



## Colorado Custom Tour:



The booming, stomping, and cackling of **Greater Prairie-Chickens** was one of the undoubted highlights of this “chicken” tour

**28 April – 3 May 2011**

**Guided by Andrew Spencer**

(All photos by Nick Athanas & Sam Woods/Tropical Birding)

Colorado is a land of contrasts. Wind-swept, wide-open prairies cover the eastern third of the state; the spine of the Rocky Mountains runs down the center, and deep, weathered red-rock canyons permeate the western part. The weather can go from unbearably hot and sunny one day to snowy and windy the next. Birds from the east meet birds from the west in an ornithological melting pot unmatched on most of the continent.

Ask most birders what really sets Colorado apart, and they will say it is the grouse. This large, square state is home to more species than anywhere else on the continent, and each spring they all display in ritualized mating dances that surely ranks among the premiere sights in the avian world.



**Greater Sage-Grouse** also boasts an absorbing display

Being a Colorado native I was fairly familiar with these displays, but the other people in the Tropical Birding office were not. Since Nick and Sam had some time off between commitments in the states it was decided that they would come on a short tour of Colorado and see the highlights

of what the Centennial State had to offer. Due to time constraints the tour was run a little differently than our usual set departure, and therefore the trip list is shorter than would be expected for that more comprehensive Colorado tour. However, we managed to see some dramatic grouse displays, interspersed with some incredible Colorado scenery, which this state is rightly famous for.

All in all we enjoyed a very successful tour; both Sam and Nick got memorable sightings and superb photos of all the grouse we targeted and I got some excellent sound recordings of some of the bizarre noises these “chickens” make when in the throws of full display. Seeing how well we did on this abridged version of our Colorado tour I can’t wait to run the full tour for Colorado’s Chickens next spring!

### **Day 1: Denver, Loveland Pass & Silverthorne**

After meeting in Denver we headed west out of the city to **Genesee Mountain Park**, located in the foothills just outside Denver. The open

Ponderosa Pine forests here are a well-known hangout of **Williamson’s Sapsucker**, and this beautiful little woodpecker did not disappoint with a pair putting on a fine show. After admiring the sapsuckers and some handsome



**Western Bluebirds** we continued upslope to **Loveland Pass**, a well-known stakeout for the inconspicuous **White-tailed Ptarmigan**. Accompanying these two seasoned tropical birders from the car we were hit with harsh wintry conditions: temperatures down in the teens, the pass draped in thick snow, and winds blowing upwards of 40mph. We made a hasty retreat, figuring that any smart ptarmigan would be



well-hidden in a snow bank in such harsh conditions, and decided we would give it another shot in hopefully milder conditions a few days later.

So we drove a short distance to the mountain town of

**Silverthorne**, where our luck improved considerably. The wind dies down and the feeders were packed with finches, just what we were

after. Even before we had pulled the car off the road we almost ran over a small flock of rosy-finches feeding on the roadside. Checking several sets of feeders along this small side



road we found flocks numbering hundreds of rosy-finches, with the typical ratio of many **Brown-capped Rosy-Finches** (*top above*), fewer **Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches**, even fewer (just a handful) of **Black Rosy-Finches**, (*above bottom*), and a few "**Hepburn's**" **Rosy-Finches** (a distinctive form of Gray-crowned, *page 3*) too. **Pine** and **Evening Grosbeaks** provided a further dash of color, as well as giving Sam a

couple of his most wanted lifers, and a couple of the local (in Colorado) **Band-tailed Pigeons** hung out in nearby treetops.

Wrapping up our time in the high mountains we began our long drive to the plains of the southeast. A quick stop in **Georgetown** to look for American Dipper proved fruitless, though the gas station cookies and a well-needed hot drink were consolation. Arriving back down at the base of the mountains we checked another location for the dipper, and voila, there they were! For the next half hour or so we admired a pair of remarkably tame **American Dippers**, (*below*), including watching one eat a large larvae right in front of us, while characteristically bopping up and down as only dippers can do.



The next few hours were occupied with driving towards **Lamar**, where we spent the night. A couple of quick stops at various reservoirs proved mostly frustrating, due to very high winds, but a smattering of shorebirds did liven up the afternoon (with **Snowy Plover** being the best of the bunch). A check of a marsh where I've had Black Rail in the past was thwarted by the wind. However, we did get to admire a flock of **White-faced Ibis** and **American Avocets** before we retired to Lamar for the night early, in preparation for the usual early start that chickens so often demand.

