



## Yellowstone: Birds, Bears & Wildlife

June 9 - 16, 2021

With guides Carlos, Hugh, and Rick and twelve trip participants:

Steve and Linda B., Edith and Wayne, Kathy and Bob R., Sandy and Cathy, Elaine and Linda L., Linda S., and Dave

Compiled by Carlos Sanchez

(HO)= Distinctive enough to be counted as heard only

(I)=introduced

### Summary:

A fantastic to one of the most iconic parks in the world. High temperatures and dry conditions remained with us for nearly the entire length of the tour, with temperatures soaring into the 90s on more than one day. The region is also experiencing an unprecedented drought, which might explain the paucity of some bird species such as Mountain Bluebird. Over the course of eight days, we recorded nearly a 100 bird species along with 19 mammal species. Avian highlights included Harlequin Duck, American Dipper, Sandhill Crane, MacGillivray's Warbler, and Black Rosy-Finch, while Grizzly Bear stole the show for us in mammals. We even had some drama when a baby Mule Deer, perhaps just a few hours old, got stuck in a hole – but eventually got out! We also had a few wildflower enthusiasts on the tour, and we managed to key out about 26 different species and counting. Trip participants loved many experiences in the trip, but the day at the Beartooth Highway remains unchallenged as the best day of the tour on every Yellowstone tour I have ever run in the summer.

### BIRDS (97 species recorded, of which 5 were heard only):

#### **DUCKS, GEESE AND SWANS: Anatidae (17)**

**Canada Goose** *Branta canadensis*—common and widespread, recorded daily at most wetland sites.

**Trumpeter Swan** *Cygnus buccinator*—a pair nesting at Swan Lake and one bird at Hayden Valley. Only 69 individuals were known to exist in the lower 48 of the United States in 1935, and all of these were in and around Yellowstone National Park. Through intense conservation efforts, there are now over 60 thousand Trumpeter Swans in the US and Canada.

**Blue-winged Teal** *Spatula discors*—a couple sightings at Hayden Valley and Lamar Valley.

**Cinnamon Teal** *Spatula cyanoptera*—one of the more common dabbling ducks in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem area, and we recorded them at most wetland sites: Swan Lake, Hayden Valley, Lamar Valley, and Cherry River FAS.

**Northern Shoveler** *Spatula clypeata*—a solitary male at Pelican Creek was our only one of the trip.

**Gadwall** *Mareca strepera*—pairs observed at Cherry River FAS, Swan Lake, Hayden Valley, Lamar Valley, and Pelican Creek.

**American Wigeon** *Mareca americana*—small numbers at Swan Lake, Hayden Valley, and Lamar Valley.

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*—common and widespread at all wetland sites.

**Northern Pintail** *Anas acuta*—a handsome drake at Swan Lake.

**Green-winged Teal** *Anas crecca*—a handful of birds between Swan Lake, Hayden Valley, and Lamar Valley.

**Redhead** *Aythya americana*—a couple birds at Indian Pond, a reliable spring and summer site for this species.

**Ring-necked Duck** *Aythya collaris*—small numbers at Floating Island Lake and Swan Lake.

**Lesser Scaup** *Aythya affinis*—the most numerous diving duck in Yellowstone National Park, with a couple dozen or more birds seen at Swan Lake, Hayden Valley, Pelican Creek, and Indian Pond.

**Harlequin Duck** *Histrionicus histrionicus*—fantastic views of about a dozen individuals at Harlequin Duck, a specialist of clear, fast-flowing rivers when breeding. The name derives from a character of traditional Italian comedy and pantomime, the harlequin, who would appear in costumes of multicolored triangular patches. **\*\*VOTED BIRD OF THE TRIP\*\***

**Barrow's Goldeneye** *Bucephala islandica*—good numbers of this handsome species at Swan Lake, Hayden Valley, and Lamar Valley.

**Common Merganser** *Mergus merganser*—a few birds at Lamar Valley, Hayden Valley, and Indian Pond.

**Ruddy Duck** *Oxyura jamaicensis*—we saw five birds at Floating Island Lake on our first full day of birding, our only ones of the trip.

### **GREBES: Podicipedidae (1)**

**Western Grebe** *Aechmophorus occidentalis*—a sleeping bird at Pelican Creek was our only one.

### **PIGEONS AND DOVES: Columbidae (3)**

**Rock Pigeon** *Columba livia* (1)—seen only around towns, such as Bozeman and Gardiner.

**Eurasian Collared-Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto* (1)—only around towns, such as Bozeman and Gardiner.

