

# Yellowstone: Birds, Bears, & Wildlife | Species List

## June 9 – 16, 2023 | with Naturalist Journeys



### With Naturalist Journeys Guide Wes Larson and participants Richard, Christine, Robert, and Margaret

We had an unforgettable week in Yellowstone National Park during what is arguably the best time of year to view wildlife in the park. The verdant greens of the wide-open meadows stood in contrast with the huge, endless skies of Montana and Wyoming that were especially vibrant in June. The cooler temperatures and abundant food sources generated a lot of wildlife sightings. And we sure lucked out in that regard! We spotted 30+ bears during our week in Yellowstone, with an even split between grizzlies and black bears. Some of our more memorable bear sightings included females with newborn cubs, and we were fortunate to watch as both black and grizzly bears escorted cubs around their spring wonderland. We were equally lucky with wolves, observing as packs hunted bison calves. We also were fortunate to witness wolves from the newly formed Shrimp Lake pack up close. A unique mammal sighting came in the form of one of the park's tiniest and most voracious predators, an ermine. We watched as the speedy little weasel completely cleaned out a family of small rodents near our hotel in Cooke City, and the interaction was so amazing that it tied for best mammal of the trip (with our grizzly that had two cubs). **In total we observed 19 mammal species.**

The bird life didn't disappoint either. Between the brilliantly patterned Harlequin Ducks that we saw in multiple locations in the park, the tropical-looking Western Tanagers and Lazuli Buntings, and the Black Rosy-Finches feeding at the edges of snow drifts, we got to see a lot of Yellowstone's avian life. A favorite for the group were the Green-tailed Towhees that we found near the Slough Creek trailhead, especially one particularly showy bird that sang for the entire group while perched on a bit of sagebrush (that performance earned him bird of the trip). **In total we observed 84 bird species.**

We were also fortunate when it came to company. It's rare to have a small group that has so much in common, but both couples were quick to bond over everything from Philadelphia sports to 60's rock, and of course birding. Sharing the kinds of sightings and experiences that we had together is something all of us will remember fondly for years to come, and I hope to see all of you again in Yellowstone or elsewhere around the world.

#### **DUCKS, GEESE AND SWANS: Anatidae (13)**

**Canada Goose** *Branta canadensis*—Canada Geese are plentiful throughout the park and the ecosystem. We saw them almost every day.

**Trumpeter Swan** *Cygnus buccinator*—Nice looks at these elegant birds in the appropriately named Swan Lake and in a small pond in Paradise Valley.

**Cinnamon Teal** *Spatula cyanoptera*—We spotted this beautiful duck in Paradise Valley and at a few other locations.

**American Wigeon** *Mareca americana*—These ducks are common in the park, and we saw them at Swan Lake, around Slough Creek and in other locations.

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*—Mallards are plentiful in the waterways throughout the park.

**Green-winged Teal** *Anas crecca*—A nice sighting in Hayden Valley.

**Redhead** *Aythya americana*—We found a few Redheads in a small lake near the Yellowstone Picnic Area.

**Ring-necked Duck** *Aythya collaris*—Seen at Floating Island Lake.

**Lesser Scaup** *Aythya affinis*—The most common diving duck in the park, we saw these throughout the park.

**Harlequin Duck** *Histrionicus histrionicus*—We had amazing, closeup views of these gorgeous ducks at LaHardy Rapids as well as some sightings in Soda Butte Creek.

**Bufflehead** *Bucephala albeola*—We saw Buffleheads in the Hayden Valley.

**Common Merganser** *Mergus merganser*—Multiple sightings in different waterways in the park.

**Ruddy Duck** *Oxyura jamaicensis*—We had some nice sightings of both males and females, the males with bright blue bills as they were courting females.

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

**Dusky Grouse** *Dendragapus obscurus*—Meg and Bob saw a Dusky Grouse on the Slough Creek walk, and then we saw, presumably, the same bird on our last morning in the park.

### **GREBES: Podicipedidae (2)**

**Western Grebe** *Aechmophorus occidentalis*—A brief look at one in the Hayden Valley.

**Clark's Grebe** *Aechmophorus clarkia*—It took us a minute, but we are confident of the identification of this locally rare grebe in the Hayden Valley based on the eye being surrounded by white, whereas Western Grebes' eyes are surrounded by black.

