

# COLORADO TOUR REPORT 2024

29 March - 10 April 2024

by Craig Robson

Our 2024 whirlwind birding road-trip around the Centennial State was another wonderful birding experience. Facing the usual complicated logistical challenges, late snowfall, and high winds, as well as Easter weekend, our hard work and perseverance paid-off. This year's top birds included Wood Duck, Barrow's Goldeneye, White-tailed Ptarmigan, Greater and Lesser Prairie Chickens, Sharp-tailed, Gunnison and Sage Grouse, Wild Turkey, Gambel's, Scaled and Northern Bobwhite Quails, Cackling Goose, Barrow's Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Sandhill Crane, Western and Clark's Grebes, Mountain Plover, Baird's Sandpiper, Long-billed Curlew, Franklin's and California Gulls, Ferruginous Hawk, Rough-legged Buzzard, Northern Pygmy, Western Screech, Great Horned and Burrowing Owls, Lewis's and American Three-toed Woodpeckers, Woodhouse's Scrub and Pinyon Jays, Clark's Nutcracker, Juniper Titmouse, Mountain Chickadee, 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, Evening and Pine Grosbeaks, Grey-crowned (including Hepburn's), Black and Brown-capped Rosy Finches, Cassin's Finch, Thick-billed (or McCown's) and Chestnut-collared Longspurs, Black-throated, Sagebrush and Rufous-crowned Sparrows, Canyon and Spotted Towhees, and Myrtle Warbler. Colorado is great for mammals too, and this year we found Coyote, Pronghorn, Wapiti (or American Elk), Bighorn Sheep, Wyoming Ground Squirrels, and three species of prairie dog.

As usual, after meeting-up at Denver International Airport, we headed westwards into the Rocky Mountains to the pretty former mining settlement of Georgetown, for a two night's stay. For the second year running, our first morning saw us up at Loveland Pass, where there was still way too much snow for White-tailed Ptarmigans. Even at somewhat lower levels, where the tops of willow bushes were available, we could not locate this much wanted species, and we decided to save time and leave it for a second visit. Moving to lower levels, we explored a number of sites not far from Silverthorne, with highlights including Barrow's Goldeneye, Belted Kingfisher, Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, Clark's Nutcracker, Steller's Jay, Pygmy Nuthatch, Mountain Chickadee, Townsend's Solitaire, Cassin's Finch, Pine Grosbeak, Red Crossbill, Grey-crowned (both forms) and Brown-capped Rosy Finches, and a selection of Dark-eyed Junco forms.

Early the following morning we tried the Guanella Pass Road close to Georgetown but were soon turned back by snow. We headed east instead and began the birding day at Genessee Park. It had been another snowy winter, and once again, we were too early for Williamson's Sapsuckers. There were a few other nice birds though, with Northern Flicker, White- and Red-breasted Nuthatches, Western Bluebird, and displaying Pine Siskins. Continuing on, we checked some subdivisions in Gould. Our first Say's Phoebe was welcomed, as was Blue Jay, American Goldfinch and, best of all, a Great Horned Owl at its nest, with two young, further down the road. After lunch we visited the

excellent Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR. A large variety of waterfowl included Blue-winged and Cinnamon Teals, Canvasback, both Goldeneyes, all three mergansers, Horned and Eared Grebes, American Avocet, Greater Yellowlegs, and Franklin's, Ring-billed and California Gulls. The day concluded with a more-or-less direct drive to Oakley in western Kansas, our base for visiting a Lesser Prairie Chicken lek on the following morning.

