

COLORADO GROUSE

APRIL 21 – 30, 2011

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Few birding experiences in North America can top the arrival of spring in the prairies and high basin parklands of Colorado. And few things are less predictable than the spring weather in the Rockies. Both points were hammered home to us during this year's Colorado Grouse II tour.

We started our tour with a predawn vigil east of Gunnison. Word had it that the Gunnison Sage-Grouse were spookier than usual, due to repeated incidents of predation at the lek from coyotes and Golden Eagles in just the past couple of weeks. That observation from the volunteers overseeing the public lek proved to be spot-on. As we sat, huddled in the blind, with dawn slowly breaking, it became apparent that there were only four male grouse at the lek. They were dancing at first, although with a stiff wind blowing it was difficult to hear their sounds. But just as it was getting light enough to really make out plumage details in the scope, the birds seemed to lose interest in displaying and appeared nervous and in a state of high alert. Within minutes, they had walked off or flown off the lek, ending the show somewhat prematurely. The weather was changing too. By the time we made it back to the hotel for breakfast and checkout, it was already snowing on Monarch Pass. This seemed to bode well for our chances of finding rosy-finches in Crested Butte, so off we went. Despite snow flurries that continued throughout our time in Crested Butte, it did not appear that rosy-finches were being driven from the mountains above into town. We did find a number of other birds that were, however, ranging from Red-naped Sapsuckers and Cassin's Finches to less expected Yellow-headed Blackbirds and Vesper Sparrows. After a couple of hours of cruising every neighborhood in Crested Butte for feeders, we headed back to Gunnison, only to spot a flock of more than 100 high-flying rosy-finches headed in the other direction. We turned around and gave chase, but never could catch up with them, and their specific identity was destined to remain a mystery.

The hours spent in Crested Butte had allowed time for the snowplows to open up Monarch Pass, which had been treacherous just a few hours earlier. We made it over without problems and birded our way to Pueblo, scoring a nice Osprey, a pair of Dippers feeding young, a very responsive Juniper Titmouse, and multiple Townsend's Solitaires in the process.

The next day found us birding our way along the Arkansas River Valley and adjacent plains east and south to Lamar. Stops at various lakes yielded lots of goodies, from a flock of 300+ Franklin's Gulls and side by side Clark's and Western grebes at Lake Meredith to a Barn Owl and Scaled Quail at Lake Henry, and a nice assortment of shorebirds (including American Avocets, Black-necked Stilts, Snowy Plovers, and Baird's Sandpipers) at Lake Cheraw. But the biggest highlights of the day came after lunch, when a stop near Las Animas yielded both a stunning Lewis's Woodpecker and

crippling views of a badger at point-blank range. Several Wild Turkeys and a rookery of Great Blue Herons were a nice bonus.

The following day found us up before dawn once again, this time in pursuit of displaying Lesser Prairie-Chickens. Our blind here was mobile, in the form of an old school bus that we parked within viewing distance of a lek located on private land. The birds were about 100 m away, but we were able to set the scope up inside the bus and obtained nice views once the light allowed. And unlike the Gunnison Sage-Grouse, these chickens were really in the mood to dance. We enjoyed a wonderful, prolonged show, followed by a hearty chuckwagon-style breakfast back at Fred and Norma's place. Then we headed south of Lamar for the Comanche National Grassland. Along the way, we stopped to glass a prairie dog town and hit on a trio of Mountain Plovers that turned out to be the only ones we would see on the trip. After several minutes of scope study and nice views, we continued on our way, headed for Cottonwood Canyon. Stops en route were numerous, for everything from Long-billed Curlews, Ferruginous Hawks, and Chihuahuan Ravens to Cassin's Sparrow and Lark Buntings. The canyon itself produced its typical interesting mix of birds, ranging from more southwestern fare like Greater Roadrunner, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Bushtit, Canyon Wren, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, and Canyon Towhee to Wild Turkeys, Eastern Phoebes, and side by side Downy and Hairy woodpeckers.

