



*Lekking Greater Prairie Chicken (Craig Robson)*

# **COLORADO**

**3 – 15 APRIL 2019**

**LEADER CRAIG ROBSON**

Our 2019 'grousequest' marked our eighth clean sweep in a row of the 'magnificent seven': White-tailed Ptarmigan, Greater and Lesser Prairie Chickens, and Dusky, Sharp-tailed, Gunnison and Greater Sage Grouse. Despite fears of treacherous conditions, following a heavy late snowfall in parts of the Rockies, the weather caused us relatively few problems compared with our previous tour in 2017.

Although the grouse and prairie chickens made the headlines in Colorado, there were many other avian highlights, including: Mexican Duck, Barrow's Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Scaled Quail, Wild Turkey, Western and Clark's Grebes, Swainson's Hawk, Virginia Rail, Sora, Mountain Plover, Long-billed Curlew,

Franklin's and California Gulls, Burrowing Owls, White-throated Swift, Lewis's and American Three-toed Woodpeckers, Williamson's Sapsucker, Prairie Falcon, Grey, Pinyon and Woodhouse's Scrub Jays, Clark's Nutcracker, Mountain Chickadee, Juniper Titmouse, American Bushtit, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Rock, Canyon, Marsh and Bewick's Wrens, Pygmy Nuthatch, Sage and Curve-billed Thrashers, all three bluebirds, Townsend's Solitaire, American Dipper, Grey-crowned, Black and Brown-capped Rosy Finches, Cassin's Finch, Pine and Evening Grosbeaks, Slate-colored Fox, Brewer's, Sagebrush, Black-throated and Rufous-crowned Sparrows, and Chestnut-collared and McCown's Longspurs.

Colorado is great for mammals too, and this year we found: American Beaver, a good number of excellent North American Porcupines, three species of prairie dog, Abert's and Rock Squirrels, Nevada, Golden-mantled, Spotted and Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrels, Elk (Red Deer), Bighorn Sheep, and the athletic Pronghorn.

As usual, after meeting-up at Denver's smart international airport, we headed westwards into the Rocky Mountains to the pretty former mining town of Georgetown for a two nights stay. Our first full day in the field began at some reliable feeders in the Silverthorne area. The much-wanted Black Rosy Finch somehow evaded us, and we could only find relatively low numbers of rather skittish Brown-capped Rosy Finches, another key species on this tour. We were not too worried though, with other sites to come, and we enjoyed the likes of Hairy Woodpecker, Steller's Jay, Mountain Chickadee, Pygmy Nuthatch, Cassin's Finch, and various forms of Dark-eyed Junco, particularly Pink-sided and Grey-headed. Osprey and Bald Eagle were already at their nest platforms, and a small lake held a single Hooded Merganser with some smart Cinnamon Teals, as well as Belted Kingfisher and an unexpected Northern Shrike. After our first of many field lunches, we ventured out, mini-expedition style, onto the snowy slopes of Loveland Pass. The weather was perfect, but an exhaustive search for White-tailed Ptarmigan was turning up nothing. A last-minute decision to check one more bouldery slope finally paid-off, when a ridiculously tame ptarmigan finally piped-up and came trundling up to us. After a swift coffee break down at Georgetown, we still had time to drive up the Guanella Pass Road. Here, the mature coniferous forests produced American Three-toed Woodpecker, Grey Jay, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and a male Pine Grosbeak. In the evening, a small group of Bighorn Sheep was located next to the main road near Georgetown.

Early the following morning, we were back at the feeders near Silverthorne, but still no luck! We headed east again, back towards Denver, stopping for some birding in the somewhat warmer Ponderosa Pine forests of Genessee Park. It was pretty birdy, with the highlight being a terrific pair of Williamson's Sapsuckers that afforded some excellent views for all. Western Bluebirds and Pine Siskins were prominent, and there was also our first Woodhouse's Scrub Jay, a brief Brown Creeper, and Abert's Squirrel.

There followed an uneventful and relatively easy drive eastwards to Wray in Colorado's far eastern Yuma County. This small pioneer town has embraced its status as an ecotourism destination and, before dinner, we attended a very interesting and entertaining orientation meeting at the delightful Wray Museum, in readiness for our appointment with Great Prairie Chickens the next day.

Well before dawn, we boarded Wray's big yellow school bus, which took us to the prairie chicken hide (a converted trailer), and once everyone was installed, the window shutters were raised and we were open to the elements. Before long, in the half-light, we could make out the shapes of prairie chickens as the males arrived from the surrounding sagebrush and took up their positions in the arena of their lekking ground. Their eerie booming calls filled the air and as dawn broke details of their intricately barred plumage were gradually revealed. The dancing starts with some foot stomping, followed by the inflation of their neck sacs (from which the booming call emanates) as they lean forwards. At the same time their elongated neck feathers are raised, completing the transformation from their usually innocuous appearance into rather fearsome looking creatures. The dominant males occupy the central, pole positions of the lekking ground and the younger and less experienced ones are literally kicked out to periphery. The number of females noted was considerably higher than on the previous tour, with 16 coming to entertain the 17 males that were present. After a couple of hours we were driven to our friendly hosts' ranch, where we were treated to a traditional home-style

breakfast. Ranch manager Russ introduced his team and gave a short speech explaining how businesses in the local community support the prairie chicken tours by contributing food and other items for the breakfast.