There was a very early start, as we drove south to meet-up with our guide Stacy Hoeme. Another twenty to thirty minutes along graded prairie roads, and we arrived at well turned-out trailer-style hide. Once inside, we didn't have to wait too long before the chickens turned up, and they put on a great show at relatively close range. This year's lek consisted of eight male Lesser Prairie Chickens, as well as a single male Greater, and even a hybrid male, which could really only be identified from the latter by the occasional Lesser call-type. Heading back to Oakley, we had close flight views of a couple of Northern Bobwhites. After a tasty breakfast at our hotel, we drove back west into Colorado, and began a tour of some of the many reservoirs, starting at Neenoshe Reservoir. A large flock of Snow Geese were floating on the main lake, along with American White Pelicans and Double-crested Cormorants. Low water levels at the SE water body meant exposed shoreline mud, and this worked in our favour, with American Avocet, Black-necked Stilt, two pairs of smart Snowy Plovers, Baird's, Least and Western Sandpipers, Wilson's Phalarope, and Long-billed Dowitcher. On the walk down to the shore, we flushed several Scaled Quails, a couple of which briefly hopped-up onto a log, and amongst a nesting colony of Great Blue Herons, another Great Horned Owl was spotted on its nest. After lunch, at Holbrook Reservoir, there were Western Grebes and a few Bonaparte's Gulls, and we finished-off the day at Lake Meredith, with super views of Clark's Grebe.

The following day, we found a great place for an early breakfast not far from the hotel, before continuing south-west to scenic Higbee Valley, arriving not long after dawn. 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 and south-western species. The mix is never quite the same, and this year, we were treated to a pair of Wood Ducks, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, Rock and Bewick's Wrens, Curve-billed Thrasher, Canyon Towhee, and Rufous-crowned Sparrow. Our journey progressed, with a picnic lunch at Lake Pueblo SP. It was rather quiet, apart from a pair of Ospreys and American Bushtits carrying nest material, so we continued onwards to Salida. There, at Sands Lake SWA, we enjoyed close views of both goldeneye males side-by-side, but there was no sign of the American Dippers at their usual nesting site. Not far away, after a short drive, we bumped into a flock of 27 Pinyon Jays. We pressed-on to our hotel in Gunnison.

A very early start ensued, as 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 around -6°C as we sat on the wooden benches in the trailer, waiting for dawn. As daylight crept into the valley bottom, we could soon make-out distinctive grouse-shapes with spiky tails through our scopes. Having moved their lek-site to a distant ridge in 2014, beyond the valley meadows, it was heart-warming once more to see them back down in the valley. Not only that, but they were considerably closer than I had seen them on my own three previous visits. We counted perhaps 30-40 individuals, but there were doubtless many more hidden behind bushes. Even at this distance, we were able to watch their full display, which included the males strutting around with their tail feathers fanned and massive neck-sacs inflated, as they nodded their heads forward, shaking their distinctive ponytails in the process. The only other noteworthy sighting was a large herd of around 100 Wapiti (American Elk) on a distant slope. After breakfast near our hotel, we drove up to Mt. Crested Butte in search of rosy finches. We stopped for a while en route to enjoy

Gunnison's Prairie Dogs at one of their colonies on the outskirts of town. There had been no recent reports of rosy finch flocks, so we had our work cut out in the snowy subdivisions. Fortunately, at one of the spots where we have seen rosy finches in the past, we soon noticed a good-sized flock alighting at some recently stocked feeders. The homeowner was just leaving and told us to go and stand by the feeders. There, we had amazing close-up views of all the rosy finches, including a single Black Rosy Finch, the most wanted of all! Well satisfied, we returned to Gunnison to buy food for lunch, before driving onwards to Blue Mesa Reservoir, where Sage Thrashers and a White-tailed Jackrabbit entertained us. We next visited Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP, near Montrose. Once again, there was rather too much snow still on the ground. We covered a preferred area as best as we could, but there was no sign of Dusky Grouse. There were a few other good birds however, with Woodhouse's Scrub Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, Mountain Bluebird and Spotted Towhee, and heading back down towards our hotel in Montrose, we found an amazing flock of at least 110 Pinyon Jays.

