

BUCKBIRD JOURNEYS Ltd

In Cooperation with Partnership for International Birding, Denver

COLORADO GROUSE QUEST 2013

Thursday 4 – Saturday 13 April 2013

HB / PB extension Saturday 13 – Monday 15 April 2013

(Betty, Gloria, Hugh, Merilyn, Robert, Peter)

*Talking about girls, talking about trucks
Riding red roads and raising up dust*

Well metaphorically speaking only but the Elvis and Country Western programmes did help to keep tired drivers awake on this odyssey. This was our version of the famed “Chicken Tour”, one of the most scenic, long in drives (over 2000 miles in 9 days) and wild life rewarding journeys on earth. We got the lot, 70 degrees F in a drought stricken Denver on arrival, 20 degrees and deep snow a few days later, on our journey a combination of brilliant views of snow capped peaks, cold high and dry low prairies and, for a day or so, worrying snowfalls. But get through we did without major incident and, between us, accomplished most, if perhaps not all for all, of our birding and other ambitions

The clean sweep 7 species of Grouse, 4 in full display, most of the birds of the low prairies, all three species of Rosy Finch and a back up cast of a variety of raptors, a female Hooded Merganser amongst a huge selection of waterfowl, a brilliant Northern Saw-whet Owl, Bighorn Sheep and a variety of smaller mammals were perhaps the highlights but the sights were many and varied. Our vehicles and hotels were comfortable, the food (often over) copious and the whole experience memorable. Thank you all for sharing it with me

For completion I have included the extra 2-3 days taken by Peter and myself at the end of the trip

Thursday 4 April

HB arrives early and takes a quick prelude with contacts in Denver with a visit to the South River Platte and Normanton Park. Perhaps notable are 5 Hooded Mergansers (2 drakes and 3 ducks) and a Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler, the latter in that it was to prove the only Warbler of the trip – a testimony to an unusually cold spring in Colorado. All are assembled at the Day’s Inn by evening with already a few things, a Northern Harrier and Black-tailed Prairie Dogs amongst them, on the lists

Friday 5 April

Our first 0515 start as we drive west to join our morning's guide Norm Lewis and shortly after dawn we are 12000 feet up on a bright, snowy and cold Loveland Pass. No much lusted after White-tailed Ptarmigan obliges but we have better luck at a series of feeders in nearby Silverthorne. Here are hundreds of Rosy Finches, most the near endemic Brown-capped but also many nominate and the "Hepburns" form of Gray-crowned and a trio of the elusive Black, two of them full adults. This is great, these birds can be desperately elusive, and a fine back up cast - several forms of Junco, Clarke's Nutcracker, Gray Jay, a pair of Pine Grosbeaks, unusual numbers of Common Redpolls and both Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel and a Least Chipmunk are also present

Backtracking alongside Georgetown one vehicle causes consternation by spotting a couple of Bighorn Sheep by the roadside before we turn north through Allenspark to our spacious accommodation at the sprawling YMCA complex at Estes Park. There are large Elk and solid Mule Deer all over the place and we liaise in the evening with local expert Scott Rashid. We fail in our first attempt at Pygmy Owl but strike real gold with a persistently calling Northern Saw-whet Owl which offers, for those that make the scramble up a steep hillside, superb daylight views of this difficult bird. Try finding one without local help! A good dinner concludes a big opening day

Saturday 6 April

No luck again with the Pygmy Owl and we are off again mid morning eastwards and then north over the snow bound Cameron's Pass to a wintry looking Waldren. A huge Bighorn ram by the roadside and a large flock of Wild Turkeys are notable on our journey. The high sage plains around Walden and Delaney Butte are thick with birds including many waterfowl, a variety of raptors which include Rough-legged and a nesting pair of Ferruginous Hawks and Glo's "boulder" at Delaney Butte which eventually transforms itself into a slow moving male Greater Sage Grouse. It is on the "menu" for the following morning. Our first Pronghorns and a colony of White-tailed Prairie Dogs are also much appreciated

