

# Colorado: Spring on the Prairies | Species List

## May 21 – 27, 2023 | with Naturalist Journeys



Compiled by: Peter Burke

**Summary:** Our tour visited the Pawnee National Grassland, one of the largest remaining tracts of shortgrass prairie in America, where we experienced firsthand how birds and other wildlife survives in coexistence with cattle pastures, wind turbines, large-scale agriculture and other human encroachments. Next we visited several reservoirs and riparian corridors along the South Platte and Republican rivers where a few shorebirds and migrant songbirds were found among multitudes of arriving breeding birds. Following is a detailed recap of the birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians we found on our wonderful adventures in northeast Colorado!

eBird Trip Report: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/132842>

### 133 Total Species

#### DUCKS, GEESE, AND SWANS: ANATIDAE

**Canada Goose** *Branta canadensis* — Common and widespread in areas with water, seen on four days of the tour.

**Wood Duck** *Aix sponsa* — One pair seen on Andrick Ponds and a second seen in flight at Stalker Lake, a great spot by Pam!

**Blue-winged Teal** *Spatula discors* — Seen at several locations, the males with the white crescent on the face being readily identified.

**Cinnamon Teal** *Spatula cyanoptera* — Another great find by Pam, a nice male that blended in with the cover at Andrick Ponds but took flight as we were getting into position to scope it.

**Northern Shoveler** *Spatula clypeata* — Many found, especially in the playas dotting the prairies.

**Gadwall** *Mareca strepera* — Also found in playas as well as at Red Lion and Stalker Lake.

**American Wigeon** *Mareca americana* — A few found at Red Lion, Little Jumbo Reservoir and at Stalker Lake.

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos* — Common wherever there was water.

**Green-winged Teal** *Anas crecca* — We counted eight at Red Lion and then found a pair in the playa near Sedgwick.

**Canvasback** *Aythya valisineria* — A good find! One male seen on the bank of the pond SW of Prewitt Reservoir.

**Redhead** *Aythya americana* — More than a dozen in the pond SW of Prewitt Reservoir

**Lesser Scaup** *Aythya affinis* — Our only scaup sighting was at Little Jumbo Reservoir.

**Common Merganser** *Mergus merganser* — Jean and I found a pair in the St. Vrain River outside Lyons on our first day before meeting up with Pam.

**Ruddy Duck** *Oxyura jamaicensis* — One at Stalker Lake.

#### PARTRIDGES, PHEASANTS, AND ALLIES: Phasianidae

**Wild Turkey** *Meleagris gallopavo* — We found one on the Pawnee Grassland, and the next day Jean spotted one at the Cottonwood SWA.

#### GREBES: Podicipedidae

**Pied-billed Grebe** *Podilymbus podiceps* — Jean and I found about six or so on Teller Pond #5 on our first day.

**Eared Grebe** *Podiceps nigricollis* — Again, just one found on our first day, at Lagerman Reservoir.

**Western Grebe** *Aechmophorus occidentalis* — Four found at Jackson Lake and a pair were seen at Stalker Lake. We scoped them all, hoping to find a Clark's, but no luck!

#### **PIGEONS AND DOVES: Columbidae**

**Rock Pigeon (I)** *Columba livia* — Common in towns we passed through.

**Eurasian Collared-Dove (I)** *Streptopelia decaocto* — Quite common and found nearly every day.

**Mourning Dove** *Zenaida macroura* — Quite common and found nearly every day.

#### **CUCKOOS: Cuculidae**

**Yellow-billed Cuckoo** *Coccyzus americanus* — A good find in a nearby cottonwood offering great scope views!

#### **NIGHTJARS: Caprimulgidae**

**Common Nighthawk** *Chordeiles minor* — Heard on many nights and early mornings, but great views of roosting birds at the Crow Valley Campground outside Briggsdale including one that flew in as we were having lunch.

#### **SWIFTS: Apodidae**

**Chimney Swift** *Chaetura pelagica* — Seen from our lunch spot in Columbine Park and also at Stalker Lake.

**White-throated Swift** *Aeronautes saxatalis* — Jean and I watched several alongside the cliffs on Old St. Vrain Road on our first day.

#### **HUMMINGBIRDS: Trochilidae**

**Broad-tailed Hummingbird** *Selasphorus platycercus* — Very common in areas along the foothills, the trill created by the notched wing of the males could be heard almost constantly when they were present.