Returning early the following morning, there was still no sign of Dusky Grouse, with the late snow a major obstacle to our efforts. The best bird on this occasion was a close singing Slate-colored Fox Sparrow. Leaving the Montrose area, our next port of call was Fruitgrowers Reservoir. We always find some good birds here, but it was a shame to see that the marshy wetlands remained too dry. There were very good numbers of Sandhill Cranes this year, and a good selection of waterfowl included no fewer than 30 Western Grebes, with several pairs displaying. Thankfully, this year, an enormous nearby tree hosted two superb Lewis's Woodpeckers, a species that had proved very tricky on our previous tour. After a sit-down lunch in Delta, we continued on to the Grand Junction area. The outstandingly scenic Colorado National Monument near Grand Junction, which is comprised of the same rugged terrain and geological formation that includes adjacent Utah's Arches and Bryce Canyon NP's, has spectacular red sandstone rock formations, studded with attractive Pinyon-juniper woodland. We started with a walk around the incredible canyon edge at the visitor centre. It was typically quite bird-wise, but we eventually connected with the perky Juniper Titmouse, as well as the localised Hopi Chipmunk. We drove to another park entrance and walked into the Devil's Kitchen, a scenic valley. Black-throated Sparrow showed very well and, and we finally caught-up with Canyon Wren, which performed superbly for us. In the evening, in subdivisions just outside this entrance, we enjoyed the habituated Gambel's Quails.

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. Before too long, a sparrow was flushed and, fortunately, it turned out to be the one we were looking for, Sagebrush Sparrow. Carefully surrounding the bird, we were able to get great views as it fed on the ground and occasionally perched up on low branches. No other sparrows were seen, though it was rather windy, but Ferruginous Hawk was seen well and there were a couple of Loggerhead Shrikes and Sage Thrashers. Heading back east, we checked Big Salt Wash in Fruita, where a Harris's Sparrow had been reported a few weeks earlier. There was no sign of the sparrow, but we did even better, as we lucked-out with Western Screech Owl, Cedar Waxwing and Lesser Goldfinch. We headed off towards our next destination to the north-east, the town of Craig. An exploratory lunchtime visits to the attractive Rifle Falls SP proved very fruitful, as not only did we find the desired American Dipper (a pair), but we also tallied Wild Turkey, Red-naped Sapsucker, and Evening Grosbeak. We had time for one final birding stop along a small road to the north of Hayden. Another stomp-around in search of Dusky Grouse, where late snow was also a hassle, only resulted in a single bird being flushed by the leader and seen rather badly by a single tour participant. Very frustrating!

We were very excited about the following morning, as we had arranged a visit to a Sharp-tailed Grouse lek on a private ranch. Having met the landowner, Ken Bekkedahl, to discuss logistics on the previous evening, we planned to arrive in the dark and park our van in the specified position, using it as our own personal hide. As is often the case in Colorado, sudden inclement weather can severely upset the best of plans. We set off in a snowstorm, driving an hour into a head-on blizzard, before reaching Ken's property. Worse still, our van lost traction en route to the lek. We decided to proceed carefully on foot. As the dawn light gathered over the high rolling open country, powdered as far as the eye could see with fresh snow, we were pleased to see that the Sharp-tailed Grouse were not bothered at all, and had already started lekking. The snow stopped and gave way to a beautiful morning. A careful step-by-step approach, and this lek of 29 birds allowed an amazingly close approach. At one stage, a Northern Harrier spooked them all, but they returned almost immediately to continue their displays. Off to one side, we were also pleased to be able to scope a Sage Grouse lek with 20 birds. Ken had noticed our van in an awkward position by now and drove down in his large yellow JCB-type digger, before pulling our van back up to his house! There, we enjoyed a nice strong cup of coffee and a chat before heading back to Craig, first along sticky county roads, and then thankfully on tarmac. During the remainder of the day, we completed the long drive to Wray in eastern Colorado, near the border with Kansas, arriving in time for the introductory meeting at the excellent Wray Museum in the evening.