*White-tailed Ptarmigan (Craig Robson)*

Heading south from Wray, we paused at Beecher Island, on the Arikaree River. Years of drought have reduced the water table in Yuma County, there is no longer an island, and the river is but a small stream. Originally the rivers of the High Plains lacked the abundant cottonwoods that now stretch from the state line in the east to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, their courses were swept clean by spring floods and emerging saplings were grazed by herds of bison. The arrival of the Europeans led to the removal of both, and the subsequent growth of trees has allowed the westward range extension of some eastern bird species. Eastern Bluebird was one such species that we found on this occasion. There is always an interesting variety of birds here, and this year we found Northern Flicker, Downy Woodpecker (of an eastern form), Townsend's Solitaire, Cedar Waxwing, and Lincoln's Sparrow. Our first Sandhill Cranes flew over.

Our next destination was the town of Oakley in north-western Kansas, where we arrived in good time and checked-into our comfortable hotel. The next morning brought another very early start as we were escorted by our guides to a distant and remote grassland location, where we hoped to catch a glimpse of the now rare and declining Lesser Prairie Chicken. We didn't really know what to expect, as the species has been getting harder and harder to pin-down in recent years, and this new site had only just come on-line. We had a small hide all to ourselves, where we sat patiently once the viewing flap had been opened. What followed was one of the best grouse lek experiences of the tour, and at surprisingly close range, with 9 male and 13 female Lesser Prairie Chickens doing their stuff right in front of us; against a back-drop of unbroken short-grass prairie. They were even joined by a single lekking male Great Prairie Chicken, as this is an area where the species' ranges overlap somewhat.

After breakfast back at the hotel, we drove down through western Kansas and then across into SE Colorado and the town of Springfield, pausing at a variety of sites. We were particularly on the lookout for Mountain Plover, another declining species, that can often be found around prairie dog towns. There were plenty of

Arizona Black-tailed Prairie Dogs but no plovers - this one would have to wait until later on the tour. The most interesting birds were a pair of Scaled Quail, Wild Turkey, at least 96 staging Long-billed Curlews, 60 or more Burrowing Owls, Loggerhead Shrike, and Vesper Sparrow, while mammals included Coyote, Pronghorn, and a write-in Spotted Ground Squirrel.



*Lekking Lesser Prairie Chicken in Kansas (Craig Robson)*

Driving north from Springfield's 'historical' Stage Stop Hotel pre-dawn, we found a great place for an early breakfast at Lamar, before continuing south-west to scenic Higbee Valley. With a range of natural and semi-natural dry woodland and brush habitats, and boulder-strewn rocky ridges, this site holds a great range of southern/south-western species. The mix is never quite the same, and this year, we were treated to Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Woodhouse's Scrub Jay, Rock, Canyon and Bewick's Wrens, Curve-billed Thrasher, a pair of Mountain Bluebirds with nest material, Townsend's Solitaire, our first Eastern Phoebe, Rufous-crowned Sparrow and Canyon Towhee.....and there were great views of everything.

The rest of the day was spent visiting three wetland areas, Cheraw Lake, Holbrook Reservoir, and Pueblo Reservoir, before overnighting in Pueblo. Holbrook Reservoir near Swink in the Arkansas Valley was the best location. As expected, there were both Western and Clark's Grebes, our only Canvasbacks of the tour along with quite a few Redheads, and a few Bonaparte's Gulls. Low water levels were attracting Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Wilson's Snipe, and both Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs. Cottonwood groves below the dam at Pueblo Reservoir held Blue Jay and American Bushtit, while the reservoir itself had our only Common Loon of the tour, and our first California Gulls. A kamikaze Scaled Quail ran at the lead vehicle on the way into town in the evening!



*Brown-capped and Black Rosy Finches (Craig Robson)*

Continuing west up the Arkansas Valley we left the plains behind and entered the Rockies once again. By a fast-flowing river in a gorge, Tore spotted an American Beaver, which we scoped before continuing on to Salida. A range of juxtaposed sites near town brought our first Pinyon Jays, our only Clarke's Nutcracker - totally unexpected searching for food that it had previously hidden around some houses -, and great views of an American Dipper ducking under a torrent.

Crossing lofty Monarch Pass, we continued via Gunnison to Crested Butte. Our first Prairie Falcon of the trip was scoped just before Gunnison, while we enjoyed the White-tailed Prairie Dogs on the other side of town. Crested Butte is a popular tourist spot and has some good restaurants, so lunchtime was timely...and very rewarding! Afterwards we located a large rosy finch flock at some well-stocked feeders. The twittering throng of Brown-capped Rosefinches was joined by at least eight much-wanted Black Rosy Finches, and a single Grey-crowned. A male Red Crossbill parked briefly in a conifer-top.