## Day 2: SE Prowers County to Wray

Chickens are exceptionally early risers. This means, unfortunately, that birders who want to see them have to be up even earlier. This morning was to be our earliest, a combination of the long distance we had to drive to get to the lek site, and being at the eastern edge of the time zone. But the draw of our first chicken of the trip was irresistible, and 3 am found us heading towards the far southeastern corner of Prowers County. After arriving on site, and after some strategic repositioning of



the car, we were ogling our first chicken of the trip, the diminutive, but insanely comical, **Lesser Prairie-Chicken**, (left).

This species has been in serious decline in the past decade, and the former public lek that people visited in Colorado was off-limits, but luckily I knew of another display site close

by. On this day we observed some ten birds at the site, where we got to enjoy the visual and auditory display to full, jaw-dropping effect.

Once the chickens had finished their morning dance we left the display area, with a plan to hunt down the uncommon and local Mountain Plover along with a few other prairie birds, before heading north to another famous chicken site. We had barely left the lekking field, though, when a **Mountain Plover** ran right in front of the car and stood on the side of the road ensuring we all got awesome looks at this odd plover! Unfortunately in an attempt to reposition ourselves for photos the bird flew off, with no photos to show for our pains. Luckily for the

photographers in the car, on our way towards **Two Buttes State Wildlife Area** we found another Plover, and this one (with some careful maneuvering) posed for some time, and even showed us a short display flight of its own.

Continuing on towards the SWA we ran into our only **Lark Buntings** of the trip; this normally common breeding species seemed to have not yet returned in good numbers. Once we arrived at Two Buttes we descended into this canyon oasis, and birded the woodland, one of Colorado's most famous migrant traps. Although not too many migrants were in evidence we did get cracking looks at the resident **Canyon Wren** (*below*) which performed beautifully. Sam and Nick were able to get some of the best photos of the trip of this little wall-creeping beauty, and, I was able to get some killer recordings of this handsome wren.



Since we had to be in Wray, all the way up in northeast Colorado, by 5 pm, we didn't have too much time available in the southeast. Our last major birding stop of the day was at **Thurston Reservoir** and the nearby **Indian Reservoirs**. Thurston Reservoir was chock-full of

waterbirds (including **Eared Grebe**, **Cinnamon Teal**, and **Ring-necked Duck**), but not Sam's hoped for Bufflehead. In some yucca-dotted grasslands just to the north there was a singing **Cassin's Sparrow** and some **Brewer's Sparrows** amid the more abundant **Vesper Sparrows**, rounding out our birding in the **Arkansas River Valley**.

The remainder of our day was spent driving north, and meeting with the owner of the "prairie-chicken" ranch on which we were planning to bird the following morning. After an entertaining and informative talk with the rancher, (that much detailed information on the Great Prairie-Chicken and many more tall stories besides), and an excellent dinner in Wray, we turned in for the night, with the knowledge that another early morning lay ahead of us.



### **Day 3: Wray to Loveland Pass & Silverthorne to North Park**

Another early morning, another chicken. Dawn found us sitting in our car in a small field, listening to the odd booming, hooting, and cackling as more than thirty **Greater Prairie-Chickens** (*above*) cavorted all around us, sometimes too close to focus on. It was sensory overload, and unquestionably among the best avian experiences in North America.



Other than a voyeuristic family of **Burrowing Owls** that shared the field with the chickens there wasn't much happening at the lek itself, but on the drive out we encountered a

small group of migrant **Upland Sandpipers**. An unexpected bonus as Upland is a local breeder in Colorado and not usually found in the Wray area.

The afternoon was mostly occupied with our drive west. But we couldn't resist the opportunity to try for the **White-tailed Ptarmigan** again in the snowy country of **Loveland Pass** (*above & right*). This snow white bird is among the most sought after chickens in Colorado and we didn't want to miss it! So early afternoon found us back on this 12,000ft-high pass, and luck was with us: the weather was nice. Snow still covered the ground as it should at this time, but we were greeted by clear skies and almost no wind. We



could handle this no problem! I explained to Nick and Sam how it sometimes takes hours to find Ptarmigans, and we set out with this warning in mind. As if to prove me wrong, we were barely 100 feet from the car when Sam calmly said “there’s one”. We spent the next half hour or so photographing and practically stepping on this remarkably tame **White-tailed Ptarmigan** as it walked around in front of us, eating snow and foliage, appearing completely nonplussed to our existence just a few feet away.