Well before dawn, we boarded a big yellow school bus, which took us to the Greater Prairie Chicken hide (a converted trailer), and once everyone was installed, the window shutters were raised and we were exposed to the elements. It was a very windy morning and at times, it felt like the trailer might actually take off! Before long however, 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-patterned plumage were gradually revealed. The dominant males occupy the central pole positions, while the younger, less experienced ones are literally kicked out to periphery. A total of 12 males and four females were present, but only a single Burrowing Owl was noted, and much too briefly. After 90 minutes we were driven to the Kitzmiller Ranch for a welcome home-style breakfast, prepared by folk participating in local community promotion and support. Another long drive was on the agenda and we had very strong winds to contend with for the second day running. A couple of local birding sites at the edge of Wray produced a pair of Eastern Bluebirds and a pair of Great Horned Owls at the nest. Further west we attempted to check some wetlands but the wind proved too strong. Once we were to the west of Fort Collins, we headed back up into the mountains, where we made further attempts to find Dusky Grouse, before continuing to Walden on the high Noerth Park plateau, where we had a two nights stay.

Pre-dawn the following morning, we were in position at the Coalmont Sage Grouse lek. We recorded temperatures as low as -17°C during our stay this year, so we made a point of donning all the clothes we had. It was thankfully a clear and calm morning, with the grouse performing well. The birds were in full-swing soon after we arrived, scattered on short grass by a dirt road, with a back-drop of snow-streaked mountains. We could easily hear the booming sounds made by the huge air sacs in the males necks, and the flapping of their wings as they had an occasional altercation. The total of 86 birds (14 Males and 72 females) was perhaps the most I have seen there. We headed back towards town. Walden Reservoir was still totally frozen over, and the only notable birds near Walden itself, were a few Yellow-headed Blackbirds consorting with a Red-winged Blackbird flock. After a hearty breakfast, we drove up to the Moose Visitor Centre near Gould. There were surprisingly few birds at the feeders, and nothing of note, so we continued

searching for new birds at various spots, either side of the beautiful Cameron Pass. With the late snow and low temperatures, birds were hard to come by, and a Brown Creeper and a few Pine Grosbeaks were all we could muster by early afternoon. Following a tip-off, we headed further downhill towards Fort Collins, where an American Three-toed Woodpecker had been spotted at Mountain Park Picnic Area. As we crossed the stream at the entrance to the area, a singing American Dipper was seen at close range, before we spread out in search of woodpeckers. The Three-toed was eventually tracked-down hanging out with a Hairy Woodpecker at the edge of a burnt area of forest, but we went one better, with fantastic views of a calling Northern Pygmy Owl. We headed directly back to Walden, arriving just in time for dinner. After dinner we had a very chilly owling session at the Cameron Pass, and only managed to hear two distant Boreal (or Tengmalm's) Owls.

On the penultimate day of the tour, a fine and clear one, we decided to drive to our final destination of Fort Collins via the Loveland Pass, for a final crack at ptarmigan. Birds had been seen a few times at a switchback below the pass, and we had hardly been there for 10 minutes before a ridiculously tame White-tailed Ptarmigan graced us with a very close encounter. The protruding willows in this area were clearly a draw for this species, and we could see numerous tracks running everywhere across the snowy slopes between the trees and shrubs. Another visit to the Guanella Pass Road produced almost nothing, and further east at Echo Lake, a Golden-crowned Kinglet was the best we could find. From this area we drove direct to the Pawnee National Grassland. Three Mountain Plovers were soon located at one of their breeding grounds and showed well. With time running out, we struggled to find much else apart from a sentry Burrowing Owl, and a foraging Long-billed Curlew.

After overnighting in Fort Collins, we returned to a different area in the grasslands. In some prime short-grass prairie, we were treated to superb views of singing and displaying Thick-billed (or McCowan's) and Chestnut-collared Longspurs. Long-billed Curlews were also singing and displaying close-by. We had a lot to cram-in on our final day, before returning the vehicle and heading for the airport. Our next port-of-call was Franklin Lake, a small reservoir at the edge of a subdivision which hosted no fewer than 500 Cackling Geese, 20 Canada Geese, three Greater White-fronted Geese and two Snow Geese. The marsh at Lower Latham Reservoir was still rather too dry but we did manage to find our only Marsh Wren of the trip, as well as several Wilson's Snipes and mixed flocks of Great and Lesser Yellowlegs. Our final birding of the trip was at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR where we had brief views of a Sora and a smart male Myrtle Warbler. A steady drive back to Denver International Airport concluded another exciting road-trip through the Rocky Mountains, high plains, and wide-open prairies of the American west.

## SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' birds for some other reason (e.g., it is only seen on one or two Birdquest tours; it is difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species).

The species names and taxonomy used in the bird list follows Gill, F., Donsker, D., & Rasmussen, P. (Eds). **2024. IOC World Bird List (v14.1)**.

Where the subspecies seen is/are known, these are often given in parentheses at the end of the species comment.

## BIRDS

\*The term “near-endemic” refers to the political unit “the USA & Canada”.

**Canada Goose (Greater C G) *Branta canadensis***

**Cackling Goose** ♦ (**Lesser C G**) *Branta hutchinsii* 500 at Franklin Lake, near Fort Collins.

**Snow Goose** ♦ *Anser caerulescens* 180 at Neenoshe Reservoir, NE of La Junta, and two at Franklin Lake.

**Snow x Cackling Goose (hybrid) *Anser caerulescens*x*Branta hutchinsii*** One at Franklin Lake.

**Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*** Three at Franklin Lake.

**Wood Duck** ♦ *Aix sponsa* A pair in the Higbee Valley.

**Cinnamon Teal *Spatula cyanoptera***

**Blue-winged Teal *Spatula discors***

**Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata***

**Gadwall *Mareca strepera***

**American Wigeon *Mareca americana***

**Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos***

**Northern Pintail *Anas acuta***

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

**Canvasback *Aythya valisineria***

**Redhead *Aythya americana***

**Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris***

**Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis***

**Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola***

**Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula***

**Barrow's Goldeneye** ♦ *Bucephala islandica* A total of 14 were noted during the tour, with some great views.

**Hooded Merganser** ♦ *Lophodytes cucullatus* Small numbers seen well at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR.