#### **RAILS, COOTS, AND ALLIES: Rallidae**

**American Coot** *Fulica americana* — Jean and I found the only one of the trip at Lagerman Reservoir.

#### **STILTS AND AVOCETS: Recurvirostridae**

**Black-necked Stilt** *Himantopus mexicanus* — Three elegant birds were found at the Red Lion SWA.

**American Avocet** *Recurvirostra americana* — We had wonderful, up-close views at a few of the playas we visited.

#### **LAPWINGS AND PLOVERS: Charadriidae**

**Mountain Plover** *Charadrius montanus* — Four! It took some patience, but eventually we were able to find and appreciate these "ghosts" of the prairie! One of the highlights of the trip.

**Killdeer** *Charadrius vociferus* — You gotta love these guys, even if they are a bit noisy!

#### **SANDPIPERS AND ALLIES: Scolopacidae**

**Least Sandpiper** *Calidris minutilla* — Jean and I found a few stragglers at Lagerman on our first day. Then at the Red Line SWA, although distant, we counted 40+.

**Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* — Also at Red Lion, at least two dozen were doing their sewing machine thing around the large, mixed shorebird flock.

**Wilson's Snipe** *Gallinago delicata* — Peter noticed one in flight while scanning for Bobolink in Boulder.

**Wilson's Phalarope** *Phalaropus tricolor* — There were a handful at Red Lion, but later we had great looks at these dainty little shorebirds on a few of the playas we found.

**Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularius* — Seen feeding and in flight at Tamarack Ranch and again at Stalker Lake.

**Greater Yellowlegs** *Tringa melanoleuca* — A good sighting at Red Lion.

### **GULLS AND TERNS: Laridae**

**Ring-billed Gull** *Larus delawarensis* — One at Andrick Ponds and then eight or so at Jackson Lake State Park.

**Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger* — Pam spotted a beautiful, breeding-plumaged adult working the shorelines at Stalker Lake.

### **CORMORANTS: Phalacrocoracidae**

**Double-crested Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax auritus* — Common and numerous at all large bodies of water and occasionally seen in flight.

### **PELICANS: Pelecanidae**

**American White Pelican** *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos* — Also found on all the large bodies of water, particularly at Prewitt where we counted 100+.

### **HERONS AND EGRETS: Ardeidae**

**Great Blue Heron** *Ardea herodias* — Common wherever there was water.

**Snowy Egret** *Egretta thula* — Jean and I found several at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR, and then we all saw just one at Red Lion out with the shorebirds.

### **IBIS AND SPOONBILLS: Threskiornithidae**

**White-faced Ibis** *Plegadis chihi* — A nice sighting from the Playa at Sedgwick, beautiful birds that really stood out against the bright, green grasses.

### **NEW WORLD VULTURES: Cathartidae**

**Turkey Vulture** *Cathartes aura* — Surprising that we didn't see so many, but they became more numerous along the foothills.

### **OSPREY: Pandionidae**

**Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* — Jean and I saw three at Lagerman. A bit worrying that we didn't see them at the reservoirs. Not sure if this was just bad luck or if the species may be experiencing avian flu?

### **HAWKS, KITES, AND EAGLES: Accipitridae**

**Northern Harrier** *Circus cyaneus* — One was seen working the meadows behind Hale Ponds within the South Republican River SWA.

**Bald Eagle** *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* — One found at Jackson Lake and a second adult was seen in flight near Prewitt Reservoir. I suspect the Bald Eagle population in Colorado has been affected by avian flu, but to what extent we may not know for some time.

**Swainson's Hawk** *Buteo swainsoni* — We were fortunate to catch the tail end of migration and also find some breeding adults providing many opportunities to study plumage details and flight characteristics.

**Red-tailed Hawk** *Buteo jamaicensis* — Quite common and seen nearly every day.

**Rough-legged Hawk** *Buteo lagopus* — Two(!) found in the Pawnee Grassland. Roughies winter in Colorado, and by May, most will have left for their breeding grounds in northern Canada. Who knows if these individuals will do so, or perhaps just spend this summer in Colorado?

### **OWLS: Strigidae**

**Great Horned Owl** *Bubo virginianus* — Three found on the morning we searched the airport for Prairie-Chickens.

**Burrowing Owl** *Athene cunicularia* — Two found in a prairie dog town and then a third was spotted from the road!

**Short-eared Owl** *Asio flammeus* — A really great find, seen hover-hunting in a field near the airport just before dawn.