We retired to our hotel in Gunnison. Yet another pre-dawn start ensued, and this time we were escorted to the trailer-hide overlooking the Gunnison Grouse lekking area. This endangered species was not described until 2000, and was not even recognized as a subspecies prior to that! Gunnison is renowned as one of the coldest places in the USA and it was predictably quite chilly sitting on the wooden benches in the trailer, waiting for dawn. As the first rays of light started to illuminate the hillside across the valley from us, we could eventually make out dark shapes with spiky tails, occasionally bobbing up and down. The grouse moved their lek to this ridge in 2014, up out of the valley meadows. Even at such a long distance however (more than 500m!), we were still able to watch their full display, which included the males strutting around with their tail feathers fanned and every now and then they inflated the massive air sacs in their necks to make their booming call, after which they nodded their heads forward, shaking their ponytail-plumes in the process. We only managed three or four males actually displaying, but a number of birds that flew across to the ridge, from a distant hidden location in the valley bottom, brought our total up to at least 16 birds. We continue to wonder what will become of this lek viewing arrangement however?



*Birding in a snowstorm at the Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP (Craig Robson)*

After breakfast we continued west to Montrose and, after picking up something for lunch, we headed up to the awe-inspiring Black Canyon of the Gunnison. We had not banked on a snow storm however, and when we reached the site we found that it had become almost completely snowbound, and a mild blizzard ensued.

We looked in vain for the normally quite easy Dusky Grouse, but to no avail. Cruising the snowy, icy road as far as the visitor centre (the only stretch open) and yomping through knee-deep snow at the first campsite (the rest were closed), we could only muster a flock of neat Evening Grosbeaks. Snow continued through the night, so we made the decision not to waste any more time, and look for the grouse elsewhere.

Leaving the Montrose area, our next port of call was Fruitgrowers Reservoir near Orchard. We always find some good birds here and this time was no exception, with Common and Red-breasted Mergansers, Sandhill Crane, Snowy Egret, Bonaparte's and Franklin's Gulls, Sand Martin, and a heard-only Marsh Wren. An unexpected Sora showed really well, and was a tour write-in. However, the Lewis's Woodpecker nearby was even more welcome. Easy to overlook from a distance, perched in giant cottonwood trees, we were happy to catch up with this super-smart and rather localised woodpecker.



*Black-throated Sparrow (Craig Robson)*

The outstandingly scenic Colorado National Monument near Grand Junction, which is comprised of the same rugged terrain of the geological formation that includes adjacent Utah's Arches and Bryce Canyon National Parks, has spectacular red sandstone rock formations studded with attractive Pinyon-juniper woodland. Starting with a walk around the incredible canyon edge at the visitor centre, we soon found the perky little Juniper Titmouse, and flocks of White-throated Swifts gathered noisily above the chasm. A flock of 33 Pinyon Jays and a tame Woodhouse's Scrub Jay also entertained us. Driving back downhill, we spotted two humongous 'Nelson's' Bighorn Sheep rams, and paused for photos. This short-horned subspecies was reintroduced to the area in 1979 and around 40 live in the national monument. We drove to another park

entrance and walked into the Devil's Kitchen, a scenic valley. Black-throated Sparrow showed ridiculously well and we also got reasonable views of a Slate-colored Fox Sparrow. Our first Gambel's Quail proved tricky and flighty, but in the nearby sub-divisions they were easy and approachable, on our way to the hotel in Grand Junction.

Next morning, we travelled north-west of Grand Junction, beyond Mack, and made a foray into the open high plains towards the Utah border. We first searched a large well-vegetated area for Sagebrush Sparrows. A nice Brewer's Sparrow perched-up and briefly fooled us - a good bird itself - but we had to keep going before we eventually tracked down a single Sagebrush. There were few other birds of note, so we drove just inside Utah, for everyone's state list! Scanning from a bluff, we had some good views of another Prairie Falcon. With a long way to go to Steamboat Springs, and Dusky Grouse to look for along the way, we needed to make tracks.



*Male Dusky Grouse near Hayden (Craig Robson)*

The journey was very scenic but otherwise uneventful. After passing Hayden we drove north to an area of scrubby oak woodland, where we hoped to find Dusky Grouse. There was less snow than at the Black Canyon, but still a fair amount. Our initial forays were unproductive, though we did get some great views of several North American Porcupines that were foraging completely in the open; two struggled to hide from us in a small isolated bush! Then Heidi reported a sound that she had heard coming from the oaks, that she thought might have been the grouse. After investigating, Craig found fresh tracks, and after a relatively short search, a nice male Dusky Grouse - even displaying and revealing its swollen neck-sacks. Well-pleased we headed to the hotel in Steamboat Springs. We arrived in good time, five grouse out of seven, and only two to go. In the early 1800s the first Europeans arrived here and likened the sound of the mineral spring to that of a steamboat's whistle. Sadly the spring was silenced by the construction of a railway over it in 1908 and Steamboat Springs has now grown into a bustling ski resort.