**Common Merganser (Goosander) *Mergus merganser***

**Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator***

**Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis***

**Scaled Quail** ♦ *Callipepla squamata* Seven at Neenoshe Reservoir.

**Gambel's Quail** ♦ *Callipepla gambelii* c.15 in the subdivisions bordering Colorado NM.

**Northern Bobwhite** ♦ *Colinus virginianus* A pair seen well in flight near Oakley, Kansas.

**Wild Turkey** ♦ *Meleagris gallopavo* Just four logged, with the best views at Rifle Falls SP (*intermedia*).

**Sage Grouse** ♦ (**Greater S G**) *Centrocercus urophasianus* Endemic. 25 near Craig, 86 at the Coalmont lek.

**Gunnison Grouse** ♦ (**G Sage G**) *Centrocercus minimus* Endemic. 30-40 at Waunita Springs lek, better than 2022.

**Dusky Grouse** ♦ *Dendragapus obscurus* Endemic. One flushed near Hayden.

**Sharp-tailed Grouse** ♦ *Tympanuchus phasianellus* Endemic. 29 at Ken's lek near Craig (*jamesi*).

**Greater Prairie Chicken** ♦ *T. cupido* Endemic. 16 (12 males) near Wray; 1 male & 1 hybrid male with next species.

**Lesser Prairie Chicken** ♦ *Tympanuchus pallidicinctus* Endemic. Eight lekking males near Oakley, Kansas.

**White-tailed Ptarmigan** ♦ *Lagopus leucura* Endemic. Fantastic views of one below Loveland Pass (*altipetens*).

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

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

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

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

**American Coot *Fulica americana***

**Sandhill Crane *Antigone canadensis***

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

**Horned Grebe (Slavonian G) *Podiceps auritus***

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

**Western Grebe** ◊ *Aechmophorus occidentalis* Nearly 40 noted during the tour – displaying at Fruitgrowers Res.

**Clark's Grebe** ◊ *Aechmophorus clarkii* Two at Lake Meredith, with one seen very well.

**Sora Porzana carolina** One seen briefly at Rocky Mountain Arsenal.

**Black-necked Stilt** *Himantopus mexicanus*

**American Avocet** *Recurvirostra americana*

**Killdeer** *Charadrius vociferous*

**Mountain Plover** ◊ *Anarhynchus montanus* Near-endemic. Three on their breeding grounds in the Pawnee NG.

**Snowy Plover** *Anarhynchus nivosus*

**Long-billed Curlew** *Numenius americanus*

**Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* Four seen in the Pawnee Grasslands.

**Wilson's Snipe** *Gallinago delicata*

**Wilson's Phalarope** *Phalaropus tricolor* One at Neenoshe Reservoir was a tour write-in.

**Lesser Yellowlegs** *Tringa flavipes*

**Greater Yellowlegs** *Tringa melanoleuca*

**Baird's Sandpiper** *Calidris bairdii* 15 at Neenoshe Reservoir.

**Least Sandpiper** *Calidris minutilla* Two at Neenoshe Reservoir.

**Western Sandpiper** *Calidris mauri* One at Neenoshe Reservoir was a tour write-in.

**Semipalmated/Western Sandpiper** *Calidris pusilla/mauri* One at Neenoshe Reservoir.

**Bonaparte's Gull** ◊ *Chroicocephalus philadelphia* Three at Holbrook Reservoir, near La Junta.

**Franklin's Gull** ◊ *Leucophaeus pipixcan* Small numbers at scattered locations.

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

**California Gull** ◊ *Larus californicus* Singles at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR, and Jackson Lake SP.

**Double-crested Cormorant** *Nannopterum auritum*

**Great Blue Heron** *Ardea herodias*

**American White Pelican** *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*

**Turkey Vulture** *Cathartes aura*

**Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus*



**Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*** Widespread, with at least six logged (*canadensis*).

**Sharp-shinned Hawk *Accipiter striatus***

**Cooper's Hawk *Accipiter cooperii***

**Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonius***

**Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus***

**Swainson's Hawk *Buteo swainsoni*** A total of four were seen en route in the plains.

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

**Ferruginous Hawk** ♦ ***Buteo regalis*** Good views of one near Mack.

**Rough-legged Buzzard** ♦ (R-I Hawk) ***Buteo lagopus*** One in fields to the NE of La Junta.

**Boreal Owl** ♦ (Tengmalm's O) ***Aegolius funereus*** Heard-only. Two were calling distantly at Cameron Pass.

**Burrowing Owl *Athene cunicularia*** Singles near Wray and in the Pawnee Grasslands (*hypugnea*).

**Northern Pygmy Owl** ♦ ***Glaucidium californicum*** Fantastic views of one at Mountain Park.

**Great Horned Owl *Bubo virginianus*** A total of six seen, and two occupied nests (one with two young).

**Western Screech Owl** ♦ ***Megascops kennicottii*** Good looks at one at Big Salt Wash, near Fruita

**Belted Kingfisher *Megaceryle alcyon***

**Lewis's Woodpecker** ♦ ***Melanerpes lewis*** Near-endemic. Lovely pair in their huge tree near Fruitgrowers Reservoir.

**Red-naped Sapsucker** ♦ ***Sphyrapicus nuchalis*** A male at Rifle Falls.

**American Three-toed Woodpecker** ♦ ***Picooides dorsalis*** Endemic. A drumming male at Mountain Park.

**Ladder-backed Woodpecker *Dryobates scalaris***

**Downy Woodpecker *D. pubescens*** Near-endemic. Three in west (*leucurus*); one Rocky Mountain A. (*pubescens*).

**Hairy Woodpecker *Leuconotopicus villosus*** 10 noted in total (all Rocky Mountain *orius*).

**Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus***

**American Kestrel *Falco sparverius***

**Merlin *Falco columbarius*** One zipped across at the Coalmont Sage Grouse lek.

**Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus***

**Eastern Phoebe** *Sayornis phoebe*

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

**Loggerhead Shrike** *Lanius ludovicianus*

**Blue Jay** *Cyanocitta cristata*

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

**Woodhouse's Scrub Jay** ◇ *Aphelocoma woodhouseii* Three at Black Canyon of the Gunnison & Colorado NM.

**Pinyon Jay** ◇ *Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus* Near-endemic. Flocks of 27 near Salida, and 110 at the Black Canyon.

