

Platte River Cranes

Species List | March 16 – 22, 2025

with Naturalist Journeys



Compiled by guide Kent Skaggs with guide David Jaffe. Our clients included Beth & Carole, Gretchen & Fred, Helen, Jennifer, Maxie, Phyllis & Mike and Richard.

Nature enthusiasts from Alaska, California, Washington, DC, Maryland, Montana and Virginia traveled to south-central Nebraska to witness one of the last great wildlife migrations on the planet. The annual spring stopover of migrating Sandhill Cranes along the Platte River near Kearney has truly become a destination for not only bird watchers, but nature lovers in general. Although cranes are the focus of this tour, several other groups of birds are beginning their journey north during March and we were looking for these too, along with any other wildlife we could find. Keep reading to find out what was seen during the tour.

BIRDS - 68 species were recorded of which two were heard only (HO) and five were introduced (I). Details are included below.

The eBird link below details the 68 species of birds our group observed during the tour. If you're new to eBird, be sure to click "Show All Details" on the right side of the list to expand the report and reveal where and when each of the birds were seen and how many.

[Platte River Cranes | March 16-22, 2025 | eBird Trip Report](#)

Following is a list of the birds and mammals we were fortunate to observe during the trip.

Common Name *species name* – observation

If not using eBird annotated species list here

Family or Species Common Name: Scientific Name

DUCKS, GEESE AND SWANS: ANATIDAE

Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens* — Although the majority had already passed through the area, we came across this species on multiple occasions in the Platte River Valley.

Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* — Four were seen on a borrow pit near the north channel of the Platte River along Nebraska Highway 10.

Cackling Goose *Branta hutchinsii* — Approximately 100 were seen on the same borrow pit as the Greater White-fronted Geese and another 50 were seen on the borrow pit behind what used to be Grandpa's Steakhouse.

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis* — Small numbers seen on most days at multiple locations.

Blue-winged Teal *Spatula discors* — A pair were seen on the pond at Spring Creek Prairie, four on the borrow pit behind Grandpa's Steakhouse and one on the river at Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary.

Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata* — Seen at multiple locations with the largest numbers seen at Harlan County Reservoir and the Alma Wastewater Treatment Ponds.

Gadwall *Mareca strepera* — Most numerous at Harlan County Reservoir with small numbers seen on borrow pits near Kearney as well.

American Wigeon *Mareca americana* — Most numerous at Harlan County Reservoir with four seen on a borrow pit near Kearney.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* — Most numerous at Harlan County Reservoir with several seen along the Platte River as well.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* — Seen at Harlan County Reservoir and along the Platte River at Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary.

Green-winged Teal *Anas crecca* — Seen on most days at multiple locations, with the largest numbers occurring at Harlan County Reservoir.

Canvasback *Aythya valisineria* — A dozen were seen at the Alma Wastewater Treatment Ponds.

Redhead *Aythya americana* — Most numerous at Harlan County Reservoir with a couple seen at the Alma Wastewater Treatment Ponds as well.

Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris* — A single bird was seen on a pond at the Fort Kearny State Recreation Area.

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis* — Most numerous at Harlan County Reservoir near the dam with good numbers seen at the Alma Wastewater Treatment Ponds as well.

Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola* — Most numerous at Harlan County Reservoir with some seen on borrow pits along the Platte River as well.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* — A single bird was seen on the borrow pit behind Grandpa's Steakhouse.

Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis* — Most numerous at the Alma Wastewater Treatment Ponds with some seen from the dam at Harlan County Reservoir and one seen on the borrow pit behind Grandpa's Steakhouse.

PARTRIDGES, PHEASANTS AND ALLIES: Phasianidae

Wild Turkey *Meleagris gallopavo* — Seen at multiple locations along the Platte River while en route.

Greater Prairie-Chicken *Tympanuchus cupido* — A single bird was seen in flight while driving east of Harlan County Reservoir.

Ring-necked Pheasant (I) *Phasianus colchicus* — Heard and seen at Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary.

GREBES: Podicipedidae

Eared Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* — A single bird was seen along the face of the dam at Harlan County Reservoir.

PIGEONS AND DOVES: Columbidae

Rock Pigeon (I) *Columba livia* — Seen at multiple locations, typically while en route.

Eurasian Collared-Dove (I) *Streptopelia decaocto* — Seen at multiple locations typically while en route.

Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura* — Four were seen along Corp Rd A near the town of Republican City.

RAILS, COOTS AND ALLIES: Rallidae

American Coot *Fulica americana* — Most numerous at Harlan County Reservoir with two seen on the borrow pit behind Grandpa's Steakhouse.

CRANES: Gruidae

Sandhill Crane *Antigone canadensis* — An aerial count conducted a week prior to the start of the tour estimated numbers in the Big Bend stretch of the Platte River, which is roughly 30 miles west of Kearney to 30 miles east of Grand Island, to be around 750,000 cranes. Since we spent most of our time near Kearney and were unable to visit the Crane Trust for an evening tour due to a blizzard, the group saw somewhere between 100,000-200,000 cranes during the

week.

Whooping Crane *Grus americana* — Outside of the Sandhill Cranes, this would have to be the bird of the tour as the group was able to see five adults from the Fort Kearny Hike-Bike Trail Bridge on the last evening.

PLOVERS AND LAPWINGS: Charadriidae

Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus* — Seen most days at multiple locations.