**Mourning Dove** *Zenaida macroura*—seems to be most common near human habitation in this part of their range, mostly around Bozeman or Gardiner.

### **HUMMINGBIRDS: Trochilidae (1)**

**Broad-tailed Hummingbird** *Selasphorus platycercus* (HO)—we heard the diagnostic wing whirring a couple times in Cooke City, a sound only made by the males in flight.

### **RAILS, COOTS AND ALLIES: Rallidae (2)**

**Sora** *Porzana carolina* (HO)—heard loud and clear at Cherry River FAS and in an overgrown pond near the Yellowstone River Picnic area.

**American Coot** *Fulica americana*—just a few birds between Floating Island Lake and Swan Lake.

### **CRANES: Gruidae (1)**

**Sandhill Crane** *Antigone canadensis*—a few pairs, all with young colts, seen over the course of our trip: pond near the Yellowstone River Picnic area, Lamar Valley, and the agricultural fields on the way to Chico Hot Springs Resort.

### **PLOVERS AND LAPWINGS: Charadriidae (1)**

**Killdeer** *Charadrius vociferus*—nice views at the Norris Geyser Basin and Mammoth Hot Springs, where individual birds seemed at home feeding in the runoff from the various geothermal features.

### **SANDPIPERS AND ALLIES: Scolopacidae (2)**

**Wilson's Snipe** *Gallinago delicata*—seen by some of the group foraging in a grassy ditch by the road in the Lamar Valley.

**Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularius*—small numbers at the Lamar Valley and Indian Pond.

**LOONS: Gaviidae (1)**

**Common Loon** *Gavia immer*—an individual calling and flying by a clearing at Virginia Cascades while we were enjoying our picnic breakfast.

**PELICANS: Pelecanidae (1)**

**American White Pelican** *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*—singles at Cherry River FAS and Pelican Creek. This pelican species feeds by dipping its bill into the water and scooping prey, often in formation with many other American White Pelicans.

**HERONS AND EGRETS: Ardeidae (1)**

**Great Blue Heron** *Ardea herodias*—a bird seen in the scope at Pelican Creek.

**NEW WORLD VULTURES: Cathartidae (1)**

**Turkey Vulture** *Cathartes aura*—small numbers at Hayden and Lamar Valley. Nathan explained to our group how Turkey Vultures have managed to expand their range into the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem area over the past decade.

**OSPREY: Pandionidae (1)**

**Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus*—singles and pairs observed at Cherry River FAS, Lamar Valley, and Hayden Valley.

**HAWKS, KITES AND EAGLES: Accipitridae (3)**

**Bald Eagle** *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*—our best views were at Hayden Valley, where a pair of adults were attending a nest.

**Swainson's Hawk** *Buteo swainsoni*—we saw this highly migratory hawk at Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, Hayden Valley, and LeHardy Rapids. The majority of these raptors spend the winter in the Pampas of Argentina, where they forage on grasshoppers.

**Red-tailed Hawk** *Buteo jamaicensis*—the most common hawk on our Yellowstone trip, observed almost daily.

**WOODPECKERS: Picidae (4)**

**Williamson's Sapsucker** *Sphyrapicus thyroideus*—Steve saw a couple of these special woodpeckers at the Yellowstone River Picnic area while the rest of us were finishing our breakfast.

**Red-naped Sapsucker** *Sphyrapicus nuchalis*—a brightly colored individual at Old Yellowstone Trail Slough, which perched nicely for us on a snag.

**Hairy Woodpecker** *Dryobates villosus (HO)*—heard calling between Silvergate and Cooke City but remained unseen.

**Northern Flicker** *Colaptes auratus*—seen at Slough Creek Trail and elsewhere in the Lamar Valley. The red-shafted subspecies occurs in this part of its range.

**FALCONS AND CARACARAS: Falconidae (2)**

**American Kestrel** *Falco sparverius*—singles observed at Crystal Creek and the Lamar Valley.

**Prairie Falcon** *Falco mexicanus*—a bird soaring overhead at Slough Creek was a nice find. Ground squirrels are the mainstay of this falcon's diet, as they provide fat-rich calories that pairs need for raising broods.

### **TYRANT FLYCATCHERS: Tyrannidae (5)**

**Olive-sided Flycatcher** *Contopus cooperi*—individuals seen at the top of snags at Pebble Creek Campground and Cooke City. This flycatcher has one of the longest migrations of any North American songbird, wintering primarily in Panama and the Andes and nesting as far north as Alaska.