**Black-billed Magpie** ◇ *Pica hudsonia* Endemic. Widespread and common in its habitat.

**Clark's Nutcracker** ◇ *Nucifraga columbiana* Near-endemic. Singles near Silverthorne and at the Black Canyon.

**American Crow** *Corvus brachyrhynchos* Near-endemic.

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

**Cedar Waxwing** *Bombycilla cedrorum*

**Juniper Titmouse** ◇ *Baeolophus ridgwayi* Near-endemic. Four at Colorado NM (nominate).

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

**Mountain Chickadee** ◇ *Poecile gambeli* Near-endemic. Widespread and common in the Rockies (nominate).

**Horned Lark (Shore L)** *Eremophila alpestris*

**Tree Swallow** *Tachycineta bicolor*

**American Bushtit** ◇ *Psaltriparus minimus* Seven in total, including one carrying nest material (*plumbeus*).

**Golden-crowned Kinglet** *Regulus satrapa* Just one, at Echo Lake (*amoenus*).

**Rock Wren** ◇ *Salpinctes obsoletus* 1 at Higbee Valley and, surprisingly, 2 in the Pawnee Grasslands (nominate).

**Canyon Wren** ◇ *Catherpes mexicanus* One performed admirably at the Devil's Kitchen (*conspersus*).

**Marsh Wren** ◇ *Cistothorus palustris* One perched up and sang at Lower Latham Reservoir area.

**Bewick's Wren** ◇ *Thryomanes bewickii* One at Higbee Valley, and a couple at the Devil's Kitchen.

**White-breasted Nuthatch** ♦ (Interior W-b N) *Sitta [carolinensis] lagunae* Occasional sightings in the Rockies.

**Pygmy Nuthatch** ♦ *Sitta pygmaea* Locally common in the mountains (*melanotis*).

**Red-breasted Nuthatch** ♦ *Sitta canadensis* Near-endemic. A total of 10 across five dates in the Rockies.

**Brown Creeper** ♦ *Certhia americana* Five in the Rockies (*montana*).

**Sage Thrasher** ♦ *Oreoscoptes montanus* Two at Blue Mesa Reservoir, two near Mack, and one at Pawnee NG.

**Curve-billed Thrasher** ♦ *Toxostoma curvirostre* Two performed nicely at Higbee Valley (*celsum*).

**Common Starling (introduced)** *Sturnus vulgaris*

**Mountain Bluebird** ♦ *Sialia currucoides* This beauty was widespread and fairly common.

**Western Bluebird** ♦ *Sialia mexicana* Well distributed, but less common than the last species (*bairdi*).

**Eastern Bluebird** ♦ *Sialia sialis* A pair near Wray.

**Townsend's Solitaire** ♦ *Myadestes townsendi* Easily seen again this year, with five across four days (nominate).

**American Robin** *Turdus migratorius*

**American Dipper** *Cinclus mexicanus* A pair at Rifle falls, and a single singing at Mountain Park (*unicolor*).

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

**Evening Grosbeak** ♦ *Hesperiphona vespertina* Five at Rifle Falls (*brooksi*).

**Pine Grosbeak** ♦ *Pinicola enucleator* A good year, with a total of 11 seen in the Rockies (*montana*).

**Grey-crowned Rosy Finch** ♦ *Leucosticte tephrocotis* Endemic. One near Silverthorne and 10+ at Mt. Crested Butte.

**Grey-crowned Rosy Finch** ♦ (Hepburn's R F) *L. [tephrocotis] littoralis* Endemic. 1 Silverthorne, 1 Mt. Crested Butte.