### **PIGEONS AND DOVES: Columbidae (1)**

**Rock Pigeon** *Columba livia*—We saw a lot of these common urban birds in the towns where we stayed.

### **HUMMINGBIRDS: Trochilidae (2)**

**Broad-tailed Hummingbird** *Selasphorus platycercus*—We saw these distinctive hummingbirds in Slough Creek, often hearing them before seeing them.

**Calliope Hummingbird** *Selasphorus calliope*—We were incredibly lucky to get long views of a spectacular Calliope Hummingbird pair on the Slough Creek trail.

### **RAILS, COOTS AND ALLIES: Rallidae (1)**

**American Coot** *Fulica americana*—Common in waterways on the northern range of the park.

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

**Sandhill Crane** *Antigone canadensis*—We were treated to some wonderful views of Sandhill Cranes, including one in Paradise Valley that was trying to escape some very excited Red-winged Blackbirds.

### **SANDPIPERS AND ALLIES: Scolopacidae (1)**

**Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularius*—We saw a couple of these small sandpipers on the Lamar River and elsewhere.

### **PELICANS: Pelecanidae (1)**

**American White Pelican** *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*—We had a number of nice pelican sightings in both Paradise Valley and in the Hayden Valley.

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

**Great Blue Heron** *Ardea herodias*—While we saw a number of herons, the standout sighting was counting eight or nine in a rookery near the Yellowstone River!

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

**Turkey Vulture** *Cathartes aura*—While these scavengers used to be less common in the park, their numbers have been increasing and we saw many soaring, often around suspected carcasses or ungulate kills.

#### **OSPREY: Pandionidae (1)**

**Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus*—Osprey sightings are common in the park, and we found a number of nests both in Yellowstone and in the Paradise Valley.

#### **HAWKS, KITES AND EAGLES: Accipitridae (4)**

**Golden Eagle** *Aquila chrysaetos*—We were lucky to have a couple Golden Eagle sightings in both the Slough Creek area and near the confluence of the Lamar River and Soda Butte Creek.

**Bald Eagle** *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*—We had several Bald Eagle sightings including one that was escaping a group of ravens in the Lamar Valley.

**Swainson's Hawk** *Buteo swainsoni*—We had a great look at a Swainson's Hawk during our last morning in the park.

**Red-tailed Hawk** *Buteo jamaicensis*—These buteos are common throughout the park, and we saw them on most days.

#### **OWLS: Strigidae (1)**

**Great Horned Owl** *Bubo virginianus*—We had a great look at a nesting Great Horned Owl with owlets in the Mammoth employee housing area.

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

**Williamson's Sapsucker** *Sphyrapicus thyroideus*—While we didn't get the best look, we are reasonably confident we saw this dark-colored sapsucker while on a short walk on the Slough Creek trail.

**Downy Woodpecker** *Dryobates pubescens*—Seen on the Slough Creek trail.

**Hairy Woodpecker** *Dryobates villosus*—We were lucky to spot a couple Hairy Woodpeckers both at Lake Butte and in Slough Creek.

**Northern Flicker** *Colaptes auratus*—Brief looks at this ubiquitous flicker and then one nice sighting near the footbridge trail in the Soda Butte Valley.

#### **FALCONS AND CARACARAS: Falconidae (1)**

**American Kestrel** *Falco sparverius*—A brief sighting on our return trip through Paradise Valley.

#### **TYRANT FLYCATCHERS: Tyrannidae (3)**

**Western Wood-Pewee** *Contopus sordidulus*—Great look at this small tyrant flycatcher on our Beartooth day.

**Willow Flycatcher** *Empidonax traillii*—We saw a number of these small flycatchers in different groups of willows in the park.

**Hammond's Flycatcher** *Empidonax hammondii*—Seen multiple times in the park.

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

**Warbling Vireo** *Vireo gilvus*—Seen in a grove of aspen at Slough Creek, and elsewhere in the park.

#### **CROWS AND JAYS: Corvidae (4)**

**Black-billed Magpie** *Pica hudsonia*—These striking birds are common in the park, and we saw many each day.

**Clark's Nutcracker** *Nucifraga columbiana*—These cheeky corvids are often found near human food and have earned the nickname, "camp robbers." We saw several in Cooke City and one in the Bridge Bay campground.

**American Crow** *Corvus brachyrhynchos*—Seen flying in Bozeman and one individual in the park.

**Common Raven** *Corvus corax*—Ravens are thought to be among the most intelligent birds in the world, we saw them daily in the park.