Sunday 7 April

It is bright and cold as we travel back predawn to Delaney Butte to witness the extraordinary lek of a dozen cock and 8 or so associated hen Greater Sage Grouse. As the sun rises it is an astonishing sight as the males inflate their chests and stomp about in their quest to outperform their rivals. They are a great Grouse opening and warm the journey south over the snowy Rabbit's Ear Pass and on to Steamboat Springs. A number of Golden Eagles and, for one vehicle, a flock of Snow Buntings are notable en route. Our afternoon is taken up with scouting Grouse sites near Hayden but nothing obliges except for our first Sandhill Cranes and we have to make do with a copious and good meal at the Steamboat Springs Smokehouse

Monday 8 April

Dawn brings the first stumble of the trip. We appear to be at the right place (later we learn we may have been a bit off) but there is no sign of Sharp-tailed Grouse and it only gets on to our lists courtesy of a bird flushed from the roadside but seen by one person only. A freshly dead Dusky Grouse on the road shortly after does not improve the mood. On south, back through Silverthorne, we again try Loveland Pass and this time all is well as a single White-tailed Ptarmigan is found hunkered down in the snow by a typical strand of dwarf willow. He looks mostly like a rotund snowball but careful viewing through the scope reveals his dark beak and eyes as he desultorily preens himself. A great coup and a great relief.

Splendid mountain views around Buena Vista and into the valley of the River Gunnison grace our afternoon. Over Monarch Pass and we reach the comfortable Rodeway Inn in Gunnison by early evening. The weather remains fine but there are ominous stories of snow predicted overnight.

Tuesday 9 April

And several inches of snow duly arrive making our predawn route west over the Cerro Pass a little hair raising. The huge deep canyons of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison River are dramatic in the snow but the rim drives are closed so we are lucky to spot a male Dusky Grouse atop a pine tree and another flying across the road. There are Spotted Towhees and we can also compare the superficially similar Least and Uinta Chipmunks. A late breakfast in Montrose and we are thankfully back in Gunnison safely by midday. The snow seems under temporary thaw and several of the endemic Gunnison Prairie Dog are out and about in the outskirts of town. We drive up to the attractive town of Crested Butte where there are more feeders but no Rosy Finches. Kare'lia of Sisk-a-Dee tours joins us for dinner. She has arranged our Sage Grouse viewing the following morning although more predicted snow is making for a few worries.

Wednesday 10 April

More snow and freezing temperatures again arrive overnight but we make it out to the Waunita trailer by 0530. It is freezing cold but our local guide gets us on to the Gunnison Sage Grouse lek in the dark and we get progressively improving views of 8 male and 9 females as they do their thing in the gathering light. They are spectacular through the scope but a bit distant and by 0730, before the sun hits, they are gone and the show is over. But they fuel our re-ascent of the snow covered Monarch Pass and we are happy to pass into snow free and sunny countryside as we breakfast in Salida.

A birding stop in Canon City is productive with the famed "woodpile" producing, in quick succession, a nice covey of Scaled Quail, a pair of Curve-billed Thrashers and a pair of Canyon Towhees – all southern species these at the end of their range. On east into the "dustbowl" prairies a flock of over 1000 Snow Geese makes a fine sight and we reach our motel in Holly in good time. Dinner at Porkie's Parlor is less than memorable!

Thursday 11 April

Fred of Arena Dust Tours is on hand at 0430 and his trusty school bus takes us south east and right up to a lek of Lesser Prairie Chickens. Again they are visible in the predawn light, the views improve as the sun comes up and the stomping display of this now rare “Dawn Dancer” can be fully appreciated. A quartering female Harrier is a nuisance, several times putting the birds to flight but they still come back. A chuck wagon breakfast at the house of Fred and Norma is much appreciated and then it a long drive via Lamar and Eads to the friendly Doc’s B & B in Wray.