SANDPIPERS AND ALLIES: Scolopacidae

Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii* — A single bird was seen flying over the river at Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary.

GULLS AND TERNS: Laridae

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis* — Seen most days at multiple locations, often while en route.

CORMORANTS: Phalacrocoracidae

Double-crested Cormorant *Nannopterum auritum* — Seen while en route flying along the Platte River near Kearney on the last evening of the tour.

PELICANS: Pelecanidae

American White Pelican *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos* — Several seen at Harlan County Reservoir.

HERONS AND EGRETS: Ardeidae

Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias* — A single bird was seen in flight at Spring Creek Prairie.

NEW WORLD VULTURES: Cathartidae

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura* — One was seen in flight at the Alma Wastewater Treatment Ponds.

HAWKS, KITES AND EAGLES: Accipitridae

Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonius* — Individual birds were seen at two locations around Harlan County Reservoir and another at the Alma Wastewater Treatment Ponds.

Cooper's Hawk *Accipiter cooperii* — One was seen at the trailhead to the Pheasant Ridge Walking Trail on the south side of Alma and another from the same trail near Methodist Cove a few miles east of town.

Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* — Seen most days at multiple locations.

Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis* — Seen most days at multiple locations, especially when en route.

OWLS: Strigidae

Great Horned Owl *Bubo virginianus* — One adult was seen on a nest near Republican City.

KINGFISHERS: Alcedinidae

Belted Kingfisher *Megasceryle alcyon* — A single bird was seen and heard from the Fort Kearny Hike-Bike Trail Bridge.

WOODPECKERS: Picidae

Red-bellied Woodpecker *Melanerpes carolinus* — A single bird was seen at a platform feeder at Spring Creek Prairie and another was seen near Republican City.

Downy Woodpecker *Dryobates pubescens* — See Red-bellied Woodpecker.

Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus* — Seen most days and at multiple locations.

FALCONS AND CARACARAS: Falconidae

American Kestrel *Falco sparverius* — Single birds seen at Spring Creek Prairie, the Crane Trust, from the dam at Harlan County Reservoir and at the Alma Wastewater Treatment Ponds.

TYRANT FLYCATCHERS: Tyrannidae

Eastern Phoebe *Sayornis phoebe* — One seen at Spring Creek Prairie and another near Republican City.

CROWS AND JAYS: Corvidae

Blue Jay *Cyanocitta cristata* — HO, at Spring Creek Prairie and near Republican City.

American Crow *Corvus brachyrhynchos* — Seen at Spring Creek Prairie and near Republican City.

TITS AND CHICKADEES: Paridae

Black-capped Chickadee *Poecile atricapillus* — HO, near Republican City.

NUTHATCHES: Sittidae

White-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta carolinensis* — One seen near Republican City.

STARLINGS AND MYNAS: Sturnidae

European Starling (I) *Sturnus vulgaris* — Seen most days and at multiple locations.

THRUSHES: Turdidae

Eastern Bluebird *Sialia sialis* — A pair was seen near a bluebird box at the Crane Trust Nature & Visitor Center.

American Robin *Turdus migratorius* — Seen everyday at multiple locations with 100+ seen at Fort Kearny State Historical Park.

OLD WORLD SPARROWS: Passeridae

House Sparrow (I) *Passer domesticus* — Seen at multiple locations.

PIPITS AND WAGTAILS: Motacillidae

American Pipit *Anthus rubescens* — One bird was seen in flight near the Crane Trust Nature & Visitor Center and at least four were seen on the rocks that line the face of the dam at Harlan County Reservoir.

FINCHES AND EUPHONIAS: Fringillidae

House Finch *Haemorhous mexicanus* — Seen and heard at multiple locations.

American Goldfinch *Spinus tristis* — A single bird was seen at Fort Kearny State Historical Park.

NEW WORLD SPARROWS: Passerellidae

Dark-eyed Junco *Junco hyemalis* — Seen at Fort Kearny State Historical Park and Fort Kearny State Recreation Area.

Harris's Sparrow *Zonotrichia querula* — See Dark-eyed Junco.

Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis* — One seen on the rocks with American Pipits on the dam at Harlan County Reservoir.

Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia* — One seen at Spring Creek Prairie.

NEW WORLD BLACKBIRDS AND ORIOLES: Icteridae

Yellow-headed Blackbird *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus* — Two were seen at Fort Kearny State Historical Park.

Western Meadowlark *Sturnella neglecta* — Multiple birds were seen en route.

Eastern Meadowlark *Sturnella magna* — One seen and at least two heard at Spring Creek Prairie.

Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus* — Seen everyday and at multiple locations.

Brown-headed Cowbird *Molothrus ater* — A few were seen at Fort Kearny State Historical Park.

Common Grackle *Quiscalus quiscula* — A large flock numbering 1,000+ was seen at Fort Kearny State Historical Park.

CARDINALS, GROSBILLS AND ALLIES: Cardinalidae

Northern Cardinal *Cardinalis cardinalis* — Seen at Fort Kearny State Recreation Area and near Republican City.

MAMMALS

Muskrat *Ondatra zibethicus* — One seen on the pond at Spring Creek Prairie.

Fox Squirrel *Sciurus niger* — Seen at multiple locations.

Black-tailed Prairie Dog *Cynomys ludovicianus* — Seen along the road leading to the dam at Harlan County Reservoir.

White-tailed Deer *Odocoileus virginianus* — Seen at Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary and at Harlan County Reservoir.