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

**Mountain Chickadee** *Poecile gambeli*—A quick sighting by Christine and Rich on the Slough Creek trail.

**LARKS: Alaudidae (1)**

**Horned Lark** *Eremophila alpestris*—We briefly saw Horned Larks while driving the Beartooth Highway.

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

**Northern Rough-winged Swallow** *Stelgidopteryx serripennis*—Seen at Swan Lake.

**Tree Swallow** *Tachycineta bicolor*—Seen sporadically throughout the forested areas of the park.

**Violet-green Swallow** *Tachycineta thalassina*—The most common swallows in the area, we saw them in many locations, most noticeably around Cooke City.

**Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*—We found a few Barn Swallows near Nez Perce Creek.

**Cliff Swallow** *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*—We had an amazing look at a Cliff Swallow colony on the side of a cabin in the Lamar Valley.

**KINGLETS: Regulidae (1)**

**Ruby-crowned Kinglet** *Regulus calendula*—We had very nice looks at this shy bird in a campground north of Cooke City.

**WRENS: Troglodytidae (1)**—

**House Wren** *Troglodytes aedon*—A closeup sighting on the Slough Creek trail.

**DIPPERS: Cinclidae (1)**

**American Dipper** *Cinclus mexicanus*—Great looks at American Dippers in both the Old Faithful area and just north of Cooke City.

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

**European Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris*—Common throughout the area.

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

**Gray Catbird** *Dumetella carolinensis*—We noted one in the Slough Creek area.

**THRUSHES: Turdidae (4)**

**Mountain Bluebird** *Sialia currucoides*—We had great looks at Mountain Bluebirds, with some of the best being right at Old Faithful.

**Townsend's Solitaire** *Myadestes townsendi*—It took us a minute to ID this bird, but we had a nice sighting in the Hoodoos near Mammoth.

**Swainson's Thrush** *Catharus ustulatus*—Very nice look at this bird in the Slough Creek area. They specialize in riparian areas and have a beautiful song.

**American Robin** *Turdus migratorius*—Very common in the area and seen daily.

**WAXWINGS: Bombycillidae (1)**

**Cedar Waxwing** *Bombycilla cedrorum*—We found Cedar Waxwings right outside of the Absaroka Lodge in Gardiner.

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

**American Pipit** *Anthus rubescens*—It was a treat to see the small American Pipit in the upper parts of the Beartooth Highway.

### **FINCHES: Fringillidae (3)**

**Black Rosy-Finch** *Leucosticte atrata*—This was one of our favorite birds of the trip, and we all enjoyed watching them explore their unique habitat on the edges of melting snow on the Beartooth Highway.

**Red Crossbill** *Loxia curvirostra*—A pair were observed early in the morning on our penultimate morning in Cooke City, and then came upon a flock of these unique birds while on a last walk through the Slough Creek area!

**Pine Siskin** *Spinus pinus*—Seen in pine trees near Cooke City and in Mammoth.

### **NEW WORLD SPARROWS: Passerellidae (6)**

**Chipping Sparrow** *Spizella passerina*—This sparrow was common, especially in the Slough Creek trail area.

**Dark-eyed Junco** *Junco hyemalis*— Seen in Cooke City.

**White-crowned Sparrow** *Zonotrichia leucophrys*—Common in Cooke City and on the Beartooth Highway.

**Savannah Sparrow** *Passerculus sandwichensis*—A few sightings in Hayden Valley and elsewhere.

**Lincoln's Sparrow** *Melospiza lincolnii*—Seen at Swan Lake.

**Green-tailed Towhee** *Pipilo chlorurus*— Seeing this colorful and charismatic bird near the Slough Creek trailhead was a true delight. We had one particularly showy male perch on sagebrush and sing right in front of us.

\*\*\*VOTED BIRD OF THE TRIP\*\*\*

### **NEW WORLD BLACKBIRDS: Icteridae (6)**

**Yellow-headed Blackbird** *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*—This beautiful blackbird is common in wetland areas around the park.

**Western Meadowlark** *Sturnella neglecta*—We had a couple nice meadowlark sightings on our return trip through Paradise Valley.

**Red-winged Blackbird** *Agelaius phoeniceus*—Common in the wetlands around the park.

**Brown-headed Cowbird** *Molothrus ater*—Commonly seen in areas where bison and elk are present, sometimes even riding on the backs of the ungulates.

