra canadensis*) – It helps to know where they hang out. Found one male in YNP on Yell Plateau on day 3. Few groups got to see River Otter, which has really declined over the years. This one was marking its territory.  
**ELK** (*Cervus canadensis*) – Seen 7 of the 8 days in the field. Getting less numerous in the interior of YNP in winter. Saw about 900 total on Northern Range in YNP and outside YNP.  
**MULE DEER** (*Odocoileus hemionus*) – Found 5 of 8 days in the field. 240 total.  
**WHITE-TAILED DEER** (*Odocoileus virginianus*) – Found 3 out of the 8 days in the field. Over 1,100 observed.  
**MOOSE** (*Alces alces*) – We were one of the lucky ones. Moose are becoming extremely hard to locate due to their low numbers. Located 2 bulls (one with antlers and one that had shed its antlers) on the Northern Range.  
**PRONGHORN** (*Antilocapra americana*) – Found 140 individuals on 4 out of the 8 days in the field.  
**AMERICAN BISON** (*Bison bison*) – The most visibly common mammal seen in Yellowstone these days, we observed about 2,500 individuals of the 4,700 or so found in YNP. Found them 7 of 8 days in the field.  
**BIGHORN SHEEP** (*Ovis canadensis*) – Counted 67 total, including nice pics of rams and ewes, and lambs of the year. Found four of the eight days in the field.

---

## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

---

Totals for the tour: 52 bird taxa and 16 mammal taxa