The pressure had now been taken off the afternoon that freed up several hours more for us, so we decided to check in on the Rosy-Finch feeders at **Silverthorne** once again, as this was so enjoyable the first time round. We found numbers there to be down from our previous visit just days earlier, but still substantial, and the rest of the supporting cast still present, which included a cooperative **Clark’s Nutcracker**.



Turning north from Silverthorne we began working our way towards North Park, up on the Wyoming border, our next chicken location. A roadside stop along Rt. 14 south of

**Walden** gave us some stunning looks at a pair of the Grandala-like **Mountain Bluebird** (*above*) and a gorgeous pair of **Sandhill Cranes** flying against the snow-covered mountains behind.

Up to this point we had failed miserably at finding one of Sam’s major nemesis birds, Bufflehead. I had assured him many times that we would get it, but each time we checked out a lake we came up empty-handed. I finally just told him I’d guarantee the bird in North Park, and sure enough, found it at the first lake we checked (**Pole Mountain Reservoir**). In addition to the many **Bufflehead** there were a few

lingering **Common Goldeneye** and more common ducks including **Lesser Scaup** and **Cinnamon Teal**.

The final birding stop of the day was at the productive **Walden Reservoir**. Here we found a number of the same ducks we had seen earlier, and a gorgeous breeding plumage **Common Loon**. However, the best find was a flock of lingering **Snow Geese**, and also a pair of **Ross's Geese** in with a flock of Canadas. The reservoir was about more than



just waterbirds, with a very cooperative flock of the garish sounding, but gorgeously patterned, **Yellow-headed Blackbird** as well.

Checking in at our hotel, Nick decided to rest after the long drive, while Sam and I went in

search of one of the main North Park specialties – **Moose** (*above*). Sam had never seen this huge beast before, and since this was the best part of Colorado to find one we went out in the last hour of the evening in pursuit. It didn't take long before we found a bull Moose, sans antlers at this time of the season! At that point we declared the day a success and sat down to our well-deserved meal and sleep.

#### **Day 4: North Park to Rabbit Ears Pass to Craig**

Compared to the chickens seen earlier on the tour, the grouse of day 4 were a drastic change. The early morning found us looking at a large lek of **Greater Sage-Grouse**, (*next page*), and what a show it was! Dozens of males were spread across the snowy plain, while huge snow-covered mountains dominated the background, making for one of the greatest settings of the tour. The dance of the sage-grouse varies from bizarre to borderline obscene, and the sounds they make while doing it all are

nothing short of amazing. Watching these absorbing, if sometimes ridiculous, and incredible, displays Nick and Sam were quick to admit the antics of the sage-grouse stood up well to even the extraordinary displays of the birds-of-paradise that they had witnessed in Papua New Guinea.



After the displaying was done for the morning we began making our way towards Craig, our final “chicken town”. As for once we did not have far to go, we had some spare time to look for other birds en route. First off we dropped in to the **Moose Visitor Center**, which had some good feeders on tap. A couple more **Brown-capped Rosy-Finches** were outshone by the very tame **Pine Grosbeaks**, and an assortment of juncos, while a lone **Vesper Sparrow** made for a weird feeder bird.



Turning back and heading west again, we stopped near the top of **Rabbit Ears Pass**, where a manicured snowmobile trail penetrated the otherwise snowbound spruce-fir woodland. It took us mere minutes to find our first target here, the camp-robbing **Gray Jay**, and only a few more minutes to find our other target, **American Three-toed Woodpecker** (left). After flailing around in waist-deep snow for a while getting photos of the woodpeckers we continued west, and downhill, towards the far

northwestern corner of the state.

Our afternoon birding was fairly laid back. We drove past Craig up into the **Little Snake River valley**, where after some searching we found our main target **Sage Sparrow**, in an area that held some prospecting Mountain Bluebirds, and also found a couple of **Juniper Titmouse** and **Lark Sparrows**. Returning to Craig, we settled in for the night.