Next morning we headed off bright and early to a lek site for Sharp-tailed Grouse. Unfortunately there was rather little activity this year, but the views were good enough, particularly of a male that loitered close to the vehicles for some time. As on our previous visit, there were around ten birds in the area. Leaving Steamboat Springs after breakfast, we searched for some ice-free open water on the nearby lakes. Fortunately, there was a nice open stretch at one end of Stagecoach Reservoir, a bonanza for waterfowl. A flock of no fewer than 18 Barrow's Goldeneyes was impressive, and there was also a single Red-breasted Merganser, American White Pelican, and a trio of Greater Yellowlegs. Continuing to remote Walden, we had a sit-down lunch before driving up to the Moose Visitor Centre near Gould. The usual Mountain Chickadees and juncos were at the feeders, and we had our best views of Pine Grosbeak, this time a female. Back at the outskirts of Walden, a large flock of Icterids held several smart Yellow-headed Blackbirds.



*A pumped-up lekking male Great Sage Grouse (Craig Robson)*

Our final grouse of the tour, Greater Sage Grouse, was the target early the following morning, as we left Walden in the dark. This lek has to be one of the most stable, reliable and atmospheric grouse leks out there. The birds were already in full swing when we arrived well before dawn. We lined up the vehicles, switched of the engine, and enjoyed the action. They were scattered on short grass by a dirt road, with a back-drop of snow-streaked mountains, and some were only a few metres from us. We could easily hear their booming sounds made by the huge air sacs in their necks and the flapping of the wings of the males when they had an occasional altercation. There were also even more birds this year than in 2017, our total of 68 birds including 33 adult males. The spectacle of a Greater Sage Grouse lek is a must-see experience for world birders, just as impressive as a bird of paradise lek.

Our final major destination of the tour was the Pawnee National Grassland in north-east Colorado. Fortunately, the quickest way to the site took us through southern Wyoming - another state tick for many of us. There were a few brief birding stops as we crossed the high plains via Laramie and Cheyenne, and plenty of Pronghorn everywhere. We were soon entering the huge Pawnee Grassland complex. Our first point of call was a large open dry area where Mountain Plovers breed. As soon as we left the vehicles, we

spotted our first and, before too long we had some crippling close-up views, right in front of us. This is a subtle but nonetheless very attractive plover. Nearby, we also had our first look at McCown's Longspur. Moving on to more suitable habitat for the latter, we ended up with some great views, and also found some very smart Chestnut-collared Longspurs. Continuing westward, we reached our last hotel at Fort Collins.

The tour was almost over now, but on our way down to Denver International Airport the following morning we still had time to fit in several birding stops. Horseshoe Reservoir, and a pond to the north of it, delivered a vagrant male Mexican Duck - a tour write-in-, as well as huge numbers of Franklin's Gulls, more American White Pelicans, and our best views of California Gull. Marshes adjacent to Lower Latham Reservoir produced great views of Virginia Rail and Marsh Wren, as well as a White-faced Ibis and finally, at Barr Lake State Park, we added breeding plumaged Horned Grebes.



*The Devil's Kitchen, Colorado National Monument (Craig Robson)*



*Watching White-tailed Ptarmigan near Georgetown (Craig Robson)*

## SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

### BIRDS

Total of bird species recorded: 157.

Canada Goose (Greater C G) *Branta Canadensis* Breeding *moffitti* was common and widely recorded.

Cinnamon Teal *Anas cyanoptera* Widespread sightings of this smart duck (*septentriolalium*)

Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors* Small numbers at scattered sites.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

American Wigeon *Anas americana*



Hooded Merganser with Cinnamon Teal (Craig Robson)

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Mexican Duck *Anas diazi* A vagrant to Colorado, we saw a male on a pond north of Horseshoe Reservoir.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

Green-winged Teal *Anas carolinensis*

Canvasback *Aythya valisineria* Just seven, at Holbrook Reservoir.

Redhead *Aythya americana* Relatively local and in small numbers.

Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris*

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*

Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola* Always a joy, and well distributed.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* Widespread sightings (*americana*).

Barrow's Goldeneye *Bucephala islandica* An excellent flock of 18 at Stagecoach Reservoir.

Hooded Merganser *Lophodytes cucullatus* Just a single female near Silverthorne.

Common Merganser (Goosander) *Mergus merganser*

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator* Nine at Fruitgrowers Reservoir, and one at Stagecoach Reservoir.

Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*

Scaled Quail *Callipepla squamata* 2 en route Oakley-Springfield, & 1 running across the road near Pueblo (*hargrivi*).

Gambel's Quail *Callipepla gambelii* Eight around Colorado National Monument; mostly in the bordering subdivisions.

Wild Turkey *Meleagris gallopavo* Occasional, with a maximum of 32 at Bonny Reservoir (*intermedia*).

Sage Grouse (Greater S G) *Centrocercus urophasianus* 66 at Coalmont lek. 33 males, 34 females, 1 imm. male.

Gunnison Grouse (G Sage G) *Centrocercus minimus* 16 at the Waunita Springs lek, but very distant again.