### **KINGFISHERS: Alcedinidae**

**Belted Kingfisher** *Megaceryle alcyon* — The first was found at Tamarack Ranch, then the next day we found two: one at

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Stalker Lake, and a second at Hale Ponds.

### **WOODPECKERS: Picidae**

**Red-headed Woodpecker** *Melanerpes erythrocephalus* — What great fun we had chasing down these colorful woodpeckers! Once we finally got into suitable habitat, they started coming out of the woodwork!

**Red-bellied Woodpecker** *Melanerpes carolinus* — We had to work to get a scope on one! Peter heard them in the distance along the Republican River, and eventually found one in flight, which we were able to track to a cottonwood.

**Downy Woodpecker** *Picoides pubescens* — Usually heard first, then seen. The first was at Andrick Ponds and then a second at Tamarack Ranch.

**Northern Flicker** *Colaptes auratus* — Colorado is where the two populations – red-shafted and yellow-shafted – meet, and we saw both on this trip including one or two “orange-shafted” hybrids, not unusual on the plains.

### **FALCONS AND CARACARAS: Falconidae**

**American Kestrel** *Falco sparverius* — Our only falcon for the trip unfortunately, and just one that was found in the Pawnee Grassland.

### **TYRANT FLYCATCHERS: Tyrannidae**

**Western Wood-Pewee** *Contopus sordidulus* — A rather conspicuous flycatcher, we found many at Crow Valley, and then ones and twos at several other stops. Apart from Kingbirds, probably the most numerous flycatchers.

**Willow Flycatcher** *Empidonax traillii* — Just one seen briefly on our walk when we returned to Crow Valley.

**Least Flycatcher** *Empidonax minimus* — Seen close by to the Willow, we had brief looks, enough to note the strong eye ring, big head and short tail.

**Hammond's Flycatcher** *Empidonax hammondii* — Also seen at Crow Valley, small-billed and giving its “wheep” call non-stop.

**Gray Flycatcher** *Empidonax wrightii* — A bit late for this early migrant. Heard first, then able to see the wide, yellow-orange bill with a black tip, diagnostic for this species.

**Dusky Flycatcher** *Empidonax oberholseri* — Seen at Pawnee, very similar to Hammond’s, but with a longer bill and a two-syllable, rising call.

**Eastern Phoebe** *Sayornis phoebe* — A pair were nesting under the bridge we stopped on near Tamarack Ranch, but were not cooperative. I think we were eventually able to get one in the scope.

**Say's Phoebe** *Sayornis saya* — Jean and I saw several at the arsenal after I met her at her hotel. Later we all had the chance to enjoy this bright and boisterous flycatcher at the Simmons SWA.

**Great-crested Flycatcher** *Myiarchus crinitus* — Found only in the NE corner of Colorado, we found quite a few along the Republican River and elsewhere.

**Western Kingbird** *Tyrannus verticalis* — Just everywhere! We searched in vain for a Cassin’s Kingbird so we could compare field marks, but none were found (they are early migrants).

**Eastern Kingbird** *Tyrannus tyrannus* — Also very common and seen nearly every day.

### **VIREOS: Vireonidae**

**Bell's Vireo** *Vireo bellii* — Heard first, the distinctive, musical song unmistakable. Eventually we found one that paused long enough for us to get looks in the scope!

**Plumbeous Vireo** *Vireo plumbeus* — Jean and I watched on on Old St. Vrain Road in Lyons, then we all had a brief look at one at Crow Valley Campground.

**Warbling Vireo** *Vireo gilvus* — Quite common, but not always easy to see, we found one cooperative bird in the Pawnee, and later had nice scope views at Little Jumbo Reservoir.

### **SHRIKES: Laniidae**

**Loggerhead Shrike** *Lanius ludovicianus* — Seen on the wires driving through the Pawnee.

### **CROWS AND JAYS: Corvidae**

**Steller's Jay** *Cyanocitta stelleri* — A common foothills species, we saw several on our many stops in Boulder.

**Blue Jay** *Cyanocitta cristata* — Very common and hard to miss, often found in loud flocks.

**Black-billed Magpie** *Pica hudsonia* — We saw one or two in the prairies, but once we returned to the foothills they were all over!

**Common Raven** *Corvus corax* — Despite being quite common, particularly along the front range, we saw just two on this trip, or perhaps I failed to record some of the sightings?

