

## **ALBERTA - CANADA. 2010.**

June 10<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup>.

This short trip was designed by our good birding friends Brian Elder and Phil Cram as a chance to explore their home state, and aim to clean up on some of our outstanding bird and mammal targets. The timing was partly dictated by the re-opening of the Highwood Pass, in the hope of some good mammal sightings after the road being closed to traffic for 6 months !

### **Flights:**

We flew from London direct to Calgary using Canadian Affair ( a Thomas Cook subsidiary ). They offer flights to all parts of Canada, and very attractive prices, especially if booked well in advance, but beware that the legroom provision in economy is only suitable for those with short legs, or people with a high pain threshold ! If travelling with them again, I would pay the extra to travel in Economy Plus ( or whatever they call it ), as it really is essential on a 9 hour flight....

### **Weather:**

The first part of the week produced clear, sunny and surprisingly warm conditions, but as we left the Rockies and headed into the prairies, we encountered increasingly heavy rain ( up to 6 inches in two days ) which flooded certain areas, and turned many of the unmade roads into impassable swamps – even for 4-wheel drives !

### **Guides:**

Brian & Phil accompanied us and showed us around the areas that they thought would produce the species that we were after. Their local knowledge, and range of contacts were invaluable in finding as much as we did...

### **Itinerary:**

- 10<sup>th</sup>: Arrived in Calgary at about 1pm local time. Visited the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary to allow a much needed leg stretch ! Late evening at the Weaselhead area near Calgary.
- 11<sup>th</sup>: Morning around the Water Valley area, NW of Calgary. After lunch drive the scenic 350 mile road to Jasper National Park.

- 12<sup>th</sup>: Early morning at the Jasper Tramway. We took the first gondola up in the hope of finding the wildlife before there was too much disturbance. In the afternoon drove the Yellowhead Highway to the East of Jasper. Evening on the Maligne Parkway / Maligne Canyon area.
- 13<sup>th</sup>: Early morning at the Miette Valley before heading South on the Icefields Parkway making stops at various scenic spots inc. Peyto Lake & Lake Louise. Truly World class scenery in marvellous weather. Checked into Banff for two nights.
- 14<sup>th</sup>: Early morning on the old highway ( 1A ) in worsening weather... Then headed towards Exshaw and the Bow Valley Provincial Park hoping to avoid the rain.
- 15<sup>th</sup>: Very early start, drove along the Spray Lakes Road and then onto the Highwood Pass ( which had only re-opened to traffic at midnight ). Arrived in Waterton area after lunch. Late afternoon and evening at the Waterton Lakes N.P. and Cameron Lake.
- 16<sup>th</sup>: Explored the Waterton area in heavy rain. Walked the Cameron Lake trail despite the weather for Red-tailed Chipmunk – eventually successfully.
- 17<sup>th</sup>: Change of plans due to the heavy rain. Our plan to head to the prairies changed, and we to Calgary and overnighted there.
- 18<sup>th</sup>: Drive straight to Medicine Hat, and then explore prairie areas as local conditions allowed.
- 19<sup>th</sup>: Visit to Police Point Park in Medicine Hat for our last wildlife watching, before driving back to Calgary for our late afternoon flight back to London. Distance driven was nearly 3000 miles !

### **Birds:**

Whilst not an exercise in getting the maximum number of species, we recorded 178 species during our trip including nearly all of the major targets. Highlights included Varied Thrush, White-tailed Ptarmigan, Ruffed, Sharp-tailed & Dusky Grouse, Harlequin, Barrow's Goldeneye, Upland Sandpiper, Great Grey Owl, Sprague's Pipit, Townsend's, Connecticut & MacGillivray's Warblers & Chestnut-collared Longspur.

### **Mammals:**

We found a total of 27 species during the trip, including superb views of most of the main targets.

The heavy rain unfortunately put paid to our chances of searching for some of the prairie targets, such

as American Badger, Ord's Kangaroo Rat etc.