## Day 5: Craig & Pawnee National Grasslands to Denver

**Sharp-tailed Grouse** can be one of the harder grouse to get a really good look at in Colorado – most of the leks usually visited aren't that close to the road, and it's harder to use your vehicle as a blind when visiting them (that is possible with some of the other species). Luckily a friend of mine was able to get us onto a private lek, and also provide the perfect blind from which to take shots of them! The upshot of this was that what is normally one of the least impressive sightings of this tour became one of the most impressive. The lek was quite large, and we spent the first few hours of the morning marveling at the strange, "choreographed", ballet-like, dancing of **Sharp-tailed Grouse** from as little as three feet away (*below*). In the end this small relative to the Prairie-Chickens won the vote for the best display of all the grouse, and best overall experience for me at least.



After leaving the blind once the grouse had "left the coup" my friend kindly offered to show us a **Ferruginous Hawk** nest, and soon we were admiring a pair of these magnificent raptors soaring overhead and perching on some nearby power poles. A surprisingly large number of

young **Bald Eagles** were also on the property, and we also got to see some newly returned **Swainson's Hawks** near a year-old nest.

Then, with our scheduled flights due out of Colorado the following morning we drove east. Our only birding stop in the mountains was made at **Windy Gap Reservoir**, a well-known staging area for ducks as they return to their breeding grounds further north and west. It did not disappoint today, and we had excellent looks at a good number of **Barrow's Goldeneye**, as well as smaller numbers of **Common Goldeneye** and **Bufflehead**.



Getting out of the mountains fairly early we decided we would make a final attempt at some prairie birds that we had not yet seen. So we angled north and worked our way up to **Pawnee National Grasslands**, where along

the Murphy's Pasture Road we quickly found the more common **McCown's Longspur**, and with a little more searching a pair of the drop-dead gorgeous **Chestnut-collared Longspur** (*above*). These allowed us to pull spectacularly close in our car, and after a few last shots were taken we called it a day, and a trip, and headed back to Denver for a last supper and a rest after a whirlwind tour of this extraordinary state.

## Bird List

Taxonomy and nomenclature follow the AOU Checklist.

### **Snow Goose**

### ***Chen caerulescens***

*A small flock of birds at Walden Reservoir were late migrants; it is rare to see this species in Colorado after mid-May, except for occasional wounded birds that summer in the state.*

### **Ross's Goose**

### ***Chen rossii***

*A pair of birds with some Canada Geese at Walden Reservoir were late migrants; this species is even more unusual this late in the spring.*

### **Cackling Goose**

### ***Branta hutchinsii***

### **Canada Goose**

### ***Branta canadensis***

### **Wood Duck**

### ***Aix sponsa***

### **Gadwall**

### ***Anas strepera***

### **American Wigeon**

### ***Anas americana***

### **Mallard**

### ***Anas platyrhynchos***

### **Blue-winged Teal**

### ***Anas discors***

### **Cinnamon Teal**

### ***Anas cyanoptera***

### **Northern Shoveler**

### ***Anas clypeata***

### **Northern Pintail**

### ***Anas acuta***

### **Green-winged Teal**

### ***Anas crecca***

### **Canvasback**

### ***Aythya valisineria***

*A few of this handsome duck were on various mountain lakes. This is often one of the least common diving ducks in Colorado.*

### **Redhead**

### ***Aythya americana***

### **Ring-necked Duck**

### ***Aythya collaris***

### **Lesser Scaup**

### ***Aythya affinis***

### **Bufflehead**

### ***Bucephala albeola***

### **Common Goldeneye**

### ***Bucephala clangula***

*A few were present on various mountain lakes, with the most being at Windy Gap Reservoir, a known staging site. This species does not breed in Colorado, so these individuals were likely among the last of the spring for the state.*

### **Barrow's Goldeneye**

### ***Bucephala islandica***

*More than 25 birds were at Windy Gap Reservoir, a known staging site for this species. Barrow's Goldeneye are very local breeders in northwestern Colorado, and it has been theorized that birds wintering and staging in the mountains of Colorado could be from that breeding population.*