In the early evening we meet with Bob and Becky Bledsoe, the ebullient owners of the huge cattle ranch where we will view the lek of the Greater Prairie Chicken. They are delightful, allow us to find a quartet of Mountain Plover, show us the lek site where several birds are still in attendance and even join us for a memorable steak dinner at Corner 4th and Maine where we are introduced to several other local dignitaries

Friday 12 April

So 0530 finds us off again to enjoy quite extraordinary views of lekking Greater Prairie Chickens before we again strike west, skirt an awesome looking storm and search for Longspurs and others on a rather windy Pawnee National Grasslands. No luck however and neither our hotel or Mexican fast food in Fort Collins are notable

Saturday 13 April

The main tour concludes with a “late” 0600 departure, still in uncertain weather, back to Pawnee and this time the short cactus studded prairie of Murphy’s Pasture. It takes a little time but we eventually find several McCown’s Longspurs, one doing its exuberant fluttering display flight. On towards Denver, St Vrain’s Park in Longmont produces our final water birds of the trip including a somnolent Tundra Swan and an active female Hooded Merganser to end the tour, which finishes at Denver Airport, on the right note. What an adventure and what a country!

Peter and I backtrack in sunshine to Estes Park and this time Scott has a Colorado Chipmunk at his feeders and takes no time at all to call in “his” female Northern Pygmy Owl which hangs around for characteristically close looks. He and his wife Susan join us for dinner at the legendary Stanley Hotel, venue for at least one filming of the classic “The Shining”

Sunday 14 April

But there is snow on the ground again this morning and the roads in the Rocky Mountain National Park are closed. Cameron’s Pass is snowy but open and the sage brush plains around Walden are now covered in snow. So is the road over the Rabbit’s Ear Pass, the environs of Steamboat Springs and on to Hayden and Craig where this time we stay. An evening scout for Grouse in the snowy hills again produces nothing but there are many Sandhill Cranes to be seen

Monday 15 April

With a bit of new information and a chance meeting with Brett Ewald of Lakeshore Nature Tours we finally score at dawn in the snowy hills near Hayden with a single then a group of 4 Sharp-tailed Grouse. They are lethargic however with no sign of display but they are another relief and the high spot of a day which otherwise produces a really trying return, over snowy, icy roads to Denver. The now familiar stretch along I 70 from Silverthorne to Denver is the worst but we make it though (many seem destined not to), return our luo seat and wag bags and are mighty pleased to find a snowy Denver Airport fully functional and our departing flight roughly on time

Systematic Lists

Birds

1. Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*)
One (HB) at Normanton Park 4/4 and one near Montrose 9/4
2. Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*)
Only one, at Saint Vrains, Longmont 13/4
3. American White Pelican (*Pelicanus erythrorhynchos*)
Several near Walden 6 and 7/4, 50+ near Lamar 11/4 and 30+ St Vrains 13/4
4. Double-crested Cormorant
Normanton Park 4/4 (HB) and St Vrains 13/4
5. Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*)
Normanton Park 4/4 (HB), near Lamar 11/4 and St Vrains 13/4
6. Tundra Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*)
One sleepy individual at St Vrains 13/4. This is the black billed relative of the Bewick's Swan of Eurasia, usually considered conspecific
7. Snow Goose (*Chen caerulescens*)
A nice flock of 1000+ near Lamar 11 and 12/4. The presence of hunters with decoys indicated this was a potentially hazardous place to be
8. Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)
Widespread and seen daily. Most would seem to be the large resident form *moffitti* but we several times found smaller forms with white neck rings which we attributed to *parvipes* (Lesser Canada Goose). No true small ones through and still a taxonomic mess
9. Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*)
A single South Platte River 4/4 (HB) and a pair Las Animas 11/4
10. Gadwall (*Anas strepera*)
Widespread and common
11. American Wigeon (*Anas americana*)
Also regularly encountered
12. Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)
Common and seen daily
13. Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*)
6 near Holly 11/4