### **CHICKADEES AND TITS: Paridae**

**Black-capped Chickadee** *Poecile atricapillus* — Found in Boulder up near Chautauqua Park.

### **LARKS: Alaudidae**

**Horned Lark** *Eremophila alpestris* — We all learned to ID these by their dark tails as they flitted out of the road.

### **SWALLOWS AND MARTINS: Hirundinidae**

**Northern Rough-winged Swallow** *Stelgidopteryx serripennis* — A few seen in Boulder on the wing, of course, brown and white and making the distinctive “prittt” call.

**Tree Swallow** *Tachycineta bicolor* — Seen near the large bodies of water out on the plains.

**Violet-green Swallow** *Tachycineta thalassina* — Found along the foothills where they were the most common swallow.

**Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* — Seen nearly every day and readily IDed by their long tails.

**Cliff Swallow** *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota* — We got a good lesson in swallow ID when we stood near a culvert where Cliff Swallows were nesting, showing off the bright rump patch and distinctive “headlamp.”

### **NUTHATCHES: Sittidae**

**Pygmy Nuthatch** *Sitta pygmaea* — This was another highlight of our birding in Boulder when a small group of highly excitable little guys came in to some recorded calls.

### **WRENS: Troglodytidae**

**Rock Wren** *Salpinctes obsoletus* — Jean and I heard these at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal and in Lyons.

**House Wren** *Troglodytes aedon* — Common and seen/heard on most stops.

**Marsh Wren** *Cistothorus palustris* — Jean and I heard one in the reeds at Teller Lakes, where we were scoping Yellow-headed Blackbirds.

### **STARLINGS: Sturnidae**

**European Starling (I)** *Sturnus vulgaris* — Common in and around towns.

### **MOCKINGBIRDS AND THRASHERS: Mimidae**

**Brown Thrasher** *Toxostoma rufum* — We had our first sighting at the Crow Valley Campground, where one was singing and eventually allowed for scope views. But we found quite a few including at Tamarack Ranch, Red Lion, Stalker Lake and other locations.

**Northern Mockingbird** *Mimus polyglottos* — Common and hard to miss with their serenading songs and bright white wing patches.

### **THRUSHES: Turdidae**

**Eastern Bluebird** *Sialia sialis* — A nice find in the cottonwoods along the Republican River!

**Swainson's Thrush** *Catharus ustulatus* — Most common at Crow Valley, but also found at Cottonwood SWA and at Tamarack Ranch.

**American Robin** *Turdus migratorius* — Common and found daily.

### **WAXWINGS: Bombycillidae**

**Cedar Waxwing** *Bombycilla cedrorum* — We had a small group of nine or so take flight as we walked the Republican River.

### **OLD WORLD SPARROWS: Passeridae**

**House Sparrow (I)** *Passer domesticus* — Black-throated Browns! Common in towns.

### **FINCHES AND EUPHONIAS: Fringillidae**

**House Finch** *Haemorhous mexicanus* — Quite numerous, particularly in and around towns.

**Lesser Goldfinch** *Spinus psaltria* — The only sighting was on Old Saint Vrain Rd. with Jean on the first day.

**American Goldfinch** *Spinus tristis* — Found nearly every day, particularly in open meadows near water.

### **NEW WORLD SPARROWS: Passerellidae**

**Chestnut-collared Longspur** *Calcarius ornatus* — We had to work a bit for our longspurs on this trip! But several Chestnut-collared were seen, with one perching right by the van, signing his heart out!

**Thick-billed Longspur** *Rhynchophanes mccownii* — Just one was seen, and only for a short time when it landed in the road behind us. But we were able to get good looks since it was so close.

**Cassin's Sparrow** *Peucaea cassinii* — A nice consolation prize for not finding Prairie-Chickens, these were singing in the fields around Wray.

**Grasshopper Sparrow** *Ammodramus savannarum* — After I said that these can be difficult to see, we of course had one perch up and sing for minutes straight! We found quite a few in the fields around Wray, some perching for a few seconds, then dropping back into the grasses.

**Clay-colored Sparrow** *Spizella pallida* — Not the most cooperative, we did find several, but seldom would sit still long enough to let us work through the field marks.

**Brewer's Sparrow** *Spizella breweri* — One briefly perched on a fence along the country roads on our drive through the Pawnee Grassland.

**Lark Sparrow** *Chondestes grammacus* — We had several nice encounter with this very handsome sparrow..."harlequinesque facial markings..."