**Hooded Merganser**

*Lophodytes cucullatus*

**Common Merganser**

*Mergus merganser*

**Red-breasted Merganser**

*Mergus serrator*

**Ruddy Duck**

*Oxyura jamaicensis*

**Ring-necked Pheasant**

*Phasianus colchicus*

**Greater Sage-Grouse**

*Centrocercus urophasianus*

*A lek of 35+ birds, including many females, near Coalmont in North Park. Watching the bizarre displays of this huge grouse was an otherworldly experience similar to watching Birds-of-Paradise in New Guinea.*

**White-tailed Ptarmigan**

*Lagopus leucura*

*Getting the award of tamest bird ever, was a single female of this species we found on our second attempt at Loveland Pass. She came as close as a foot at times as it fed in the snow, as we stood there awestruck.*

**Sharp-tailed Grouse**

*Tympanuchus phasianellus*

*Thanks to my friend in Craig we were able to put a blind right next to a large lek of this species. Voted best display of the trip, the stomping, dancing, and running around of the males when a female would show up brought to mind a choreographed ballet.*

**Greater Prairie-Chicken**

*Tympanuchus cupido*

*Voted bird of the trip by Nick and Sam, we were able to park right next to a large lek of this species on a private ranch near Wray. Having the sunrise while listening to the booming, stomping, and cackling of male Prairie-Chickens displaying right by the car window is among the greatest avian experiences anywhere.*

**Lesser Prairie-Chicken**

*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*

*The first chicken of the trip was a great introduction to the grouse of Colorado. We were able to see 10+ birds at a private lek in southeastern Prowers County. This species has been doing very poorly in the past few years, the victim of deep snow, extreme cold, and a small, fragmented population. The formerly accessible public leks in the state have been closed, and other than a few private leks this bird had become quite hard to see in the state.*

**Wild Turkey**

*Meleagris gallopavo*

**Common Loon**

*Gavia immer*

*A couple of breeding plumaged birds on mountain lakes were late migrants; this species does not breed in Colorado, though occasionally a few non-breeding plumaged birds summer in the state.*

**Pied-billed Grebe**

*Podilymbus podiceps*

**Horned Grebe**

*Podiceps auritus*

**Eared Grebe**

*Podiceps nigricollis*

**Western Grebe**

*Aechmophorus occidentalis*

**Clark's Grebe**

*Aechmophorus clarkii*

**Double-crested Cormorant**

*Phalacrocorax auritus*

**American White Pelican**

*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*

*Good numbers of this huge pelican were seen on various lakes, including in North Park, one of the few breeding locations in Colorado.*

**Great Blue Heron**

*Ardea herodias*

**Great Egret**

*Ardea alba*

**Snowy Egret**

*Egretta thula*

**Black-crowned Night-Heron**

*Nycticorax nycticorax*

**White-faced Ibis**

*Plegadis chihi*

**Turkey Vulture**

*Cathartes aura*

**Osprey**

*Pandion haliaetus*

**Bald Eagle**

*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*

**Northern Harrier**

*Circus cyaneus*

**Sharp-shinned Hawk**

*Accipiter striatus*

**Cooper's Hawk**

*Accipiter cooperii*

**Swainson's Hawk**

*Buteo swainsoni*

**Red-tailed Hawk**

*Buteo jamaicensis*

**Ferruginous Hawk**

*Buteo regalis*

*Perhaps the most beautiful of the Buteo genus in the United States, this large raptor is an uncommon and local bird throughout its range. We saw three, a distant bird near Thurston Reservoir in southeastern Colorado, and pair near a nest near Craig.*

**Golden Eagle**

*Aquila chrysaetos*

*Only a couple of this large, handsome raptor were seen on the trip, one on the southeastern Plains and one near Hayden.*

**American Kestrel**

*Falco sparverius*

**Peregrine Falcon**

*Falco peregrinus*

**Prairie Falcon**

*Falco mexicanus*

**American Coot**

*Fulica americana*

**Sandhill Crane**

*Grus canadensis*

*While we were in the state a bit too late in the year to see the large migrating flocks of this species on the eastern plains, we did run in to a few pairs in northwestern Colorado, where the species is a local breeder.*