14. Cinnamon Teal (*Anas cyanoptera*)
Only a single on Walden Reservoir 7/4
15. Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*)
Regularly encountered
16. Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*)
Fairly widespread, 50+ at Saint Vrain 14/4
17. Green-winged Teal (*Anas carolinensis*)
Common. Now a largely accepted split from Eurasian forms
18. Canvasback (*Aythya valisineria*)
A few on Walden Reservoir 7/4 and at Saint Vrain 13/4
19. Redhead (*Aythya americana*)
4 near Holly 11/4 and 30+ at St Vrain 13/4
20. Ring-necked Duck (*Aythya collaris*)
Regularly encountered
21. Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*)
Ditto
22. Bufflehead (*Bucephala albeola*)
Ditto. A most handsome duck
23. Common Goldeneye
One at Normanton Park 4/4 (HB), 2 at Estes Park 6/4 and 2 at St Vrain 13/4
24. Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*)
5 Normanton Park 4/4 (HB), a female at St Vrain 13/4
25. Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*)
Several records
26. Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)
A pair at Normanton Park 4/4 (HB)
27. Scaled Quail (*Callipepla squamata*)
A covey of around 10 birds at Canon City 10/4. The northern form *hargrivi*
28. Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*)
A possible flushed bird at the Bob Bledsoe ranch 11/4 gave poor views to a few
29. Ring-necked Pheasant
Regularly seen in the east
30. Greater Sage Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*)
A single male at the Delaney Butte lek evening of 6/4 and a good close display of 12 males and 8 females at dawn 7/4. This declining and spectacular bird is one of the world's greats, especially in this mood
31. Gunnison Sage Grouse (*Centrocercus minimus*)
Despite the snow some 17 birds were active at the Waunita lek 10/4 and good scope views were obtained pre sunrise. Only recently recognised as a distinct species it is also declining (some 75% since the late nineties) and only an estimated 4000 birds, in 8 isolated populations, now remain
32. White-tailed Ptarmigan (*Lagopus leucurus*)
We dipped at the Loveland Pass 5/4 but returned 8/4 to be rewarded with a single pristine white bird preening on the slope below us . A hugely desired species and by no means guaranteed

33. Dusky Grouse (*Dendragapus obscurus*)
The weather gods seemed against us at the Black Canyon of the Gunnison River but a perched up male gave good views 9/4. Another male flew across the road at the same time. A freshly dead male on the road near Hayden 8/4
34. Sharp-tailed Grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*)
The disappointment of the trip for many. We may have misjudged the site of the lekking ground and there was no sign of any activity near Hayden 8/4. A flushed bird from the vehicle was only seen by MB. HB and PB made the long trek back and were rewarded by 5 birds in the snow 15/4. No lekking though. This form *jamesi* is one of several found in North America
35. Greater Prairie Chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido*)
A superb close display of 14 or so at the Bob Bledsoe Ranch on a sunny dawn 12/4. 10 at the site the previous evening. For many the highlight of the trip. Ssp *pinnatus*
36. Lesser Prairie Chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*)
18 birds put on a fine show for us from our school bus east of Holly 11/4 even if they were a bit flighty from the activities of that wretched Harrier. This wonderful "Dawn Dancer" is again threatened from loss of native prairie land
37. Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*)
A flock of around 30 near Masonville 6/4 and another 15 or so near Lamar 11/4. Ssp *intermedia*
38. Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*)
Common and seen daily
39. American Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus carolinensis*)
Seen occasionally in a number of places. Recent genetic work indicates more than one species if that is what you want
40. Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)
Always a treat and individuals seen around Walden 6 and 7/4, St Vrains 13/4 and Estes Park 14/4
41. Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*)
Perhaps even more of a treat were multiple close views of this majestic beast, especially around Walden
42. Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus hudsonicus*)
Several encounters, especially in the eastern prairies
43. Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*)
A male swept across the road in front of one of the vehicles near Oak Creek 8/4
44. Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*)
Several around the Fort Collins / Greeley area 13/4 but we did not do them justice
45. Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*)
Regularly encountered
46. Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*)
A nice pair nest building near Delaney Butte 6 and 7/4
47. Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*)
Several encounters, especially around Walden
48. American Kestrel (*Falco spaverius*)
Frequently encountered