Awaking the next morning to cold temperatures and misting rain was a mere prelude to the jolt I got upon discovering that we had a severely flat tire. Fortunately, it took only an hour or so to find a garage whose road service team could repair the flat, and we were on our way, thankful that the mishap hadn't happened the previous morning, which would have cost us the Lesser Prairie-Chickens. After securing some eastern species (Red-bellied Woodpecker and Brown Thrasher) at the Lamar Community College, we headed east and then north toward Wray. A stop at Bonny Reservoir yielded two big treats in the form of multiple Virginia Rails and a Long-eared Owl on a nest. Upon arrival in Wray, we made a recon trip out to the Greater Prairie-Chicken lek, and enjoyed watching 28 males booming away in the late afternoon sun. We returned to that lek pre-dawn the next morning, and reveled in the cacophony of cackling, hooting, and booming that marks the displays of these dancers of the dawn. Just sitting in the dark, surrounded by the sounds of the chickens, was a spectacular treat—one made even better with the arrival of light. Once again, there were 28 revved-up males, with a succession of females wandering on to the lek and stirring things up. Best of all, they were close, really close. And with females hanging around, the males were in overdrive, performing as if there were no tomorrow. The show went on, and on, and on, and when it was over, I had to concede that this was probably the best single performance I had ever seen at a Greater Prairie-Chicken lek in over 20 years of leading grouse tours.

After the lek, almost anything else would seem mundane, but we were now headed west, toward the renowned Pawnee National Grassland, with our search images set for longspurs. And find them we did, although not exactly as expected. In most years, both McCown's and Chestnut-collared longspurs would already be on territory by this late date in the spring. But throughout our tour, we would be constantly reminded that this was no ordinary year, and that the northward march of spring was slower than usual. We

had little trouble in locating McCown's Longspurs, but they were not on territory, and no males were singing. Instead, we kept encountering small flocks of males and females that fed in one spot for a while and then moved on. Nonetheless, we secured many fine views. But aside from one highly suspect individual that rocketed away before we could check it out, Chestnut-collared Longspurs were totally missing in action. They are almost always later to arrive than the McCown's Longspurs, which themselves appeared to be newly on the scene. Reluctantly, we threw in the towel and headed for Fort Collins where an excellent dinner awaited.

A much later start the next morning found us with our internal batteries recharged, and looking forward to birding our way through the mountains to Walden. Stops in Poudre Canyon produced Common Merganser, Red-naped Sapsucker, Mountain Chickadee and others, but the strong winds that had dogged us virtually throughout the tour to this point persisted, making any birding outside of the vehicle a downright chilly proposition. A stop at Moose Visitor Center allowed us to bird from inside the building, and we enjoyed watching an array of feeder visitors ranging from red fox and least chipmunk to Pine Grosbeaks and Cassin's Finches. We rolled into Walden in time for lunch and check-in, and then headed out to Walden Reservoir and Arapahoe National Wildlife Refuge, where we enjoyed a fabulous assortment of waterfowl, grebes, and shorebirds, not to mention raptors that ranged from Northern Harriers to Bald Eagles.

The next morning found us once again in a pre-dawn vigil, this time for Greater Sage-Grouse. I had pretty much promised that the Greaters would make up for the rather half-hearted efforts of their Gunnison brethren; fortunately, they did not let me down. Although not nearly as frenetic nor as aurally spectacular as the displays of the Greater Prairie-Chickens, the displays of the Greater Sage-Grouse were impressive nonetheless, and at various times we had multiple displaying birds that were almost too close to focus on. And what they lacked in agility and sound, the sage-grouse made up for in size and general impressiveness—these are some whacking big grouse! After a most enjoyable morning spent on the lek, we cruised the Walden area looking for Prairie Falcons, but to no avail. Then it was on to Steamboat Springs, where an afternoon excursion failed to yield the hoped-for Dusky Grouse, but did produce some fairly distant Sharp-tailed Grouse dancing in a stubble field.

Heading out to the parking lot before dawn the next morning had us optimistic that the weather was on our side for a change. Skies appeared to be clear, and temperatures were warm, so off we went, headed for our traditional Sharp-tailed Grouse lek, with a stop to look for Dusky Grouse en route. We pulled up to my Dusky Grouse spot and within seconds of turning off the engine, I could hear not one but three different displaying Dusky Grouse. We waited for it to get light, but the light brought no visible grouse, and time was slipping away. We got out and walked toward the sounds, which stopped almost immediately. Tom and Suzanne spotted a Dusky Grouse slipping silently away through the sagebrush, but then it flushed before everyone could get on it. Fortunately, I followed it to where it landed (upslope), and was able to get it in the scope for everyone, allowing nice views. But there was no time to enjoy this conquest, because, once again, the weather was changing. The temperature was dropping, and it was starting to snow! We