**Western Wood-Pewee** *Contopus sordidulus*—great views at the Old Yellowstone Trail Slough. This flycatcher is a common part of the soundscape of summer in Yellowstone.

**Willow Flycatcher** *Empidonax traillii*—mostly heard only in a stand of willows at an overlook over the Lamar Valley, although a couple trip participants were able to see this little flycatcher.

**Dusky Flycatcher** *Empidonax oberholseri*—nice views of this western *Empidonax* flycatcher at Slough Creek Trail and Yellowstone River Picnic area. This flycatcher prefers to nest in forest clearings in upland areas.

**Eastern Kingbird** *Tyrannus tyrannus*—two in the parking lot at Glen Rotary Park in Bozeman.

### **VIREOS: Vireonidae (1)**

**Warbling Vireo** *Vireo gilvus*—common by voice but seen only at Pebble Creek Campground and Apollinaris Spring in Yellowstone National Park.

### **CROWS AND JAYS: Corvidae (5)**

**Steller's Jay** *Cyanocitta stelleri*—great views of this western counterpart of the Blue Jay in Cooke City and Clark's Fork Picnic area.

**Black-billed Magpie** *Pica hudsonia*—common in the park, recorded daily in open areas.

**Clark's Nutcracker** *Nucifraga columbiana*—recorded at Virginia Cascades, Apollinaris Spring, and the Shoshone NF – Yellowstone Overlook. This interesting species survives the harsh winters of the area by storing pine seeds in caches.

**American Crow** *Corvus brachyrhynchos*—only one individual in the parking lot of Bozeman International Airport.

**Common Raven** *Corvus corax*—very common in the park. It is the world's largest passerine.

### **TITS AND CHICKADEES: Paridae (1)**

**Mountain Chickadee** *Poecile gambeli*—common woodland resident in the Greater Yellowstone area, recorded at Clark's Fork Picnic Area, Cooke City, and Glen Rotary Park.

### **SWALLOWS AND MARTINS: Hirundinidae (5)**

**Tree Swallow** *Tachycineta bicolor*—small numbers in the Hayden Valley and Floating Island Lake.

**Violet-green Swallow** *Tachycineta thalassina*—this handsome western swallow was common in the area, and we observed nesting activity at Old Faithful Lodge and Cooke City as well.

**Bank Swallow** *Riparia riparia*—small numbers at Pelican Creek and Hayden Valley.

**Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*—a few incidental sightings as we were driving around Yellowstone, including a few flyovers in the Old Faithful area.

**Cliff Swallow** *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*—the active nesting colony at the restroom in the Lamar Valley was a memorable experience.

### **KINGLETS: Regulidae (1)**

**Ruby-crowned Kinglet** *Regulus calendula*—common woodland species in the Greater Yellowstone area, recorded (or at least heard) daily.

### **NUTHATCHES: Sittidae (2)**

**Red-breasted Nuthatch** *Sitta canadensis*—our best views were at the Apollinaris Spring Picnic Area.

**White-breasted Nuthatch** *Sitta carolinensis*—incredibly, one scaling a dry wall of rock at Old Yellowstone Trail Slough. Cool!

### **WRENS: Troglodytidae (2)**

**House Wren** *Troglodytes aedon* (HO)—singing at the Old Yellowstone Trail Slough.

**Marsh Wren** *Cistothorus palustris*—we managed to both see and hear this species at Cherry River FAS, only minutes from the Bozeman Airport.

### **DIPPERS: Cinclidae (1)**

**American Dipper** *Cinclus mexicanus*—seen at LeHardy Rapids and a stream in Cooke City. Dippers are the only truly aquatic songbirds, spending their entire lives along fast-flowing streams.

### **STARLINGS AND MYNAS: Sturnidae (1)**

**European Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris* (I)—unfortunately, common in the Greater Yellowstone area.

### **MOCKINGBIRDS AND THRASHERS: Mimidae (1)**

**Gray Catbird** *Dumetella carolinensis*—seen and heard at Old Yellowstone Trail Slough, our only one of the trip.

### **THRUSHES: Turdidae (4)**

**Mountain Bluebird** *Sialia currucoides*—we saw this stunning Rocky Mountain specialty at Virginia Cascades and Mammoth Hot Springs. Numbers of these birds seem to be really down this year, perhaps due to the ongoing drought.