**Dusky Grouse** *Dendragapus obscurus* Thanks to Heidi, we found a smart male near Hayden.

**Sharp-tailed Grouse** *Tympanuchus phasianellus* Ten at a lek near Steamboat Springs (*jamesi*).

**Lesser Prairie Chicken** *Tympanuchus pallidicinctus* 9 males & 13 females at a superb lek near Oakley, Kansas.

**Greater Prairie Chicken** *T. cupido* 17 males & 16 females at a lek near Wray; 1 male lekking with the last species.

**White-tailed Ptarmigan** *Lagopus leucura* A brilliant male was eventually located at Loveland Pass (*altipetens*).

**Common Pheasant (Ring-necked P)** *Phasianus colchicus*

**Common Loon (Great Northern Diver)** *Gavia immer* Just one at Pueblo Reservoir.

**Pied-billed Grebe** *Podilymbus podiceps*

**Horned Grebe (Slavonian G)** *Podiceps auritus* Three at Barr Lake State Park (*cornutus*).

**Black-necked Grebe (Eared G)** *Podiceps nigricollis*

**Western Grebe** *Aechmophorus occidentalis* Positively identified at Cheraw Lake and Holbrook Reservoir.

**Clark's Grebe** *Aechmophorus clarkia* Noted at Cheraw Lake, and Holbrook, Fruitgrowers and Pueblo Reservoirs.

**White-faced Ibis** *Plegadis chihi* One at Lower Latham Reservoir.

**Great Blue Heron** *Ardea herodias*

**Snowy Egret** *Egretta thula* One at Fruitgrowers Reservoir.

**American White Pelican** *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos* Good numbers were noted towards the end of the tour.

**Double-crested Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax auritus*

**Turkey Vulture** *Cathartes aura*

**Western Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* Regular sightings, particularly where nesting platforms have been provided.

**Golden Eagle** *Aquila chrysaetos* Widespread, with 15 logged (*canadensis*).

**Cooper's Hawk** *Accipiter cooperii* One at Higbee Valley was the only record.

**Northern Harrier** *Circus hudsonius*

**Bald Eagle** *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* A pair Silverthorne was followed by another 10 logged.