**Black Rosy Finch** ♦ *L. atrata* Endemic. Male Mt. Crested Butte. This and next species endangered and monotypic.

**Brown-capped Rosy Finch** ♦ *Leucosticte australis* Endemic. 35 near Silverthorne, and 80+ at Mt. Crested Butte.

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

**House Finch *Haemorhous mexicanus***

**Red Crossbill (Common C) *Loxia curvirostra*** Four near Silverthorne (presumably *benti*).

**American Goldfinch *Spinus tristis***

**Lesser Goldfinch *Spinus psaltria*** Two at Big Salt Wash were a tour write-in.

**Pine Siskin** ♦ *Spinus pinus* Small numbers at scattered sites in the Rockies (nominate).

**Thick-billed Longspur** ♦ (McCown's L) *Rhynchophanes mccownii* Magic encounters in the Pawnee (8+).

**Chestnut-collared Longspur** ♦ *Calcarius ornatus* Two stunning males at the Pawnee NG; also seen superbly.

**Black-throated Sparrow *Amphispiza bilineata*** One seen well at Colorado NM (*deserticola*).

**Slate-colored Fox Sparrow** ♦ *Passerella schistacea* Near-endemic. One singing, and two heard Black Canyon.

**Dark-eyed Junco** ♦ (Oregon J) *Junco [hyemalis] oregonus* Multiple sightings.

**Dark-eyed Junco** ♦ (Pink-sided J) *Junco [hyemalis] mearnsi* Ditto.

**Dark-eyed Junco** ♦ (Grey-headed J) *Junco [hyemalis] caniceps* The commonest junco in the Rockies.

**White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys*** Scattered sightings of *gambelii*.

**Sagebrush Sparrow** ♦ *Artemisiospiza nevadensis* Near-endemic. One seen very well NW of Mack.

**Vesper Sparrow** ♦ *Pooecetes gramineus* Small numbers in the Pawnee Grasslands (*confinis*).

**Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia*** Occasional in suitable wetland habitat (*juddi*).

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

**Rufous-crowned Sparrow** ♦ *Aimophila ruficeps* A pair seen well at Higbee Valley (*eremoeca*).

**Spotted Towhee** ♦ *Pipilo maculatus* Eight or so at the Black Canyon; singles Colorado NM & N of Hayden (*arcticus*).

**Yellow-headed Blackbird *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*** At least four at Walden.

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

**Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus***

**Brown-headed Cowbird *Molothrus ater***

**Common Grackle *Quiscalus quiscula***

**Great-tailed Grackle *Quiscalus mexicanus***

**Myrtle Warbler *Setophaga coronata*** A single male at Rocky Mountain Arsenal, on our last day.

## MAMMALS

**Coyote *Canis latrans***

**Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*** Several in the Walden-Cameron Pass area.

**Pronghorn *Antilocapra americana*** Regular encounters with this lovely antelope.

**Wapiti (American Elk) *Cervus canadensis*** The biggest count was at the Gunnison Grouse lek, with 100 noted.

**Mule Deer *Odocoileus hemionus***

**Bighorn Sheep *Ovis canadensis*** Many sightings this year, with at least 22 logged (*nelsoni*).

**White-tailed Jackrabbit *Lepus townsendii*** One at Blue Mesa Res., and several near Walden.

**Desert Cottontail *Sylvilagus audubonii***

**Eastern Cottontail *Sylvilagus floridanus*** One at our hotel in Oakley.

**Gunnison's Prairie Dog *Cynomys gunnisoni*** Small numbers were active near Gunnison.

**White-tailed Prairie Dog *Cynomys leucurus*** Multiple sightings at the more westerly locations that we visited.

**Black-tailed Prairie Dog *Cynomys ludovicianus*** Frequent at the more easterly locations that we visited.

**Least Chipmunk *Neotamias minimus***

**Hopi Chipmunk *Neotamias rufus*** Three of these more localised chipmunks at Colorado NM.

**Common Rock Squirrel *Otospermophilus variegatus***

**Eastern Fox Squirrel *Sciurus niger***

**North American Red Squirrel *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus***

**Wyoming Ground Squirrel (Nevada G S) *Urocitellus elegans*** A couple in the Coalmont Sage Grouse lek.

## BUTTERFLIES

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

## AMPHIBIANS

**Wood Frog *Lithobates sylvaticus***