raced to Twenty Mile Road and our favorite Sharp-tailed lek, and sure enough, birds were already dancing when we arrived. Sadly, it would not last. The snow was coming down in buckets now, and just trying to keep it from totally obscuring the spotting scope was an impossible task. What's worse, the Sharp-tails themselves were waving the white flag of surrender—there was just no point in dancing when the wind was howling and wet snow was blanketing the landscape. There was nothing left for us to do but head back to Steamboat Springs, pack-up, and hope we could get over Rabbit Ears Pass without too much difficulty. The going was slow on the Pass, and at times near whiteout conditions prevailed. But eventually we made it over and down the other side. Stops for high mountain birds were completely out of the question, so we too surrendered, and headed for Silverthorne and lunch. For a couple of hours, we succeeded in outrunning the storm, but now it had overtaken us once again. Looking for ptarmigan on Loveland Pass was nearly hopeless, although we attempted it anyway. Giving up, we headed down the mountain toward Denver, but not before spending some enjoyable and productive time in the Ponderosa Pine belt at Genesee Park, where close Western Bluebirds and Pygmy Nuthatches took a backseat to a spectacular pair of Williamson's Sapsuckers at the same spot.

This was a very successful trip, in spite of being book-ended by snowstorms on the first and last days, with persistent high winds nearly throughout the trip, that really only abated (thankfully) during our visit to the Greater Prairie-Chicken lek. The abnormally late spring cost us several migrants that we typically would expect to see during the course of the tour, but then again, there's just no predicting the Colorado spring weather. We were witness to some of the greatest natural history spectacles on the continent, in the form of the displays of both species of prairie-chickens and the Greater Sage-Grouse, not to mention an impressive cross section of birds and mammals. You all were a great group and loads of fun, and I hope to see you on another trip soon—hopefully one with less wind and snow!

Itinerary:

4/21 - Meet in Gunnison

4/22 - Visit Gunnison Sage-Grouse lek (Waunita Lek), followed by birding in and around Crested Butte. We then birded our way east along Hwy. 50 to Pueblo, with numerous stops en route. Evening in Pueblo.

4/23 - Birding from Pueblo east to Lamar, primarily along the Arkansas River Valley, with stops near Boone, Fowler, Lake Meredith, Lake Henry, Sugar City, Cheraw, and Las Animas, with lunch in La Junta. Evening in Lamar.

4/24 - Visit to Lesser Prairie-Chicken lek northeast of Holly, followed by breakfast at Fred & Norma's place. We then drove back to Lamar and south to Springfield and Campo, spending the remainder of the day birding Carrizo and Cottonwood Canyons, before returning to Lamar. Evening in Lamar.

4/25 - We awoke to a seriously flat tire, which delayed our birding for an hour or so. Once we had the tire repaired, we birded the Lamar Community College woods. Then, off to Wray, with a major stop en route at Bonny Reservoir. Late afternoon visit to Greater Prairie-Chicken lek on the Bledsoe Ranch. Evening in Wray.

4/26 - Dawn vigil at Greater Prairie-Chicken lek on Bledsoe Ranch. After breakfast, we birded residential areas in Wray before heading north to Holyoke and west to Sterling, with various stops en route, including the Haxtun Sewage Ponds. After lunch, we headed to Briggsdale and the Pawnee National Grassland (Murphy Pasture Loop and the west unit north of Nunn), where we spent most of the afternoon before heading to our hotel in Fort Collins. Evening in Fort Collins.

4/27 - Fort Collins to Hwy. 14 west through Poudre Canyon to Cameron Pass, with various stops en route. West of the pass we stopped at the Moose Visitor Center, and then headed to Walden, where we birded around Walden Reservoir and Arapahoe NWR. Evening in Walden.

4/28 - Dawn vigil at Greater Sage-Grouse lek near Walden, followed by birding near Delaney Buttes and return visits to Walden Reservoir, Arapahoe NWR and the Lake Johns road. Early lunch in Walden, followed by afternoon drive over Rabbit Ears Pass to Steamboat Springs. After checking into our hotel, we drove to Hayden and the California Park Road, and then visited a Sharp-tailed Grouse lek. Evening in Steamboat Springs.