**Swainson's Hawk** *Buteo swainsoni* A pair at a nest by the Greater Prairie Chicken lek near Wray

**Red-tailed Hawk** *Buteo jamaicensis*

**Virginia Rail** *Rallus limicola* One showed very well at Lower Latham Reservoir.

**Sora** *Porzana carolina* Fruitgrowers Reservoir.

**American Coot** *Fulica americana*

**Sandhill Crane** *Grus canadensis* Heard near Richfield in KS, 18 Gunnison and 18 Yampa Valley (*tabida*).

**Black-necked Stilt** *Himantopus mexicanus* Five at Holbrook Reservoir.

**American Avocet** *Recurvirostra americana* Nine at Holbrook Reservoir.

**Killdeer** *Charadrius vociferous*

**Mountain Plover** *Charadrius montanus* 6 seen well on their breeding grounds in the Pawnee National Grassland.

**Long-billed Curlew** *Numenius americanus* 96 were noted in SE Colorado, and another at the Pawnee Grassland.

**Wilson's Snipe** *Gallinago delicata* Three at Holbrook Reservoir, and another Steamboat Springs-Walden.

**Lesser Yellowlegs** *Tringa flavipes* One at Holbrook Reservoir.

**Greater Yellowlegs** *Tringa melanoleuca* Scattered in small numbers.

**Bonaparte's Gull** *Chroicocephalus philadelphia* Nine at Holbrook Reservoir, and 16 at Fruitgrowers Reservoir.

**Franklin's Gull** *Leucophaeus pipixcan* A few scattered sightings, then c.1000 at Horseshoe Reservoir.

**Ring-billed Gull** *Larus delawarensis*

**California Gull** *Larus californicus* 4 at Pueblo Reservoir, 2 en route in Wyoming, & c.100 at Horseshoe Reservoir.

**Rock Dove (introduced) (R Pigeon)** *Columba livia*

**Eurasian Collared Dove (introduced)** *Streptopelia decaocto*

**Mourning Dove (American M D)** *Zenaidura macroura* Widespread (*carolinensis* in east, *marginella* in west).

**Burrowing Owl** *Athene cunicularia* 10 near Wray, c.60 SW Kansas to Springfield, 6 Pawnee NG etc. (*hypugnea*).

**White-throated Swift** *Aeronautes saxatalis* 100 at Colorado National monument, with great views.

**Belted Kingfisher** *Megaceryle alcyon* One near Silverthorne, and another at Barr Lake SP.

**Lewis's Woodpecker** *Melanerpes lewis* One showed really well near Orchard City.

**Williamson's Sapsucker** *Sphyrapicus thyroideus* A cracking pair at Genessee Mountain Park.

**American Three-toed Woodpecker** *Picoides dorsalis* Three seen and another heard near Georgetown.

**Ladder-backed Woodpecker** *Dryobates scalaris* A pair at Higbee Valley.

**Downy Woodpecker** *Dryobates pubescens* A pair at Beecher Island (*pubescens*).

**Hairy Woodpecker (Eastern H W)** *Leuconotopicus villosus* 10 Silverthorne-Genessee Park area (*septentrionalis*).

**Northern Flicker** *Colaptes auratus* Widespread (all red shafted *cafer*).



*Greater Sage Grouse lekking, and Mountain Plover (Craig Robson)*

**American Kestrel** *Falco sparverius*

**Prairie Falcon** *Falco mexicanus* One near Gunnison, and another just inside Utah, NW of Mack.

**Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus* Several scattered sightings (*anatum*).

**Eastern Phoebe** *Sayornis phoebe* Four at Higbee Valley, and others near Pueblo and Salida.

**Say's Phoebe** *Sayornis saya*

**Loggerhead Shrike** *Lanius ludovicianus* 6 SW Kansas/SE Colorado; singles NW of Grand Junction & Pawnee NG.

**Northern Shrike** *Lanius borealis* One near Silverthorne (*capitalis*).

**Grey Jay** *Perisoreus canadensis* Just two near Georgetown.

**Blue Jay** *Cyanocitta cristata* Occasional sightings, west to Salida (*cyanoptera*).

**Steller's Jay** *Cyanocitta stelleri* Regularly encountered in the Rockies (*macrolopha*).

**Woodhouse's Scrub Jay** *Aphelocoma woodhouseii* Well distributed, with some tame individuals.

**Pinyon Jay** *Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus* Three near Salida, and 38 at Colorado NM, including 33 in one flock.

**Black-billed Magpie** *Pica hudsonia*

**Clark's Nutcracker** *Nucifraga columbiana* Fantastic views of one going about its business near Salida.

**American Crow** *Corvus brachyrhynchos*

**Northern Raven (Common R)** *Corvus corax* Common (*sinuatus*).

**Cedar Waxwing** *Bombycilla cedrorum* 24 Beecher Island, 16 Wray-Oakley, and 35 Devil's Kitchen, Colorado NM.



Steller's Jay (Craig Robson)

**Juniper Titmouse** *Baeolophus ridgwayi* Three at Colorado National Monument.

**Black-capped Chickadee** *Poecile atricapillus* Occasional (*garrina*).

**Mountain Chickadee** *Poecile gambeli* Widespread and common in the Rockies.

**Horned Lark (Shore L)** *Eremophila alpestris* Common in suitable habitat (*enthymia*).



*Mountain Chickadee and Pygmy Nuthatches (Craig Robson)*

**Sand Martin (Bank Swallow) *Riparia riparia*** At least nine at Fruitgrowers Reservoir.

**Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*** One Pueblo Reservoir, and two at Fruitgrowers Reservoir (*erythrogaster*).

**American Bushtit *Psaltriparus minimus*** A confiding pair at Pueblo Reservoir (*plumbeus*).

**Golden-crowned Kinglet *Regulus satrapa*** Just one near Georgetown.

**Rock Wren *Salpinctes obsoletus*** Five at Higbee Valley.

**Canyon Wren *Catherpes mexicanus*** One performed admirably at Higbee Valley (*conspersus*).

**Marsh Wren *Cistothorus palustris*** Heard Fruitgrowers Reservoir; 8+ Lower Latham Reservoir, where seen (*plesius*).

**Bewick's Wren *Thryomanes bewickii*** Singles seen and heard at Higbee Valley; two at Pueblo Reservoir.

**Pygmy Nuthatch *Sitta pygmaea*** Six near Silverthorne and eight at Genessee Park (*melanotis*).

**Red-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta canadensis*** Just a single female near Georgetown.

**White-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta carolinensis*** 2 near Silverthorne, 1 Genessee Park, and 1 near Salida (*nelsoni*).

