

# Platte River Cranes: A Migration Spectacular Species List | Mar. 6-12, 2022 | Naturalist Journeys



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

(I)=introduced

## BIRDS (55 species recorded, of which 1 were heard only):

### **DUCKS, GEESE AND SWANS: Anatidae (15 species)**

**Snow Goose** *Anser caerulescens*—Fairly common to common winter resident in the greater Kearney area, we observed up to several hundred in flight daily, and on the first day at least one thousand in the fields to the south and east of Spring Creek Sanctuary on the way into Kearney.

**Ross's Goose** *Anser rossii*—Uncommon winter resident to the area, and easily overlooked in flocks of Snow Goose, we saw several in the air in direct comparison with Snow Goose near the Rowe Sanctuary and the Crane Trust, but did not find the concentrations on the ground that we sought for direct comparisons.

**Greater White-fronted Goose** *Anser albifrons*—Uncommon winter resident and transient to the area, several were seen in flight along the interstate on the return drive from Kearney to Lincoln.

**Cackling Goose** *Branta hutchinsii*—Uncommon to fairly common winter resident in the area. Several seen in flight in direct comparison with larger Canada Goose in the fields to the south and east of Spring Creek Sanctuary on the way into Kearney.

**Canada Goose** *Branta canadensis*—Common to abundant winter resident, we viewed a great number in the fields and in flight around the Kearney area daily.

**Wood Duck** *Aix sponsa*—Uncommon permanent resident, we found two flying away from us on the first day at the Spring Creek Sanctuary pond on the first day.

**Blue-winged Teal** *Spatula discors*—Uncommon winter resident to the area, we saw 5 in flight (departing to the south) at the Spring Creek Sanctuary on the first day.

**Northern Shoveler** *Spatula clypeata*—Uncommon to fairly common winter resident to open water in central Nebraska, we found several loafing on the Platte River near the Rowe Sanctuary and near the Hike & Bike Trail at Fort Kearney Recreation Area on 8 March 2022.

**Gadwall** *Mareca strepera*—Fairly common winter resident, we recorded several along the Platte River near the Rowe Sanctuary and also at the Fort Kearney Recreation Area Hike & Bike bridge.

**American Wigeon** *Mareca americana*—Fairly common winter resident, we viewed several to a dozen daily at several locations along the Platte River and at ponds and wetlands.

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*—Common winter resident (permanent?) and we recorded this species on all days of the tour.

**Northern Pintail** *Anas acuta*—Fairly common to common winter resident to central Nebraska, we found several to a dozen nearly daily along the Platte River or a ponds.

**Green-winged Teal** *Anas crecca*—As with the former species, fairly common to common winter resident to central Nebraska, we found several to a dozen nearly daily along the Platte River or a ponds.

**Lesser Scaup** *Aythya affinis*—Uncommon winter visitor to the larger bodies of water, this diving duck was seen on the Platte River near the Crane Trust blind on 10 March. Needing deeper water to forage in, this was a bit of an unusual sighting in the relative shallow waters of the Platte.

**Bufflehead** *Bucephala albeola*—Uncommon winter resident to the shallow waters and ponds near the Platte, we found several on 10 March near the Crane Trust and also at deeper ponds on the back roads near Kearney.

#### **PARTRIDGES, PHEASANTS AND ALLIES: Phasianidae (1 species)**

**Wild Turkey** *Meleagris gallopavo*—Fairly common permanent resident to central Nebraska, we found several groups during the tour along the back roads and near woodlots.

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

**Rock Pigeon** *Columba livia* (1)—Common permanent resident throughout the tour in towns and small communities.

**Eurasian Collared-Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto* (1)—Common permanent resident throughout towns and rural habitats and seen on all days.

**Mourning Dove** *Zenaida macroura*—Fairly common permanent resident to communities and rural localities throughout the tour.

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

**Sandhill Crane** *Antigone canadensis*—Abundant migrant to the greater Kearney and Platte River area, we learned that biologists estimated up to 800,000 to over 1,000,000 individuals in the area while on the tour. We had spectacular views of huge concentrations while at the Rowe Sanctuary, the Crane Trust, and in the many agricultural fields to the south of Kearney throughout the tour. Of interest to some is that the genus name *Antigone* is from a Greek myth, where Antigone, the daughter of King Laomedon of Troy, was transformed into a stork or crane by the goddess Hera.