4/29 - Dawn efforts centered on finding Dusky Grouse near Steamboat, and a visit to a different Sharp-tailed Grouse lek, this time amid heavy snow flurries. After checking out of the hotel, we headed back up Rabbit Ears Pass, which was approaching near whiteout conditions (and was subsequently closed by snow after we made it over!), negating any planned attempts at birding. Then, on to Kremmling and Silverthorne (where we had lunch), followed by a visit to Loveland Pass, where, amid howling winds and blowing snow, we could not locate a White-tailed Ptarmigan. From here, brief stops at Georgetown and Genesee Park before rolling into Denver for our farewell dinner and checklist session.

4/30 - flights home

Key:

* = heard only

Birds:

Snow Goose - 1 at Lake Meredith on 4/23 and 10+ at Walden Reservoir on 4/28.

Canada Goose - Seen all but one day (4/24).

Wood Duck - 3 seen by Suzanne near Holly on 4/24, and 2 at the Lamar Community College on 4/25 were our only records.

Gadwall - Recorded on only 4 days, but common to abundant at all locales where encountered, particularly around Walden, Haxtun, and the eastern lakes. Noteworthy was our leucistic male at Arapahoe NWR on 4/27.

American Wigeon - Scattered singles, pairs and small groups recorded on 5 different days.

Mallard - Seen daily.

Blue-winged Teal - Seen 4 days (all on the eastern plains), with a high count of 50+ on 4/26.

Cinnamon Teal - 4 at Fowler on 4/23, and then not seen again until we got to Walden and Steamboat Springs, where we averaged 12–20/day.

Northern Shoveler - Recorded on 6 days.

Northern Pintail - 1 at Lake Cheraw on 4/23; 2 at Haxtun on 4/26; and 2 at Walden on 4/28.

Green-winged Teal - Scattered pairs and small groups recorded on 5 different days.

Canvasback - Seen only in the Walden area, where we recorded 15–25 both days.

Redhead - 15+ at Lake Cheraw on 4/23; 20+ at Walden Reservoir on 4/27–28.

Ring-necked Duck - 2 at Arapahoe NWR on 4/27 represented our only record.

Greater Scaup - 1 male at Walden Reservoir on 4/28. This species is fairly rare anywhere on our route.

Lesser Scaup - Not seen until we reached the Walden area, where it was common.

Bufflehead - Not seen until we got to the Walden area, where we were seeing 20+/day.

Common Goldeneye - 1 female at Lake Cheraw on 4/23 was our only record.

Common Merganser - 2 along the Poudre River on 4/27, and 50+ near Steamboat Springs on 4/28.

Red-breasted Merganser - 2 females near Steamboat Springs on 4/28.

Ruddy Duck - 50+ at Lakes Meredith, Henry & Cheraw on 4/23; 20 at Haxtun on 4/26; and common in the Walden area.

Scaled Quail - 2 near Boone that scurried away before they could be seen well, followed by 1 that posed beautifully along the road to Lake Henry, all on 4/23.

Ring-necked Pheasant - Less common than usual; seen on three days (4/38–30), with most coming on the drive between Lamar and Wray.

Greater Sage-Grouse - Nice performance from 16 close males, at least up until the rain shower literally dampened their enthusiasm!

Gunnison Sage-Grouse - A better performance than usual from the birds at this, the most distant of our leks. We had at least 16 birds, including some females.

Dusky Grouse - We started with a male that KJZ walked up in the afternoon near Hayden; unfortunately, only Ann got to see in on the ground before it flew again, although I think everyone at least saw it in flight as it crossed the road. The next day, we were afforded outstanding studies of first one, then another male displaying in the road pre-dawn, seemingly oblivious to our headlight beams. Still another male was seen along the roadside en route to the Sharp-tail lek. Voted “2nd Favorite Bird” of the trip.

Sharp-tailed Grouse - We started with 5 uninspired and rain-soaked bird on the afternoon of 5/2, then followed the next morning with at least 17 males and 4 females putting on a great show that went on and on.

Greater Prairie-Chicken - This one got the vote for “best performance by a displaying grouse” – we had at least 32 birds displaying all around us, often as close as 10 feet from the van. We even had a couple of birds displaying on top of the van for a few minutes!

Lesser Prairie-Chicken - At least 8 of these rapidly declining grouse on the lek. Displays were intermittent, partly due to strong winds, and partly due to the lateness of the season (These guys start displaying earlier in spring than the other species of grouse.), but we had good scope studies from inside our bus.