**Brown Creeper *Certhia americana*** One briefly at Genessee Park.

**Sage Thrasher *Oreoscoptes montanus*** 3 Blue Mesa Reservoir, 3 near Mack, and 2 near Steamboat Springs.

**Curve-billed Thrasher *Toxostoma curvirostre*** One scoped at Higbee Valley.

**Common Starling (European S) *Sturnus vulgaris***

**Eastern Bluebird *Sialia sialis*** Three at Beecher Island (*sialis*).

**Western Bluebird *Sialia mexicana*** Six Genessee Park, two Fruitgrowers Reservoir, and one Colorado NM.

**Mountain Bluebird *Sialia currucoides*** Widespread and often common.

**Townsend's Solitaire *Myadestes townsendi*** Singles at Beecher Island, Higbee Valley, and Moose Visitor Centre.

**American Robin *Turdus migratorius***

**American Dipper *Cinclus mexicanus*** One watched feeding under water near Salida (*unicolor*).

**House Sparrow (introduced) *Passer domesticus***

**Evening Grosbeak *Hesperiphona vespertina*** A wonderful flock of at least 52 at the Black Canyon (*brooksi*).

**Pine Grosbeak *Pinicola enucleator*** A male near Silverthorne and a female at Moose Visitor Centre (*montana*).

**Grey-crowned Rosy Finch *Leucosticte tephrocotis*** Just one with other rosy finches at Crested Butte (*tephrocotis*).

**Black Rosy Finch *Leucosticte atrata*** Great close-ups of at least four at Crested Butte.

**Brown-capped Rosy Finch *Leucosticte australis*** Maxima of 50 near Silverthorne, and 80+ at Crested Butte.

**Cassin's Finch *Haemorhous cassinii*** Occasional sightings in the rockies.

**House Finch *Haemorhous mexicanus***

**Red Crossbill (Common C) *Loxia curvirostra*** A male briefly at Crested Butte.

**American Goldfinch *Spinus tristis*** Scattered and occasional (*pallida*).

**Pine Siskin *Spinus pinus*** 20 or so at Genessee Park, where a number singing.

**McCown's Longspur *Rhynchophanes mccownii*** At least four seen very well at the Pawnee Grassland.

**Chestnut-collared Longspur *Calcarius ornatus*** Ditto; though rather less confiding.

**Slate-colored Fox Sparrow *Passerella schistacea*** One at the Devil's Kitchen, Colorado NM.

**Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia*** Not uncommon in suitable wetland habitat (*juddi*).

**Lincoln's Sparrow *Melospiza lincolnii*** One was teed up at Beecher Island.

**White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys***

**Dark-eyed Junco *Junco [hyemalis] hyemalis*** One near Silverthorne.

**Dark-eyed Junco (Oregon J) *Junco [hyemalis] oregonus*** One near Silverthorne.

**Dark-eyed Junco (Pink-sided J) *Junco [hyemalis] mearnsi*** Common and widespread in the rockies.

**Dark-eyed Junco (Grey-headed J) *Junco [hyemalis] caniceps*** Ditto.

**Brewer's Sparrow *Poocetes breweri*** One was scoped NW of Mack (nominate).

**Vesper Sparrow *Poocetes gramineus*** Small numbers in grassland habitats (*confinis*).

**Black-throated Sparrow *Amphispiza bilineata*** A tame songster at the Devil's Kitchen, Colorado NM (*deserticola*).

**Sagebrush Sparrow *Artemisiospiza nevadensis*** Just one near Mack, after a lengthy search.

**Rufous-crowned Sparrow *Aimophila ruficeps*** One at Higbee Valley was the only record (*eremoeca*).

**Spotted Towhee *Pipilo maculatus*** Occasional (*arcticus*).

**Canyon Towhee *Melozona fusca*** Four at Higbee Valley (*mesatus*).

**Yellow-headed Blackbird *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*** 1 near Hayden, 5 Walden, 8 Lower Latham Reservoir.

**Western Meadowlark *Sturnella neglecta*** Very common in the plains (*neglecta*).

**Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus*** Very common throughout (*fortis*).

**Brown-headed Cowbird *Molothrus ater*** Scattered sightings.

**Brewer's Blackbird *Euphagus cyanocephalus*** Just one in a parking lot at Parachute.



*Clockwise from top: 'Grey-headed' Junco, McCown's Longspur, and Brewer's Sparrow (Craig Robson)*

**Common Grackle** *Quiscalus quiscula* Regular sightings (*versicolor*).  
**Great-tailed Grackle** *Quiscalus mexicanus* A few in southern to south-eastern Colorado.  
**Northern Cardinal** *Cardinalis cardinalis* A smart male at Wray (nominated).



*Gunnison Prairie Dog near Gunnison (Craig Robson)*

## MAMMALS

Total of bird species recorded: 23.

**Desert Cottontail** *Sylvilagus audubonii* Frequently seen.

**Mountain Cottontail (Nuttall's C)** *Sylvilagus nuttallii* One near Hayden.

**American Beaver** *Castor canadensis* One scoped on Arkansas River; Canon City-Texas Creek.

**North American Porcupine** *Erethizon dorsatum* At least six were seen foraging on open slopes north of Hayden.

**Gunnison's Prairie Dog** *Cynomys gunnisoni* Around ten by the roadside near Gunnison.

**White-tailed Prairie Dog** *Cynomys leucurus* Good numbers in the Grand Junction area.

**Black-tailed Prairie Dog** *Cynomys ludovicianus* Very common on the plains.

**Abert's Squirrel (Tassel-eared S)** *Sciurus aberti* One at Genessee Park.

**Bryant's Fox Squirrel (Eastern F S)** *Sciurus niger* Singles Beecher Island, Oakley-Springfield, and Crested Butte.

**Nevada Ground Squirrel (Wyoming G S)** *Spermophilus elegans* Eight between Steamboat Springs and Walden.

**Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel** *Spermophilus lateralis* A couple near Georgetown.

**Spotted Ground Squirrel** *Spermophilus spilosoma* One by the roadside in SE Colorado.

**Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel** *Spermophilus tridecemlineatus* Four at Pawnee National Grassland.