### **GULLS AND TERNS: Laridae (1 species)**

**Ring-billed Gull** *Larus delawarensis*—Uncommon to fairly common winter resident in the Platte River area, we found several daily while visiting Rowe Sanctuary and the Crane Trust.

### **HAWKS, KITES AND EAGLES: Accipitridae (7 species)**

**Northern Harrier** *Circus hudsonius*—Fairly common winter resident to central Nebraska and the Kearney area, we found one to several daily on our forays on the back roads.

**Sharp-shinned Hawk** *Accipiter striatus*—Uncommon winter resident, we observed one zooming in near the bird feeders on 9 March at the Crane Trust facilities.

**Cooper's Hawk** *Accipiter cooperii*—Uncommon winter resident, one was seen at Fort Kearney on 11 March while it was hunting.

**Bald Eagle** *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*—Fairly common to common winter resident along the Platte River habitats. We counted 11 in one binocular view (in several trees) near the Rowe Sanctuary on one day. No doubt they were feeding well with all of the crane and goose mortalities along the Platte and adjacent wetlands.

**Red-tailed Hawk** *Buteo jamaicensis*—Common permanent and winter resident throughout the area, we observed up to ten daily on poles and in flight along the rural areas and backroads.

**Rough-legged Hawk** *Buteo lagopus*—Fairly common winter resident of the open prairies and agricultural fields throughout the tour, we found several daily.

**Ferruginous Hawk** *Buteo regalis*—Uncommon to rare winter resident this far to the east, we found several at scattered locations including the Spring Creek Prairie Reserve, the Prairie Dog Wildlife Management Area, and near the Rowe Sanctuary. Photo documentation was required for this species as it is considered a rarity in eBird.

### **OWLS: Strigidae (2 species)**

**Great Horned Owl** *Bubo virginianus*—Fairly common permanent resident to woodlots and rural areas throughout the Lower 48 and to Nebraska, we heard one male hooting early in the morning while in the blind at the Rowe Sanctuary on 8 March. Difficult to hear over chattering teeth and the shivers!

**Short-eared Owl** *Asio flammeus*—Wow. Simply WOW. We had a total of nine individuals flush from a central communal roosting site on 10 March near the Prairie Dog WMA to the south of Kearney. We all had great looks as the owls circled around, perched on fence posts and wires, and did the flight thing again on several occasions. One of the best views that I have ever had of this elusive species (see photo).

### **WOODPECKERS: Picidae (4 species)**

**Red-bellied Woodpecker** *Melanerpes carolinus*—Fairly common permanent resident in the area, we found them daily in small numbers, but they were especially colorful and conspicuous when coming in to suet and seed feeders.

**Downy Woodpecker** *Dryobates pubescens*—Fairly common resident, we were able to see and photograph several throughout the tour.

**Hairy Woodpecker** *Dryobates villosus*—Fairly common permanent resident to the larger trees and where parks held more extensive woodlands, we saw or heard several daily throughout the tour.

**Northern Flicker** *Colaptes auratus*—Surprising, this permanent resident did not show well for us. We had several on multiple days of the tour, but they did not stick around long and did not allow for lengthy views.

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

**American Kestrel** *Falco sparverius*—Fairly common to common permanent resident, this is the smallest of our North American falcon species. We saw them daily along the wires in the rural areas.

**Merlin** *Falco columbarius*—A very nice addition to the trip list was an accommodating individual on 10 March near the Prairie Dog WMA which perched just long enough for us to make out the facial markings and the back patterning.

### **CROWS AND JAYS: Corvidae (2 species)**

**Blue Jay** *Cyanocitta cristata*—Uncommon to fairly common permanent resident in the area, particularly around towns and suburban areas. We saw or hear them nearly daily while on the tour.

**American Crow** *Corvus brachyrhynchos*—Common permanent resident, seen daily in moderate to high numbers.

### **LARKS: Alaudidae (1 species)**

**Horned Lark** *Eremophila alpestris*—Fairly common winter visitor to the area, we found several in the fallow and plowed fields to the south of Kearney on several days.