Hoary Marmot.

American Beaver - *Castor canadensis* - 3 individuals found. 1 at the Weaselhead in Calgary, and  
2 in Jasper N.P inc. 1 chasing a Great Northern Diver !

Muskrat - *Ondatra zibethicus* - 14 sightings in widely scattered localities.

Hoary Marmot - *Marmota caligata* - 3 seen and photographed on Whistlers Mountain, Jasper  
N.P.

Eastern Grey Squirrel: - *Sciurus carolinensis* - Surprisingly only 1 seen; an almost black animal.

Apparently introduced here.

Columbian Ground Squirrel - *Urocitellus columbianus* - A total of 51 were noted; there was a  
large colony near Lake Louise. Seen on 7 days.

Richardson's Ground Squirrel - *Urocitellus richardsonii* - Seen on 4 days, and especially common in  
the prairies. 85 in total.

Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel - *Callospermophilus lateralis* - 16 were seen on 3 days in the  
mountain parks.

Northern Flying Squirrel - *Glaucomys sabrinus* - Probably the biggest surprise was great views of

one that glided over our heads and fed in front of us at the Weaselhead on the first evening at 10.15.

Least Chipmunk - *Tamias minimus* - Just one seen at Peyto Lake, coming to look for scraps around the platform overlooking the lake.

Red-tailed Chipmunk - *Tamias ruficaudus* - One very confident individual eventually found on the lakeside trail alongside Cameron Lake.

American Red Squirrel - *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus* - 8 seen on 4 days at widely scattered localities.

Snowshoe Hare - *Lepus americanus* - A total of 12 were seen in the mountain parks. Encountered on 6 days.

White-tailed Jackrabbit - *Lepus townsendii* - 3 were seen near Calgary on the 10<sup>th</sup>, and 1 further on the 17<sup>th</sup>, also near Calgary.

Mountain Cottontail - *Sylvilagus nuttallii* - 4 were seen - 1 in Lethbridge and 3 in Medicine Hat.

American Pika - *Ochotona princeps* - 2 were seen in cool and overcast conditions on a rocky slope north of Highwood Pass on Highway 40.

Coyote - *Canis latrans* - A total of 15 seen in scattered localities. Seen on 6 days.

Gray Wolf - *Canis lupus* - The other surprise was finding a female close to the road shortly after dawn on the 14<sup>th</sup>, on Highway 1A in Banff N.P.

Red Fox - *Vulpes vulpes* - One youngster playing with a piece of bone on a hillside near Waterton was our sole sighting.

American Black Bear - *Ursus americanus* - A total of 8 were seen, mostly in the mountains except for one in the foothills near Longview. Most were black, but a couple were brown and one showed a white throat patch.

Brown ( Grizzly ) Bear - *Ursus arctos* - 7 were seen ( some very close ! ) in scattered mountain localities, and included a mother with two cubs.

Pronghorn - *Antilocapra americana* - Poor weather didn't help our total, but we still found 12 including a female with two young, all in the prairies.

Mountain Goat - *Oreamnos americanus* - Surprisingly we only encountered 1 individual, showing very well on the Icefields Parkway on the 11<sup>th</sup>.

Bighorn Sheep - *Ovis canadensis* - A total of about 55 were seen, including a group of 30+ with many youngsters on the Yellowhead Highway in Jasper N.P.

Moose - *Alces americanus* - 4 were seen in total; 1 in Jasper and 3 along the Spray Lakes Road south-east of Banff, shortly after dawn on the 15<sup>th</sup>.

Elk - *Cervus elaphus* - Over 160 were recorded, mainly in small numbers, but a large group of about 100 were seen along the Sheep River west of Turner Valley.

Mule Deer - *Odocoileus hemionus* - 54 were logged throughout the region.

White-tailed Deer - *Odocoileus virginianus* - 90+ were noted, again throughout the region.



Gray Wolf.

Steve Davis & Karen Baker - 2010.