**Rock Squirrel (Rock G S)** *Spermophilus variegatus* Just one at Holbrook Reservoir.

**Least Chipmunk** *Tamias minimus* Several at the Black Canyon, and one near Hayden.

**American Red Squirrel (Red S)** *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus* Two at Genessee Park.

**Coyote** *Canis latrans* Occasional sightings.

**Red Fox** *Vulpes vulpes* (NL) One near Steamboat Springs.

**Red Deer (Elk)** *Cervus [elaphus] canadensis* Large numbers noted during the latter half of the tour.

**Mule Deer** *Odocoileus hemionus*

**White-tailed Deer** *Odocoileus virginianus* Just three at Barr Lake State Park.

**Bighorn Sheep** *Ovis canadensis* 7 Georgetown (nominated), 9 Colorado NM (*nelsoni*).

**Pronghorn (P Antelope)** *Antilocapra americana* Regularly seen. Particularly common Walden-Wyoming-Pawnee.



*Greater Sage Grouse and Greater Prairie Chicken (Craig Robson)*

## NOTES TO THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

### BIRDS

#### **Green-winged Teal** *Anas carolinensis*

Some authorities lump this species in Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*, using either the name Common Teal (in the Old World) or Green-winged Teal (in the New World) for the enlarged species.

#### **Dusky Grouse** *Dendragapus obscurus*

Formerly, Sooty Grouse *Dendragapus fuliginosus* was lumped into this species, with the name Blue Grouse being used for the enlarged species.

#### **Western Osprey** *Pandion carolinensis*

This species was formerly referred to as Osprey, but it has been renamed following the separation of Eastern Osprey *Pandion cristatus* as a distinct species.

#### **Northern Harrier** *Circus hudsonicus*

Some authorities lump this species in Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*, using the name Northern Harrier (in the New World) or Hen Harrier (in the Old World) for the enlarged species.

#### **Woodhouse's Scrub Jay** *Aphelocoma woodhouseii*

This relatively recent split was formerly lumped in Western Scrub Jay *Aphelocoma californica*.

#### **Black-billed Magpie** *Pica hudsonia*

This species was formerly lumped in Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica* with the name Common or Black-billed Magpie being used for the enlarged species.

#### **Juniper Titmouse** *Baeolophus ridgwayi*

This species, which is found from northern Sonora through SE Arizona and eastern California north and east to Idaho and Oklahoma, was formerly lumped in Oak Titmouse *Baeolophus inornatus*, with the name Plain Titmouse being used for the enlarged species. Oak Titmouse inhabits coastal and adjacent regions from Baja California north to California and southern Oregon.

#### **White-breasted Nuthatch (Interior W-b N)** *Sitta [carolinensis] lagunae*

#### **White-breasted Nuthatch (Eastern W-b N)** *Sitta [carolinensis] carolinensis*

BirdLife/IBW detail a possible three-way split of this species. The forms we see in Colorado would become Interior White-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta lagunae* in the Rockies, and Eastern White-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta carolinensis* in the eastern plains.

#### **Slate-colored Fox Sparrow** *Passerella schistacea*

Formerly, this species along with Sooty Fox Sparrow *Passerella unalaschensis*, and Thick-billed Fox Sparrow *P. megarhyncha* were lumped in Red Fox Sparrow *Passerella iliaca* with the name Fox Sparrow being used for the enlarged species.

#### **Dark-eyed Junco** *Junco hyemalis*

The taxonomy of the Dark-eyed Junco complex remains unresolved. Several authorities suggest that five species would be valid, with a degree of intergradation occurring in some areas: Slate-colored Junco *Junco hyemalis* (including 'Cassiar Junco' *J. h. cismontanus*), White-winged Junco *J. aikenii*, Oregon Junco *J. oregonus*, Pink-sided Junco *J. mearnsi*, and Grey-headed Junco *J. caniceps*. The IOC still treats them as one very diverse species under the name, but we have treated each form as an allospecies to facilitate accurate recording.

#### **Sagebursh Sparrow** *Artemisiospiza nevadensis*

This interior form was until fairly recently lumped in Bell's Sparrow *Artemisiospiza belli*, with the name Sage Sparrow being used for the enlarged species.

**Canyon Towhee** *Melospiza fuscus*

California Towhee *Melospiza crissalis* was formerly lumped in this species, with the name Brown Towhee being used for the enlarged species.

**MAMMALS**

**Nevada Ground Squirrel (Wyoming G S)** *Spermophilus elegans*

This form has been split from Richardson's Ground Squirrel *Spermophilus richardsoni*.

**Red Deer (American Elk)** *Cervus [elaphus] canadensis*

Despite its very distinctive appearance, many authorities lump American Elk in Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*.

**APPENDIX 1 - Top 5 birds of the tour**

- 1st **Lesser Prairie Chicken**
- 2nd **Greater Sage Grouse**
- 3rd **White-tailed ptarmigan**
- 4th **Dusky Grouse**
- 5th **Greater Prairie Chicken**

**APPENDIX 2 - Other fauna & flora recorded**

**REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS**

**Collared Lizard** *Crotaphytus collaris* Heidi spotted one on distant rocks at Higbee Valley.

**BUTTERFLIES**

**Camberwell Beauty (Mourning Cloak)** *Nymphalis antiopa*

**Painted Lady** *Vanessa cardui*



*Colorado National Monument, and Lesser Prairie Chicken lek in Kansas (Craig Robson)*