49. Prairie Falcon (*Falco mexicanus*)
Singles near Walden 7/4 and near Holly 10 and 11/4
50. American Coot (*Fulica americana*)
Regularly encountered
51. Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*)
A few near Hayden 7 and 8/4, near Lamar 10/4 and up to 50 near Hayden 14 and 15/4
52. Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*)
The only regularly encountered shorebird
53. Mountain Plover (*Charadrius montanus*)
We were delighted to find a quartet of this declining prairie speciality at the Bob Bledsoe Ranch near Wray 11/4
54. Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*)
A couple near Lamar 10/4
55. Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*)
A couple near Holly 11/4
56. Baird's Sandpiper (*Calidris bairdii*)
5 near Lamar 11/4
57. Wilson's Snipe (*Gallinago delicata*)
One near Wray 11/4
58. Franklin's Gull (*Larus pipixcan*)
2 at Walden Reservoir 7/4, 40+ near Lamar 11/4 and 2 St Vrain 13/4
59. Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*)
4 at Walden Reservoir 7/4
60. California Gull (*Larus californicus*)
The most frequently encountered Gull
61. American Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*)
A couple near Lamar 11/4 and another couple St Vrain 13/4. An off/off split from Eurasian forms
62. Band-tailed Pigeon (*Columba fasciata*)
A single in flight near Estes Park 14/4 (HB). A wide ranging species possibly destined for a multiple split
63. Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*)
Common in the east
64. Eurasian Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)
Now widespread in North America and many seen in the east
65. Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*)
3 individuals at Estes Park 6/4, a single near Holly 11/4 and a single at Pawnee 12/4. This great bird remains pleasingly common in the USA
66. Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*)
Thanks to Scott, superb views of a persistent and nonchalant daylight calling bird at Estes Park 5/4. A bit of a scramble to get to it but worth it for this notoriously elusive species
67. Northern Pygmy Owl (*Glaucidium californicus*)
No luck for the main group but "Scott's female" performed admirably for HB and PB at Estes Park evening of 13/4. An on/off split from *G. gnoma* I prefer to treat it as a full species which I am sure it will be again someday

68. Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*)
A single bird at the Bledsoe Prairie Chicken lek for one vehicle 13/4. The ssp *hypugaea*, widespread in North America with another 20+ ssp south of the border
69. Belted Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*)
One at Normanton Park 4/4 (HB) and another near Pueblo 10/4
70. Downy Woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*)
Several sightings including direct comparison with 71
71. Hairy Woodpecker (*Picoides villosus*)
Several around Allenspark and Estes Park 5 and 6/4. Ssp *septentrionalis*
72. Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*)
Multiple sightings. All seemed of the western race *cafer* or “Red-shafted” Flicker
73. Say’s Phoebe (*Sayornis saya*)
Amongst an almost total dearth of summer arrivals several of these were notable
74. Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*)
A single near Lamar 11/4 and a couple on the Pawnee Grasslands 12/4
75. Gray Jay (*Perisoreus Canadensis*)
Only one, briefly at Silverthorne 4/4
76. Steller’s Jay (*Cyanocitta stelleri*)
Pleasingly common in suitable habitat
77. Woodhouse’s Western Scrub Jay (*Aphelocoma californica woodhouseii*)
A couple at Canon City 10/4. Pay attention to these, “they” are into them!
78. Clarke’s Nutcracker (*Nucifraga columbiana*)
A single at the Silverthorne feeders 5/4 and one at the Moose Visitor Centre near Walden 6/4
79. Black-billed Magpie (*Pica hudsonicus*)
Common and conspicuous. Now split from Eurasian forms
80. American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)
Common and widespread
81. Chihuahuan Raven (*Corvus cryptoleucus*)
We made a special effort for 6 of these smaller relatives of 82 on the prairies near Eads 11/4
82. Northern Raven (*Corvus corax*)
Frequently encountered. The ssp *sinuatus* which is a potential split from both Eurasian and west coast USA forms
83. Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*)
Several around Wray and numerous in the eastern prairies, ssp *enthymia*
84. Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*)
A surprise threesome at Estes Park 6/4 would not have enjoyed the weather to follow
85. Cliff Swallow (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*)
Several over flooded pasture near Lamar 11/4
86. Black-capped Chickadee (*Poecile atricapilla*)
Several around Denver, Silverthorne and Estes Park 4 and 5/4. The Rocky Mountain ssp *garrina*
87. Mountain Chickadee (*Poecile gambelli*)
Largely replacing 86 at higher altitudes and several sightings. Nominate ssp