**Black-bellied Plover**

*Pluvialis squatarola*

**Snowy Plover**

*Charadrius alexandrinus*

**Semipalmated Plover**

*Charadrius semipalmatus*

**Killdeer**

**Mountain Plover**

*Charadrius vociferus*

*Charadrius montanus*

*Somewhat of a misnamed bird, this medium-sized plover is a specialty of the eastern plains of Colorado. We had excellent looks at two near the Lesser Prairie-Chicken lek in southeastern Colorado, and a couple of more were seen as high speed drivebys (photo below).*



**Black-necked Stilt**

**American Avocet**

**Spotted Sandpiper**

**Solitary Sandpiper**

**Greater Yellowlegs**

**Willet**

**Lesser Yellowlegs**

**Upland Sandpiper**

*Himantopus mexicanus*

*Recurvirostra americana*

*Actitis macularius*

*Tringa solitaria*

*Tringa melanoleuca*

*Tringa semipalmata*

*Tringa flavipes*

*Bartramia longicauda*

*This prairie shorebird is a very local breeder in far northeastern Colorado, and an uncommon migrant in the eastern tier of the state. So a group of four or five that we ran across near the Greater Prairie-Chicken lek was a nice surprise.*

**Whimbrel**

*The day before we birded Neenoshe Reservoir in southeastern Colorado the largest flock ever reported of this uncommon migrant in Colorado was seen. By the time we arrived it had dwindled to about 30 birds, which was still more at one time than I had seen in any five year period in the state.*

**Long-billed Curlew**

**Marbled Godwit**

*While not a breeder in Colorado, a good number of this large, handsome shorebird migrate through the state. We found a good-sized flock at Walden Reservoir.*

**Sanderling**

**Semipalmated Sandpiper**

**Western Sandpiper**

**Least Sandpiper**

**Baird's Sandpiper**

**Stilt Sandpiper**

**Long-billed Dowitcher**

**Wilson's Snipe**

**Wilson's Phalarope**

**Bonaparte's Gull**

**Franklin's Gull**

**Ring-billed Gull**

**California Gull**

**Forster's Tern**

**Rock Pigeon**

**Band-tailed Pigeon**

*While common in many parts of the western US and points south, this large pigeon is uncommon and local in Colorado. The only ones we saw were by the Rosy-Finch feeders near Silverthorne.*

**Eurasian Collared-Dove**

*I can still remember chasing this species in southeastern Colorado back when it was a rare and recent arrival to the state. These days though it's been seen in every county in Colorado and is downright abundant on the eastern plains, where we saw many.*

**Mourning Dove**

**Burrowing Owl**

**Broad-tailed Hummingbird**

***Numenius phaeopus***

***Numenius americanus***

***Limosa fedoa***

***Calidris alba***

***Calidris pusilla***

***Calidris mauri***

***Calidris minutilla***

***Calidris bairdii***

***Calidris himantopus***

***Limnodromus scolopaceus***

***Gallinago delicata***

***Phalaropus tricolor***

***Chroicocephalus philadelphia***

***Leucophaeus pipixcan***

***Larus delawarensis***

***Larus californicus***

***Sterna forsteri***

***Columba livia***

***Patagioenas fasciata***

***Streptopelia decaocto***

***Zenaida macroura***

***Athene cunicularia***

***Selasphorus platycercus***

*We only had a couple of flyovers of this montane species, the most common hummer in Colorado. They usually arrive in mid-April and had not yet returned in good numbers by the time of our trip.*

**Belted Kingfisher**

***Megaceryle alcyon***

**Williamson's Sapsucker**

***Sphyrapicus thyroideus***

*Surely among the contenders for most beautiful woodpecker in the New World, we found a pair at the Genesee Mountain Park near Denver. This species is a fairly common breeder in Ponderosa Pine forests throughout Colorado.*

**Red-naped Sapsucker**

***Sphyrapicus nuchalis***

**Downy Woodpecker**

***Picoides pubescens***

**Hairy Woodpecker**

***Picoides villosus***

**American Three-toed Woodpecker** ***Picoides dorsalis***

*This highly sought-after species is a fairly common, but at times hard to find, resident in the spruce-fir zone of the high mountains. We found a pair with refreshing swiftness at Rabbit Ears Pass and got to tromp through the snow getting photos and recordings of them.*