Wild Turkey - 8 near Las Animas on 4/23; 15+ in Cottonwood Canyon on 4/24; ca. 30 at Bonny Reservoir on 4/25; and 1 in Wray on 4/26.

Pied-billed Grebe - 1 at Lake Henry on 4/23 and 2 at Walden Reservoir on 4/27 were, surprisingly, the only ones recorded.

Horned Grebe - 1 at Lake Cheraw on 4/23 was our only record.

Eared Grebe - Seen on 4 days; particularly common at Lake Cheraw (100+) and Walden Reservoir.

Western Grebe - Seen on 5 days; particularly common at Lake Cheraw (100+) and Walden Reservoir (25+).

Clark's Grebe - 10 at Lake Henry & Meredith on 4/23; with a single individual seen at Walden Reservoir on 4/27-28.

Double-crested Cormorant - 15+ at Lake Henry on 4/23; also seen at Walden Reservoir.

American White Pelican - 20+ at Lake Meredith & Lake Henry on 4/23; 200–300+ at Walden Reservoir on 4/27-28.

Great Blue Heron - Seen on 4 days, with high count being 8+ in a small heronry near Las Animas on 4/23.

Cattle Egret - 1 near Lake Meredith on 4/23 was our only record.

White-faced Ibis - Small numbers at scattered locales (Lake Meredith & Lake Cheraw, Bonny Reservoir), with high count of 30+ on 4/28.

Turkey Vulture - Daily.

Osprey - 1 along the Arkansas River on 4/22; 1 at Fort Collins on 4/27; and 2 between Steamboat Springs and Silverthorn on 4/29.

Bald Eagle - Singles seen at Fort Collins, Poudre Canyon and Arapahoe NWR on 4/27, and 1 near Walden on 4/28.

Northern Harrier - Scattered singles seen on 4 different days.

Sharp-shinned Hawk - 1 on 4/24; an Accipiter seen at Poudre Park on 4/27 might have been this species.

Cooper's Hawk - Singles on 4/22 (Crested Butte) and 4/24 (Cottonwood Canyon) were our only definite records.

Swainson's Hawk - Recorded daily (except for 4/22) with high counts of 20+ on 4/23 and again on 4/26.

Red-tailed Hawk - 1–5 birds seen daily.

Ferruginous Hawk - Seen on 3 days, with high count of 3 individuals on 4/24.

Golden Eagle - Single birds seen on 3 days (4/24, 4/26, 4/28)

American Kestrel - Recorded daily (up to 30+/day).

Peregrine Falcon - 1 at Walden Reservoir on 4/27 was our only record.

Prairie Falcon - 1 at the west unit of the Pawnee Grassland on 4/26 was seen only in flight by KJZ.

Virginia Rail - 6+ seen at Bonny Reservoir on 4/25, including one very responsive pair that showed off for great studies.

American Coot - 300+ at Lakes Meredith, Henry & Cheraw on 4/23; common at Walden Reservoir on 4/27–28.

Sandhill Crane - 4 near Steamboat Springs on 4/29 were the only ones seen.

Snowy Plover - 2 at Lake Cheraw on 4/23.

Semipalmated Plover - 1 at Lake Cheraw on 4/23.

Killdeer - Almost daily in small numbers (high count of 15 on 4/23).

Mountain Plover - 3 south of Lamar on 4/24 were our only ones, but we did enjoy great views. This species used to be a slam-dunk on this tour, often with multiple encounters at various locations. Sadly, those days are long-gone, and we gratefully take this globally declining species wherever we can get it.

Black-necked Stilt - 4 at Fowler and 40+ at Lake Cheraw on 4/23.

American Avocet - Singles at Fowler and Lake Meredith, followed by 25+ at Lake Cheraw on 4/23, with 4 more at Walden on 4/27.

Greater Yellowlegs - 2 at Lake Cheraw on 4/23.

Willet - Seen only at Walden, where we had 5 on 4/27 and 7+ on 4/28.

Lesser Yellowlegs - 2 at Lake Cheraw on 4/23.

Long-billed Curlew - 3 near Campo on 4/24 and 2 on 4/26 were our only records.

Western Sandpiper - 3 at Lake Cheraw on 4/23.

Baird's Sandpiper - 3 at Lake Cheraw on 4/23.