88. American Bushtit (*Psaltriparus ridgwayi*)
A couple at Normanton Park 4/4 (HB). Ssp *plumbeus*
89. White-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*)
A single vocal bird at the edge of the Rocky Mountain NP near Estes Park 6/4.
The mountain ssp *nelsoni*
90. Pygmy Nuthatch (*Sitta pygmaea*)
Refreshingly common around Allenspark and Estes Park with up to 20 on 6/4.
Ssp *melanoti*
91. Brown Creeper (*Certhia americana*)
One at Normanton Park 4/4 (HB). Now split from Northern Treecreeper in Eurasia
92. American Dipper (*Cinclus mexicanus*)
One at Estes Park 6/4 and one near Montrose 9/4. Ssp *unicolor*
93. Western Bluebird (*Sialia mexicana*)
One at Estes Park 6/4 and up to 6 at Canon City 10/4. Nominate ssp
94. Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*)
This lovely bird was pleasingly common throughout
95. Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendii*)
Only a pair in flight at the edge of the Rocky Mountain NP near Estes Park 6/4.
Nominate ssp
96. American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*)
Abundant – the latin name says it all
97. Curve-billed Thrasher (*Toxostoma curvirostre*)
A fine responsive pair at the “wood pile” Canon City 10/4. Ssp *celsum*
98. European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)
Sadly still abundant
99. Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*)
One of the “Myrtle” form at Normanton Park 4/4 (HB). It turned out to be the only Warbler of the trip
100. Spotted Towhee (*Pipilo maculatus*)
Two were conspicuous in the snow at the Black Canyon 9/4. Ssp *articus* which seemed appropriate!
101. Canyon Towhee (*Pipilo fuscus*)
Another coup at the “woodpile” in Canon City with a responsive pair of the ssp *mesatus*
102. Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerine*)
A single near Montrose 9/4, a couple at the Bledsoe Ranch 11/4, a dozen or so there 12/4
103. Sagebrush Sparrow (*Amphispiza nevadensis*)
A small flock for HB / PB on the snowy road near Walden 14/4. Newly split from nominate Sage (*A. belli*) and confined to the Great Basin of USA
104. Vesper Sparrow (*Pooecetes gramineus*)
Only a single, at the Bledsoe Ranch 12/4. Ssp *confines*
105. White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*)
Frequent in the east especially at the Bledsoe Ranch. Ssp *gambelli*
106. Slate-colored Junco (*Junco (hyemalis) hyemalis*)
A few of this winter visitor at Silverthorne 5/4 and Wray 12/4
107. Oregon Junco (*Junco (hyemalis) oregonos*)
A couple at Silverthorne 5/4 and one at Buena Vista 8/4. Another winter visitor

108. Pink-sided Junco (*Junco (hyemalis) mearnsi*)
Frequently encountered. Also a winter visitor
109. Gray-headed Junco (*Junco (hyemalis) caniceps*)
Common. This is the breeding form in Colorado. Keep a note of these Juncos, multiple splits are possible
110. McCown's Longspur (*Calcarius macconnii*)
After drawing a blank in the wind on 12/4 we scored in the morning on Murphy's Pasture on the Pawnee Grasslands 13/4. Around 8 birds including an exuberant bird in its fluttering display flight. Although it winters further south it is an endemic central USA breeder
111. Snow Bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*)
A small flock from one vehicle near Walden 7/4. An irregular winter visitor doubtless right at home in these surroundings
112. Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)
Abundant, often in huge flocks. Ssp *fortis*
113. Western Meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*)
Abundant. Ssp *neglecta*
114. Yellow-headed Blackbird (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*)
Only a couple, near Gunnison 10/4
115. Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)
A flock of around 30 at Holly 11/4 and a single at Pawnee 13/4
116. Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*)
Common around Day's Inn, Denver, Holly and Wray. Ssp *versicolor*
117. Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch (*Leucosticte tephrocotis*)
Rosy Finches were a key target of this trip and can be horribly elusive. We were therefore more than delighted to find large numbers mixed together at feeders in Silverthorne 5/4. There were at least 100 of this species including several of the northwest coastal form "Hepburns"
118. Brown-capped Rosy-Finch (*Leucosticte australis*)
What a strange latin name! Again at least 100 of these at Silverthorne 5/4, this is almost a Colorado breeding endemic
119. Black Rosy-Finch (*Leucosticte australis*)
This is notorious as the one people miss so we were even more delighted to identify 3 amongst the throng, two of them full adults. Breeding in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming it wanders widely in winter
It may be significant that, despite plenty of snow, we saw no more Rosy Finches for the rest of our trip!
120. Pine Grosbeak (*Pinicola enucleator*)
A fine pair also at the Silverthorne feeders 5/4. This grey bellied form *montanus* is endemic to USA and Canada and is possibly distinct from Eurasian forms
121. Cassin's Finch (*Carpodacus cassinii*)
1 at Estes Park 6/4, several at Black Canyon and Crested Butte 9/4, at Canon City 10/4 and at Wray 13/4
122. House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*)
A few here and there but several around Wray 13/4. Ssp *frontalis*, one of a dozen or so of this species