**Lark Bunting** *Calamospiza melanocorys* — State bird of Colorado! And now we know why! In the open prairie, they are extremely numerous.

**White-crowned Sparrow** *Zonotrichia leucophrys* — Just one, found on our second visit to Crow Valley.

**Song Sparrow** *Melospiza melodia* — Most often found not far from water.

**Spotted Towhee** *Pipilo maculatus* — We found these at Tamarack Ranch and at the Maxwell Natural Area, west of Fort Collins. And on our Boulder Birding day, they were everywhere.

### **YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT: Icteriidae**

**Yellow-breasted Chat** *Icteria virens* — We heard one at Crow Valley, then had really nice scope views in Boulder on the Skunk Canyon trails.

### **NEW WORLD BLACKBIRDS: Icteridae**

**Yellow-headed Blackbird** *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus* — Jean and I saw dozens in Boulder on our first day birding. Later we found two at Prewitt Reservoir and then one at Red Lion.

**Western Meadowlark** *Sturnella neglecta* — Good lord, I tallied over a hundred on various eBird lists, but I would imagine we saw/heard several hundred over the work.

**Bobolink** *Dolichonyx oryzivorus* — This was a target for the trip, and with a little work, we were finally able to get onto a few males on our first stop in Boulder.

**Orchard Oriole** *Icterus spurius* — These were quite common all week, with quite a few perching close so that we had amazing views.

**Bullock's Oriole** *Icterus bullockii* — Seen every day, not that anyone was complaining...such a handsome songster!  
**Baltimore Oriole** *Icterus galbula* — Just the one male found at the bridge near Tamarack Ranch.  
**Red-winged Blackbird** *Agelaius phoeniceus* — Common and seen daily.  
**Brown-headed Cowbird** *Molothrus ater* — Common and seen daily.  
**Common Grackle** *Quiscalus quiscula* — Common and seen daily.  
**Great-tailed Grackle** *Quiscalus mexicanus* — Our best look was at a male at Tamarack Ranch.

#### **NEW WORLD WARBLERS: Parulidae**

**Virginia's Warbler** *Oreothlypis virginiae* — GREAT looks at Chautauqua Park, and then another singing male on the trails at Skunk Canyon.  
**MacGillivray's Warbler** *Geothlypis tolmiei* — Another great find in Chautauqua Park!  
**Common Yellowthroat** *Geothlypis trichas* — Heard and seen from many locations, near water of course.  
**American Redstart** *Setophaga ruticilla* — A good find at Tamarack Ranch, flitting around a fallen tree.  
**Yellow Warbler** *Setophaga petechia* — Our most numerous warbler by far, found nearly every day.

#### **CARDINALS, GROSBEAKS, AND ALLIES: Cardinalidae**

**Western Tanager** *Piranga ludoviciana* — Nice scope views in Boulder at Skunk Canyon.  
**Northern Cardinal** *Cardinalis cardinalis* — A good find by Jane at Tamarack Ranch.  
**Black-headed Grosbeak** *Pheucticus melanocephalus* — ()  
**Blue Grosbeak** *Passerina caerulea* — Several were heard and seen in Skunk Canyon.  
**Lazuli Bunting** *Passerina amoena* — Our best looks were at the Cottonwood SWA when one was perching in the grasses right in front of us.

#### **MAMMALS**

**Desert Cottontail** *Sylvilagus auduboni* —  
**Western Brush Rabbit** *Sylvilagus bachmani* —  
**Black-tailed Jackrabbit** *Lepus californicus* —  
**Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel** *Ictidomys tridecemlineatus* — Not great looks at these – I think two were just briefly visible from the truck as we were driving the county roads.  
**Black-tailed Prairie Dog** *Cynomys ludovicianus* —  
**White-tailed Deer** *Odocoileus virginianus* —  
**Pronghorn** *Antilocarpa americana* —  
**American Bison** *Ovis canadensis* — Jane and I saw one in the Rocky Mountain Arsenal.  
**Red Fox** *Vulpes vulpes* — Nice to see two in the early morning not far from the airport in Wray.

#### **REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS**

**Western Painted Turtle** *Cophosaurus texanus* —  
**Gopher Snake** *Pituophis catenifer* — Also called Bull Snake, one just appeared on the trail and Peter was able to redirect it back to the path so everyone was able to get a better look.  
**Paririe Rattlesnake** *Crotalus atrox* — What a fun sighting, and fun getting it out of the road!