**Townsend's Solitaire** *Myadestes townsendi*—seen by some on our tour.

**Hermit Thrush** *Catharus guttatus* (HO)—caroling at the Norris Geyser Basin and Hayden Valley.

**American Robin** *Turdus migratorius*—abundant in the park.

### **WAXWINGS: Bombycillidae (1)**

**Cedar Waxwing** *Bombycilla cedrorum*—seen at Cherry River FAS and the Old Yellowstone Trail Slough.

### **OLD WORLD SPARROWS: Passeridae (1)**

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* (I)—recorded on three days in Bozeman, Gardiner, and Cooke City.

### **PIPITS AND WAGTAILS: Motacillidae (1)**

**American Pipit** *Anthus rubescens*—small numbers at the Beartooth Pass, feeding in the alpine meadows.

### **FINCHES: Fringillidae (4)**

**Evening Grosbeak** *Coccothraustes vespertinus*—a few birds perched nicely after our breakfast at the Yellowstone River Picnic Area. It was a great spot by Nathan!

**Black Rosy-Finch** *Leucosticte atrata*—could not ask for better views as up to six individuals fed within a few feet of us at the Beartooth Pass. This alpine finch feeds mostly along the melting borders of snow banks, where old food items are freshly uncovered. **\*\*RUNNER UP FOR BIRD OF THE TRIP\*\***

**House Finch** *Haemorhous mexicanus*—seen at Glen Lake Rotary Park and Old Yellowstone Trail Slough.

**Pine Siskin** *Spinus pinus*—one of the most numerous songbirds in the park and surrounding areas.

### **NEW WORLD SPARROWS: Passerellidae (7)**

**Chipping Sparrow** *Spizella passerina*—small numbers at Pebble Creek Campground, Yellowstone River Picnic Area, and Cooke City.

**Brewer's Sparrow** *Spizella breweri*—singing at the top of the sagebrush at the Lamar River overlook, the Shoshone NF – Yellowstone Overlook, and Slough Creek Trail. Similar in appearance to Chipping Sparrow but nests in areas of extensive sagebrush.

**Dark-eyed Junco** *Junco hyemalis*—a few individuals at scattered locations: Virginia Cascades, Apollinaris Spring, and Yellowstone River Picnic Area.

**White-crowned Sparrow** *Zonotrichia leucophrys*—singles at Apollinaris Spring (on a picnic table!) and Cooke City (behind the reception building at the motel).

**Vesper Sparrow** *Pooecetes gramineus*—not uncommon in areas of taller grass and sagebrush in the Lamar Valley.

**Savannah Sparrow** *Passerculus sandwichensis*—recorded at Indian Pond and Swan Lake, differentiated from the preceding species by its smaller size, yellow lores, and facial pattern.

**Lincoln's Sparrow** *Melospiza lincolnii*—our best views were in an extensive area of wet ground punctuated by willows in Cooke City.

### **NEW WORLD BLACKBIRDS: Icteridae (5)**

**Yellow-headed Blackbird** *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*—our best views were at Cherry River FAS, where several were singing and displaying within feet of us in the cattails.

**Western Meadowlark** *Sturnella neglecta*—one at the Lamar River valley overlook site.

**Red-winged Blackbird** *Agelaius phoeniceus*—a few at Cherry River FAS, Lamar Valley, and Old Yellowstone Trail Slough.

**Brown-headed Cowbird** *Molothrus ater*—sometimes foraging for food or resting right on top of an American Bison like an oxpecker! Seen at Hayden and Lamar Valley.

**Brewer's Blackbird** *Euphagus cyanocephalus*—small numbers at the Lamar Valley and on our way to Gardiner.

### **NEW WORLD WARBLERS: Parulidae (5)**

**MacGillivray's Warbler** *Geothlypis tolmiei*—great views of this rather secretive summer breeder at the Slough Creek Trail, where it surprised everyone by perching on an open bare branch!

**Common Yellowthroat** *Geothlypis trichas*—small numbers at Cherry River FAS and the Lamar Valley overlook.

**Yellow Warbler** *Setophaga petechia*—the most common warbler in riparian areas of the park.

**Yellow-rumped Warbler** *Setophaga coronata*—sightings of the 'Audubon's' subspecies at Pebble Creek Campground, Apollinaris Spring, and Yellowstone River Picnic Area.

**Wilson's Warbler** *Cardellina pusilla*—at least two birds, possibly more, in the extensive area of low willows behind Cooke City.