**Brewer's Blackbird** *Euphagus cyanocephalus*—See above! Same behavior as the Brown-headed Cowbird.

**Common Grackle** *Quiscalus quiscula*—Seen sporadically throughout the park, sometimes hard to distinguish from the male Brown-headed Cowbird.

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

**MacGillivray's Warbler** *Geothlypis tolmiei*—With its gray head and yellowish-green body, we noticed a few of these western warblers flitting around the trees in the Slough Creek bottom.

**Common Yellowthroat** *Geothlypis trichas*—Seen in the willows near the footbridge trail; easily recognized by their distinctive "bandit mask."

**Yellow Warbler** *Setophaga petechia*—We saw a number of these bright, flying lemons in willows around the park and in Cooke City.

**Yellow-rumped Warbler** *Setophaga coronata*—Seen commonly in the northern range of the ecosystem.

**Wilson's Warbler** *Cardellina pusilla*—We had a nice Wilson's Warbler sighting in the willows in Round Prairie.

### **CARDINALS, GROSBEAKS, AND ALLIES: Cardinalidae (2)**

**Western Tanager** *Piranga ludoviciana*—We were very lucky with these beautiful, tropical-looking birds both in Gardiner near our hotel and elsewhere throughout the park.

**Lazuli Bunting** *Passerina amoena*—We started our trip with incredible views of this gorgeous blue and russet bird.

## **MAMMALS (19)**

**Pronghorn** *Antilocapra Americana*—Common on the prairies around the park and in Paradise Valley.

**American Bison** *Bison bison*—With over 5,000 bison in the park currently, we had no trouble finding these massive bovines around every corner, particularly in the Lamar Valley with their playful “red dog” calves.

**Bighorn Sheep** *Ovis canadensis*—A quick view through Jack’s scope in the Soda Butte Valley.

**Rocky Mountain Goat** *Oreamnos americanus*—Seen along the cliffs on the NE entrance road and on the Beartooth Highway.

**Moose** *Alces alces*—We had a nice look at a bull moose and two others in the Pebble Creek drainage, and then a really amazing sighting of a female with a calf in the road just north of Cooke City.

**Elk** *Cervus elaphus*—Very common in Gardiner and the Mammoth area, and we were lucky to see a couple newborn calves and a very nice bull elk up close.

**Mule Deer** *Odocoileus hemionus*—Common around the Cooke City area.

**Coyote** *Canis latrans*—We had some VERY close coyote sightings (one came within 10 feet) and watched as a group of three followed a pronghorn in the Lamar Valley.

**Gray Wolf** *Canis lupus*—When out with Jack from Wolf Tracker, we saw several wolves from two different packs including a group of four that tried to bring down a bison calf. Then later in the trip, we were treated to a closeup sighting of four wolves from the newly formed Shrimp Lake pack on a rainy day.

**Red Fox** *Vulpes vulpes*—We had several closeup fox sightings, but the one that took the cake was a fox carrying a deer fawn back to its hungry kits.

**American Black Bear** *Ursus americanus*—We could hardly turn a corner without seeing a black bear, and we counted 15+ of the forest-dwelling ursids as we traveled through the park. One of our best sightings came on our first full day as we watched a female with two cubs playing at the base of a tree.

**Brown (Grizzly) Bear** *Ursus arctos*—We were very lucky to watch a female and subadult for 30 minutes as they looked for food on the side of a hill near Lake Butte on the East Entrance Road. The bears were only about 150 yards away and we were thrilled to spend so much time with them. Our best grizzly sighting was a female with two cubs in a meadow near the Northeast Entrance. We had over a dozen grizzly bear sightings total. \*\*\*TIED FOR MAMMAL OF THE TRIP\*\*\*

**Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel** *Callospermophilus lateralis*—Common on the Beartooth Highway and elsewhere.

**Yellow-bellied Marmot** *Marmota flaviventris*—Common on the Beartooth Highway and elsewhere in piles of rocks.

**Yellow-pine Chipmunk** *Tamias amoenus*—Seen on the Beartooth Highway.

**Least Chipmunk** *Tamias minimus*—Seen up close on the Beartooth Highway.

**American Red Squirrel** *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*—Common in the woods around the park.

**Uinta Ground Squirrel** *Urocitellus armatus*—We spotted dozens of these ground squirrels all around the park in sagebrush areas.

**Ermine** *Mustela ermine*—A truly incredible sighting as we watched an ermine dispatch an entire family of small rodents near our Cooke City hotel rooms. \*\*\*TIED FOR MAMMAL OF THE TRIP\*\*\*