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

**Black-capped Chickadee** *Poecile atricapillus*—Fairly common permanent resident to the woodlands and riparian areas that we visited. We found two to five daily while in appropriate habitat, especially at Spring Creek Prairie Sanctuary, and also at the feeders at Rowe Sanctuary and the Crane Trust.

### **NUTHATCHES: Sittidae (1 species)**

**White-breasted Nuthatch** *Sitta carolinensis*—Fairly common permanent resident to woodlands and woodlots throughout the tour, we were able to view several at a time on most days of the tour.

### **THRUSHES: Turdidae (1 species)**

**American Robin** *Turdus migratorius*—Common winter resident to the area, we recorded this species on each day, with totals between ten and two hundred depending on the area visited.

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

**European Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris* (I)—Common permanent resident to the region, we observed up to several hundred daily during our travels on the backroads in rural central Nebraska.

### **FINCHES AND EUPHONIAS: Fringillidae (2 species)**

**House Finch** *Haemorhous mexicanus*—Uncommon permanent resident to the area, we found several coming in to feeders on three days while at the Spring Creek Sanctuary, the Crane Trust and at the Rowe Sanctuary.

**American Goldfinch** *Spinus tristis*—Fairly common to common winter resident to the area, we found them daily in good numbers, primarily flying over or at seed feeders at various locations.

### **NEW WORLD SPARROWS: Passerellidae (5 species)**

**American Tree Sparrow** *Spizelloides arborea*—Fairly common winter resident, and especially along roadside vegetation and at feeders. We were able to view these beauties up close and personal at several locations on each of the five full days in the field.

**Dark-eyed Junco** *Junco hyemalis*—Fairly common to common winter resident to the area, we observed the expected subspecies Slate-colored Junco (*Junco hyemalis hyemalis*) on all days of the tour.

**White-crowned Sparrow** *Zonotrichia leucophrys*—Uncommon to fairly common winter visitor, we found several at the Fort Kearney Hike & Bike walk on 8 March.

**Harris's Sparrow** *Zonotrichia querula*—A classic beautiful Zonotrichia sparrow, we found several daily on the latter half of the tour, especially at feeders and along hedgerows along rural roads..

**Song Sparrow** *Melospiza melodia*—Uncommon winter resident to ponds and weedy field in and adjacent to the Platte River, we were able to see one or two and also heard several during the tour.

### **NEW WORLD BLACKBIRDS AND ORIOLES: Icteridae (2 species)**

**Western Meadowlark** *Sturnella neglecta*—Uncommon to fairly common winter resident, we found several every day of the tour. While challenging to identify, with brownish facial patterns and less white in the tail while in flight (and with calling individuals), we were comfortable with the identifications, and we did not feel that we had any Eastern Meadowlarks.

**Red-winged Blackbird** *Agelaius phoeniceus*—Common to abundant throughout the tour, we counted more than 10,000 in one flock in the trees and fields near the Rowe Sanctuary on 10 March.

**NEW WORLD WARBLERS: Parulidae (1 species)**

**Yellow-rumped Warbler** *Setophaga coronata*— Uncommon winter resident. One heard and seen briefly at Spring Creek Prairie Center on 8 March (some other participants heard and saw the bird fly over).

**CARDINALS, GROSBILLS AND ALLIES: Cardinalidae (1 species)**

**Northern Cardinal** *Cardinalis cardinalis*—Fairly common permanent resident to the Kearney area, we observed this species daily in low numbers throughout the tour. Most detections were by song but we also had some good views of males singing and defending territories.

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

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* (I)—Well... OK. Gotta count this one for the list. Seen daily for the tour in a wide variety of habitats.

**Mammals (6 species)**

**Fox Squirrel** *Sciurus niger*—Several seen at Fort Kearney Historic Site

**White-tailed Deer** *Odocoileus virginianus*— Dead on road only (DOR)

**Common Raccoon** *Procyon lotor*— DOR

**Striped Skunk** *Mephitis mephitis* — One wandering brazenly at Fort Kearney Historic Site

**Opossum** *Didelphis virginiana*— DOR

**Bison** *Bison bison*— Several to many in fields at Rowe Sanctuary and at the Crane Trust.