### **CARDINAL-GROSBEAKS: Cardinalidae (2)**

**Western Tanager** *Piranga ludoviciana*—we saw this colorful summer breeder in Gardiner, Slough Creek Trail, Clark's Fork Picnic Area, and the Pebble Creek Campground.

**Black-headed Grosbeak** *Pheucticus melanocephalus*—a few birds in the cottonwoods at Old Yellowstone Trail Slough.

## **Mammals (19 species)**

**Pronghorn** *Antilocapra americana*—common in areas of open grassland, particularly in the Hayden Valley. It is the only surviving member of the family Antilocapridae, which is more closely related to giraffes than antelope.

**American Bison** *Bison bison*—common and conspicuous!

**Rocky Mountain Goat** *Oreamnos americanus* (I)—great views of a mixed herd on the Beartooth Highway. They are the descendants of goats introduced in the Absaroka Mountains during the 1940s and 1950s.

**Elk** *Cervus elaphus*—common and conspicuous, especially around Mammoth Hot Springs and Gardiner.

**Mule Deer** *Odocoileus hemionus*—small numbers observed daily at a variety of locations.

**Coyote** *Canis latrans*—one in the Hayden Valley causing some distress to a small herd of Pronghorn.

**Gray Wolf** *Canis lupus*—single black wolves seen on two different days in the Hayden Valley. One of these wolves had apparently recently killed a newly born American Bison calf.

**Red Fox** *Vulpes vulpes*—seen hunting along the edge of the road in the tall grass on our way from Chico Hot Springs to Bozeman

**North American River Otter** *Lontra canadensis*—seen by some in the Hayden Valley. Nice!

**American Badger** *Taxidea taxus*—great views of this aggressive little carnivore in the Hayden Valley.

**American Black Bear** *Ursus americanus*—seen on four days of the tour, often right by the road or crossing it. Incredible luck with this species!

**Brown (Grizzly) Bear** *Ursus arctos*—scope views of a mother and cub on the mountainside with Nathan and more distant scope views in the same area a few days later.

**Snowshoe Hare** *Brachylagus idahoensis*—in the parking lot of our motel in Gardiner on two mornings.

**American Pika** *Ochotona princeps*—brief views by some at Beartooth Pass, but it would not show itself well to the entire group despite a long wait. This species cannot tolerate temperatures above 77F, which is concerning since it was nearing that temperature the day we were there!

**Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel** *Callospermophilus lateralis*

**Yellow-bellied Marmot** *Marmota flaviventris*—great views at Roosevelt Lodge and Beartooth Pass.

**Yellow-pine Chipmunk** *Tamias amoenus*

**American Red Squirrel** *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*

**Uinta Ground Squirrel** *Urocitellus armatus*—perhaps the most common mammal in the park by population size!

### Reptiles (1 species)

**Common Sagebrush Lizard** *Sceloporus graciosus*—photographed by Elaine and Linda Long at Norris Geyser Basin.

### Wildflowers (26 species identified)

**Sticky Geranium** *Geranium viscosissimum*

**Arrowleaf Balsamroot** *Balsamorhiza sagittata*

**Silvery Lupine** *Lupinus argenteus*

**Monument Plant** *Frasera speciosa*

**Glacier Lily** *Erythronium grandiflorum*

**Giant Red Indian Paintbrush** *Castilleja miniata*

**Mountain Bluebells** *Mertensia ciliata*

**Yellow Salsify** *Tragopogon dubius* (I)  
**Common Dandelion** *Taraxacum officinale*  
**Richardson's Geranium** *Geranium richardsonii*  
**Dark-throated Shooting Star** *Primula pauciflora*  
**Low Larkspur** *Delphinium bicolor*  
**Flowery Phlox** *Phlox multiflora*  
**Hound's-Tongue** *Cynoglossum officinale*  
**Woods' Rose** *Rosa woodsii*  
**Solomon's Plume** *Maiathemum racemosum*  
**Star-flowered Lily-of-the-Valley** *Maiathemum stellatum*  
**Sky Pilot** *Polemomium viscosum*  
**Rocky Mountain Penstemon** *Penstemon strictus*  
**Wyoming Kittenails** *Veronica wyomingensis*  
**White Marsh Marigold** *Caltha leptosepala*  
**Sego Lily** *Calochortus nuttallii*  
**Moss Campion** *Silene acaulis*  
**Canada Violet** *Viola canadensis*  
**Pale Alpine Forget-Me-Not** *Eritrichium argenteum*  
**Chives** *Allium schoenoprasum*