Long-billed Dowitcher - 5 at Lake Cheraw on 4/23 and 4+ at Haxtun on 4/26.

Wilson's Snipe* - Heard winnowing pre-dawn near Steamboat Springs on 4/29. Seen by Allison and Tom at Gunnison prior to the official start of the trip.

Wilson's Phalarope - 1 elegant female at Lake Cheraw on 4/23 and 2 at Haxtun on 4/26. Also seen by some at Walden on 4/28.

Bonaparte's Gull - 20 at Lake Cheraw on 4/23, and 1 at Walden on 4/27.

Franklin's Gull - 300+ at Lake Meredith on 4/23. Many of these birds had the ephemeral rosy blush to the underparts that is typical of this species (and some other gulls and terns) at the height of breeding condition. Also 1 seen on 4/25, 5 seen high over Poudre Park (!) on 4/27; and 80+ seen around Walden later on 4/27.

Ring-billed Gull - 20+ scattered over the various eastern lakes on 4/23, then not recorded again until we reached Walden, where it was fairly common.

California Gull - Recorded only at Walden, where it is fairly common.

Herring Gull - 1 at Lake Meredith on 4/23 was our only record.

Rock Pigeon - Seen daily; yawn.

Band-tailed Pigeon - 2 in Georgetown on 4/29 represented our only record.

Eurasian Collared-Dove - The rapid spread of this species through Colorado has been nothing short of remarkable. I remember being excited by finding a pair in Campo in the mid-late 1990s; now they are everywhere, including at Moose Visitor Center at 9000' elevation amidst lodgepole pine, spruce, and fir! We saw them daily, and nearly everywhere we went.

Mourning Dove - Common throughout.

Barn Owl - 1 near Lake Henry on 4/23 was a treat!

Burrowing Owl - 1-6 seen per day from 4/23-26.

Long-eared Owl - 1 hunkered down on a nest at Bonny Reservoir was nice.

Broad-tailed Hummingbird* - We heard males fly over at several points in the mountains (east of Gunnison, Poudre Park, Poudre Canyon, Genesee Park), but never managed to see one.

Belted Kingfisher - 2 at Bonny Reservoir on 4/25 were, surprisingly, the only ones seen.

Lewis's Woodpecker - 1 bird seen nicely near Las Animas on 4/23 was our only record. It was clearly a down year for this cyclic and somewhat nomadic species, since there were none in their usual hangouts in Cottonwood and Carrizo canyons.

Red-bellied Woodpecker - Seen nicely at Lamar on 4/25, where they have become regular only in the past few years. Also heard at Bonny Reservoir later that day.

Williamson's Sapsucker - A stunning pair at Genesee Park on 4/29.

Red-naped Sapsucker - 1 at Crested Butte on 4/22, and then not seen again until Poudre Canyon on 4/27, where we encountered males at two different spots.

Ladder-backed Woodpecker* - Heard in Cottonwood Canyon, but we were never able to track it down.

Downy Woodpecker - 2 at Cottonwood Canyon on 4/24; 2 at Lamar Community College on 4/25; and 1 at Wray on 4/26.

Hairy Woodpecker - 1 at Crested Butte on 4/22; 1 at Cottonwood Canyon on 4/24; and 1 heard in Poudre Canyon on 4/27.

Northern Flicker - 1–5 birds seen daily. Every individual that I had a good look at was a “Red-shafted”-type bird. We often get “Yellow-shafteds” in the eastern plains.

Eastern Phoebe - 4 in Cottonwood Canyon on 4/24 were our only records.

Say’s Phoebe - Seen on 4 different days, with a high count of 20 on 4/24 (mostly along the Cottonwood Canyon loop).

Ash-throated Flycatcher - 1 in Cottonwood Canyon on 4/24 afforded excellent views.

Western Kingbird - 5 at various spots on the eastern plains on 4/23, and singles the next two days were our only ones.

Loggerhead Shrike - Seen on 5 different days, with high counts of 30+ on 4/23 and 15+ (mostly on the Pawnee Grasslands) on 4/25.

Steller’s Jay - 4+ at Crested Butte on 4/22; 10 between Ft. Collins and Walden on 4/27; and 6+ between Steamboat and Denver on 4/29. The subspecies here, *macrolopha*, is distinguished from other races by its longer crest, white forehead streaking, and white accents above the eyes.

Blue Jay - 1 at Lamar Community College on 4/25 and 2 in Wray on 4/26.