122. Common Redpoll (*Carduelis flammea*)
It had been a very good year for this species in Colorado and there were around 50 at the Silverthorne feeders 5/4. Now split from the Eurasian Lesser Redpoll
123. House Sparrow (*Passer domestica*)
Do I have to mention them?

Mammals

1. Desert Cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*)
One at Canon City 10/4 (GS)
2. Eastern Cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*)
One Bledsoe Ranch 12/4
3. Black-tailed Jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*)
2 at the LPC lek near Holly were called by Fred as this species but could have been White-tailed
4. Eastern Fox Squirrel (*Sciurus niger*)
3 in Denver 4/4 (HB) and one at Pawnee 13/4
5. American Red Squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)
A couple at Silverthorne 5/4 and 3 at Estes Park 6/4. Almost black coated
6. Least Chipmunk (*Tamias minimus*)
One at Silverthorne 5/4 and one at Black Canyon 9/4
7. Uinta Chipmunk (*Tamias quadrivittatus*)
3 at Black Canyon 9/4. Superficially very similar to 6 they are more arboreal and run with the tail held horizontally (vertical in 6), both features we noted
8. Colorado Chipmunk (*Tamias quadrivittatus*)
One at Scott's feeders Estes Park 13/4 (HB/PB)
9. Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel (*Spermophilus lateralis*)
Only a single at Silverthorne 5/4
10. Variegated Ground Squirrel (*Spermophilus variegatus*)
One at Canon City 10/4
11. Wyoming Ground Squirrel (*Spermophilus elegans*)
Common around Estes Park and Walden
12. Black-tailed Prairie Dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*)
Literally hundreds around Denver airport 4/4 and also several seen in the eastern prairies
13. White-tailed Prairie Dog (*Cynomys leucurus*)
The higher altitude replacement of 12. A nice colony of 20 or so animals near Walden 6/4, less active in the snow 7/4
14. Gunnison Prairie Dog (*Cynomys gunnisoni*)
Several of this range restricted and 40 chromosome (the other have 50) endemic were active in the snow on the outskirts of Gunnison 9/4
15. Northern Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)
Only DOR
16. American Beaver (*Castor canadensis*)
Plenty of gnawings and dams but no cigar
17. Bobcat (*Lynx rufus*)
One by the roadside near Allenspark 5/4 (GS only) was an envied sighting

18. White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)
Relatively common on the eastern prairies
19. Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*)
Many sightings even in downtown Estes Park
20. Elk (*Cervus canadensis*)
Especially common and a traffic hazard in Estes Park. Some lump them with *C. elaphus* or Red Deer but they seem much more massive
21. Pronghorn (*Antilocarpa americana*)
Several much appreciated sightings in the high and low prairies
22. Bighorn Sheep (*Ovis canadensis*)
2 near Georgetown 5/4 by one vehicle nearly caused a traffic accident.
Happily all caught up with a magnificent ram by the roadside and three others up the hill near Estes Park 6/4

Hugh Buck

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