**Northern Flicker**

***Colaptes auratus***

**Eastern Phoebe**

***Sayornis phoebe***

**Say's Phoebe**

***Sayornis saya***

**Western Kingbird**

***Tyrannus verticalis***

**Eastern Kingbird**

***Tyrannus tyrannus***

**Loggerhead Shrike**

***Lanius ludovicianus***

**Gray Jay**

***Perisoreus canadensis***

*Known among many tourists as the "camp robber", this charismatic species is fairly common in high-elevation Colorado. Since this was a much-wanted species by Sam and Nick we checked out a couple of locations for it before we finally found one near Rabbit Ears Pass.*

**Steller's Jay**

***Cyanocitta stelleri***

**Blue Jay**

***Cyanocitta cristata***

**Western Scrub-Jay**

***Aphelocoma californica***

**Clark's Nutcracker**

***Nucifraga columbiana***

*We saw a couple of this large corvid at the Rosy-Finch feeders near Silverthorne.*

**Black-billed Magpie**

***Pica hudsonia***

**American Crow**

***Corvus brachyrhynchos***

**Chihuahuan Raven**

***Corvus cryptoleucus***

*One of the most under appreciated ID challenges in the US, the true distribution in Colorado is somewhat hazy. Both species of Ravens are*

*present in southeastern Colorado, but they tend to segregate by habitat, and the ones we saw on the prairie south of Lamar were this species.*

**Common Raven**

*Corvus corax*

**Horned Lark**

*Eremophila alpestris*

**Tree Swallow**

*Tachycineta bicolor*

**Violet-green Swallow**

*Tachycineta thalassina*

**Northern Rough-winged Swallow** *Stelgidopteryx serripennis*

**Cliff Swallow**

*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*

**Barn Swallow**

*Hirundo rustica*

**Black-capped Chickadee**

*Poecile atricapillus*

**Mountain Chickadee**

*Poecile gambeli*

*(Photo below).*



**Juniper Titmouse**

*Baeolophus ridgwayi*

*A fairly common resident in the pinyon-juniper forests throughout Colorado. We saw a few northwest of Craig.*

**Red-breasted Nuthatch**

*Sitta canadensis*

**White-breasted Nuthatch**

*Sitta carolinensis*

**Pygmy Nuthatch**

*Sitta pygmaea*

**Brown Creeper**

*Certhia americana*

**Rock Wren**

*Salpinctes obsoletus*

*While this species is a common breeder anywhere in Colorado with cliffs or lots of rocks, the good numbers we had on the prairie north of Lamar were somewhat unexpected and were doubtless migrants.*

**Canyon Wren**

***Catherpes mexicanus***

*Scarily similar to the Chilean endemic Crag Chilia in looks and behavior, this species is common in cliffy areas throughout Colorado. We were treated to a spectacular encounter with this species at Two Buttes Reservoir, where one sang right in front of us, allowing for excellent photos and recordings of its gorgeous song.*

**Bewick's Wren**

***Thryomanes bewickii***

**House Wren**

***Troglodytes aedon***

**Blue-gray Gnatcatcher**

***Polioptila caerulea***

**American Dipper**

***Cinclus mexicanus***

*After some searching we were able to enjoy point-blank views of this weird and charismatic species near Morrison.*

**Golden-crowned Kinglet**

***Regulus satrapa***

**Ruby-crowned Kinglet**

***Regulus calendula***

**Western Bluebird**

***Sialia mexicana***

**Mountain Bluebird**

***Sialia currucoides***

**Townsend's Solitaire**

***Myadestes townsendi***

**American Robin**

***Turdus migratorius***

**Gray Catbird**

***Dumetella carolinensis***

**Northern Mockingbird**

***Mimus polyglottos***

**Sage Thrasher**

***Oreoscoptes montanus***

*This small and atypical thrasher was encountered a few times near Craig in northwestern Colorado.*

**Brown Thrasher**

***Toxostoma rufum***

**European Starling**

***Sturnus vulgaris***

**American Pipit**

***Anthus rubescens***

**Cedar Waxwing**

***Bombycilla cedrorum***

**Chestnut-collared Longspur**

***Calcarius ornatus***

*Who says prairie birds are boring? A stunner by anyone's standards, we had amazing views of a pair on the Pawnee National Grasslands.*