Western Scrub-Jay - 2 west of Pueblo on 4/22 and another in Cottonwood Canyon on 4/24.

Black-billed Magpie - Seen on 6 different days, with a high count of 200+ on 4/22 (particularly impressive numbers between Gunnison and Crested Butte).

American Crow - Seen every day except 4/24 and 4/26.

Chihuahuan Raven - 1 seen on the eastern plains on 4/23 and several seen along the grasslands leading to Cottonwood Canyon on 4/24.

Common Raven - Seen on 5 different days.

Horned Lark - Seen daily, usually in big numbers.

Tree Swallow - 2 east of Gunnison on 4/22; common in the Arkansas River Valley and eastern plains on 4/23; 5 at Hayden on 4/28.

Cliff Swallow - 5+ on the eastern plains on 4/23 were, oddly, the only ones seen.

Barn Swallow - Seen on 6 out of 8 days in the field.

Black-capped Chickadee - 2 at Bonny Reservoir on 4/25; several seen on 4/26 at Poudre Park and Moose Visitor Center; seen again in Georgetown on 4/29.

Mountain Chickadee - 2 near Maysville on 4/22; several in the mountains on 4/27; seen again in Georgetown on 4/29.

Juniper Titmouse - A responsive bird along Hwy. 50 west of Pueblo on 4/22 provided us with nice views.

Bushtit - Several in Cottonwood Canyon on 4/24.

Red-breasted Nuthatch * - Heard near Maysville on 4/22, but the little bugger wouldn’t come in.

White-breasted Nuthatch - 2 in Georgetown on 4/29 were our only ones.

Pygmy Nuthatch - Seen beautifully at Genesee Park on 4/29.

Rock Wren - Singles in Carrizo Canyon on 4/24 and the Pawnee Grassland on 4/26 were our only ones.

Canyon Wren - 3 in Cottonwood Canyon on 4/24.

Bewick's Wren - 5+ in Cottonwood Canyon on 4/24.

Marsh Wren - 1 glimpsed as it buried itself in the reeds at Lamar Community College on 4/25.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher - 2 at Cottonwood Canyon on 4/24.

American Dipper - 2 along the Arkansas River east of Gunnison on 4/22 were feeding young at a nest.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet - 2 in Cottonwood Canyon on 4/24, and another heard in Poudre Canyon on 4/27.

Western Bluebird - A nice pair at Genesee Park on 4/29.

Mountain Bluebird - 25+ on 4/22, and then not seen again until 4/27, when we saw one between Ft. Collins and Walden; 12+ around Walden on 4/28; and seen again between Steamboat and Denver on 4/29.

Townsend's Solitaire - 6+ west of Pueblo on 4/22 afforded good views, with singles seen at Bonny Reservoir on 4/25 and near Delaney Buttes on 4/28.

Hermit Thrush - 2 at Crested Butte on 4/22, and another in Cottonwood Canyon on 4/24.

American Robin - Common; seen daily.

Northern Mockingbird - 3 on 4/24 and 1 on 4/25 were our only records.

Sage Thrasher - 6 at Arapahoe NWR on 4/27, and 2 more near Walden Reservoir on 4/28.

Brown Thrasher - 2 at Lamar Community College and 1 at Bonny Reservoir on 4/25.

European Starling - Common; seen daily.

McCown's Longspur - 75+ at the Pawnee Grasslands on 4/26. These birds were still not on territory yet, just moving around in small flocks, which is further evidence of a late spring.

Orange-crowned Warbler - 2 at Cottonwood Canyon on 4/24 and 2 at Lamar Community College on 4/25.

Yellow-rumped Warbler - Scattered singles seen on 5 different days, with both "Myrtle" and "Audubon's" types seen; high count of 10 on 4/25.

Green-tailed Towhee - 1 seen from the blind at the Waunita lek on 4/22.

Spotted Towhee - 1 at Crested Butte and 1 west of Pueblo on 4/22, and another heard in Cottonwood Canyon on 4/24.

Rufous-crowned Sparrow - 3 seen in Cottonwood Canyon on 4/24.

Canyon Towhee - 5 seen in Cottonwood Canyon on 4/24.

Cassin's Sparrow - 1 in the grasslands near Campo on 4/24.

Chipping Sparrow - Small numbers recorded on 4 different days.

Brewer's Sparrow - 8 near Boone on 4/23 were, surprisingly, the only ones seen.

Vesper Sparrow - Common; seen daily in numbers, including several in Crested Butte during the snowstorm!

Lark Sparrow - 5 seen near Boone on 4/23.

Lark Bunting - 20+ in the grasslands west of Campo on 4/24.

Song Sparrow - Seen by some in Crested Butte on 4/22.

White-crowned Sparrow - Seen daily for the first 5 days of the trip, with highs of 30+ on 4/23 and 4/24.

Dark-eyed Junco - Common at Crested Butte (4/22) and in the mountains between Fort Collins and Walden, and between Steamboat Springs and Denver. Most of the birds we saw were of the subspecies *caniceps* (“Gray-headed Junco”), formerly recognized as a distinct species. We also saw a few “Pink-sided Juncos” (subspecies *mearnsi*) and “Slate-colored” types.

Red-winged Blackbird - Common; seen daily in numbers.

Western Meadowlark - Common; seen daily.

Yellow-headed Blackbird - 50+ in Crested Butte on 4/22; 50+ near Lake Meredith on 4/23; and 40+ around Walden on 4/27.

Brewer’s Blackbird - Small numbers (10–15) seen on 4/22 and 4/23.

Common Grackle - Common; seen daily.

Great-tailed Grackle - After 15 years of expansion and increasing abundance, this species seems to have declined in se Colorado. We saw only a few on 4/23 and 4/24.

Brown-headed Cowbird - 1 female at Crested Butte on 4/22 was, amazingly, the only one we saw. Were we just not paying attention?

Rosy-finch sp. - A flock of 100+ Rosy-Finches seen swirling over the highway outside of Crested Butte on 4/22 couldn’t be identified to species. We turned around and tried to follow them, but they disappeared from sight. Bummer!

Pine Grosbeak - 2 (male & female) at the Moose Visitor Center feeders on 4/27.

Cassin’s Finch - 12+ in Crested Butte on 4/22 and 1 male at Moose Visitor Center on 4/27.

House Finch - Small numbers seen each of the last 4 days of the trip.

Pine Siskin - 1 at Wray on 4/26; heard at Poudre Park on 4/27 and at Georgetown on 4/29.

American Goldfinch - 1 in Cottonwood Canyon on 4/24 was, amazingly, the only one seen.

House Sparrow - Common; seen daily.

TOTAL = 162 species

Mammals:

Black-tailed Jackrabbit - Pawnee Grassland

White-tailed Jackrabbit - North Park

Desert Cottontail - southeastern plains

Eastern Cottontail - These were the cottontails that we saw around Wray and Bonny Reservoir.

Gunnison’s Prairie-Dog - Gunnison area. These are only recently recognized as a distinct species.

Black-tailed Prairie-Dog - This was the widespread prairie-dog that we saw over most of our route (Pueblo, Boone, Lamar, Campo, Pawnee Grassland).

White-tailed Prairie-Dog - North Park (particularly Arapahoe NWR). Remember, “it’s not a job, it’s an adventure!”

Least Chipmunk - Moose Visitor Center

Colorado Chipmunk - west of Pueblo on 4/22.

Golden-mantled Ground-Squirrel - California Park Road out of Hayden.

Wyoming Ground-Squirrel - This is a recent split from what was called "Richardson's Ground-Squirrel".

Rock Squirrel - Seen by Allison on 4/23.

Eastern Fox Squirrel - Crested Butte on 4/22, and somewhere en route to Denver on 4/29.

Abert's Squirrel (Tassel-eared Squirrel) - Genesee Park on 4/29

Muskrat - Walden Reservoir

Porcupine - Seen first at Bonny Reservoir (nice spotting Tom!) and then again right next to the road in the snowstorm along Twenty Mile Road (near Hayden) on 4/29.

Coyote - Crested Butte

Red Fox - Seen nicely at the Moose Visitor Center on 4/27.

Badger - Spectacular views near Las Animas on 4/23.

Mule Deer - Gunnison to Pueblo on 4/22 and Cottonwood Canyon on 4/24.

White-tailed Deer - Wooded areas of the eastern plains on 4/23–25.

Pronghorn - Almost daily (Missed only on the day we went from Lamar to Wray.)

Bighorn Sheep - Gunnison to Pueblo on 4/22 and Cottonwood Canyon on 4/24.

TOTAL = 23 species