**McCown's Longspur**

***Rhynchophanes mccownii***

*While not as handsome as the species above, this is still a gorgeous prairie breeder. It prefers shorter grass than Chestnut-collared Longspur and is much more common in Colorado, which has a good share of short-grass prairie. We saw a few on the Pawnee National Grasslands.*

**Yellow-rumped Warbler**

***Dendroica coronata***

**Common Yellowthroat**  
**Spotted Towhee**  
**Cassin's Sparrow**

***Geothlypis trichas***  
***Pipilo maculatus***  
***Peucaea cassinii***

*We found a couple of these bland-looking, but amazing-sounding, sparrows near Thurston Reservoir. A fairly common breeder in Colorado, it is almost always found on rolling prairie with abundant yucca.*

**Chipping Sparrow**  
**Clay-colored Sparrow**  
**Brewer's Sparrow**  
**Vesper Sparrow**  
**Lark Sparrow**

***Spizella passerina***  
***Spizella pallida***  
***Spizella breweri***  
***Pooecetes gramineus***  
***Chondestes grammacus***



**Sage Sparrow**

***Amphispiza belli***

*Yet another of those amazing songsters in the sparrow family, this species is fairly common in western Colorado, in sage flats with large sage bushes. Since we spent our trip a little further north than most of this species' range in the state we had to search for a while before we found a pair, northwest of Craig (photo above).*

**Lark Bunting**

***Calamospiza melanocorys***

*Colorado's state bird is, depending on the year, an abundant breeder on the eastern plains. Since our trip was a bit early for the bulk of them to have returned we didn't see these large numbers. We did find a couple of small flocks near Two Buttes Reservoir in the southeast.*

**Savannah Sparrow**

***Passerculus sandwichensis***

**Grasshopper Sparrow**

***Ammodramus savannarum***

**Song Sparrow**

***Melospiza melodia***

**White-crowned Sparrow**

***Zonotrichia leucophrys***

**Dark-eyed Junco**

***Junco hyemalis***

*Colorado is probably better than any other place in the country to see the various distinctive subspecies of this variable species. Late April is a little late into the spring to see the whole variety, but we still managed to see "Slate-colored", "Oregon", and "Pink-sided" varieties in addition to the locally breeding and most common "Gray-headed" races.*

**Red-winged Blackbird**

***Agelaius phoeniceus***

**Western Meadowlark**

***Sturnella neglecta***

**Yellow-headed Blackbird**

***Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus***

**Brewer's Blackbird**

***Euphagus cyanocephalus***

**Common Grackle**

***Quiscalus quiscula***

**Great-tailed Grackle**

***Quiscalus mexicanus***

**Brown-headed Cowbird**

***Molothrus ater***

**Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch**

***Leucosticte tephrocotis***

*Breeding in the northwestern US, this species is typically the second most common of the three Rosy-Finches in Colorado. Among the very large flocks of "Rosies" that we had near Silverthorne we had a good number of the interior subspecies and a few of the coastal, "Hepburn's" subspecies.*

**Black Rosy-Finch**

***Leucosticte atrata***

*Even though this beautiful species breeds right over the border in Utah, it is usually the least common of the Rosy-Finches in the state (except for the western margin near the Utah border). In the Rosy-Finch flock near Silverthorne we saw as many as eight individuals, including a couple of spectacular adult males.*

**Brown-capped Rosy-Finch**

***Leucosticte australis***

*Nearly a Colorado endemic, this is almost always the most common Rosy-Finch in flocks in the state. We saw several hundred near Silverthorne, and a couple more near Walden.*

**Pine Grosbeak**

***Pinicola enucleator***

*We saw a few of this handsome finch near Silverthorne and near Walden.*

**Cassin's Finch**

***Carpodacus cassinii***

**House Finch**

***Carpodacus mexicanus***

**Red Crossbill**

***Loxia curvirostra***

**Pine Siskin**

***Spinus pinus***

**Lesser Goldfinch**  
**American Goldfinch**

*Spinus psaltria*  
*Spinus tristis*



**Evening Grosbeak**

*Coccothraustes vespertinus*

*Often underrated, and at times difficult to find, we found a few near Silverthorne and then a small flock near Hayden that was hanging out in scrub-oak, an unusual habitat to find them in (photo above).*

**House Sparrow**

*Passer domesticus*