

Colorado 2024. 5 ½ days, 22 species

This is my first trip report, although I have been following the website for a few years. Even though I have been to several mammal watching hotspots throughout the world, I have not posted a trip report until now because my species counts always seem to be lower than everyone else's. This may be because I tend to travel on a budget, so I don't employ guides enough. I am also generally not very good at keeping mammal lists from trips and tend to retire for a beer come nightfall.

I went to a conference in Colorado last week (Annual Meeting of the American Society of Mammalogists, at UC Boulder), so I thought it would be a good opportunity to relieve my non-reporting guilt by making my first trip report! Although I did not see anything groundbreaking, perhaps this report can be useful for anyone planning a short trip to that state. Each day of the conference, just before sunrise, I would drive to mammal watching sites for a few hours and then, by late morning, I returned to the conference for the rest of the day. This made for a rather hectic schedule.

6/6: Flew into Denver and drove to the Betasso Preserve just outside of Boulder for a short evening hike. When driving into the preserve I saw a rabbit (not sure what species), and a couple of **mule deer**. There was also a **red fox** hanging around the parking lot, and a **golden-mantled ground squirrel** near the top of the short Bummer's rock trail.



6/7: The next day I drove to Rocky Mountain NP. I saw a Pair of **Wapiti (elk)** by the road on the way in (near Pinewood Springs). In the park I saw two mule deer, **three American pika** at Rainbow Curve Overlook, Forest Canyon Overlook and near the Tundra Communities trailhead, and a few **Yellow-bellied marmots** at the Forest Canyon Overlook. On the Tundra Communities trail I saw what looked like fresh Mountain lion scat. I also saw an **elk** near sheep lakes and a bull **Moose** bathing in the lake. At the sheep lakes parking lot there is still an active **Wyoming ground squirrel** colony (a new species for me, thanks to the location tip from previous trip reports).



6/8: I drove to the Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge via the very scenic Route 14. On the way I stopped at the Moose Visitor Center near Gould. A lot of **least chipmunks** live around the bird feeders behind the visitor center, and at least one **red squirrel**. Just before arriving at the Arapaho Refuge auto route, I saw a couple of **pronghorns**, and in the auto route there were lots of **white-tailed prairie dogs** and Wyoming ground squirrels, as well as a **white-tailed jackrabbit** and, near the end of the auto route, a **long-tailed weasel** that had just caught its lunch.



A long-tailed weasel running away with its prey (out-of-focus and photographed through a dirty windshield).

6/9: Paint Mines Interpretive Park. I **did not** see thirteen-lined ground squirrels there. I looked in the places where a previous trip report (from June 2021) had described seeing them and I found their burrows, but no ground squirrels appeared to be home. I did see an

Eastern cottontail and, on the way out, a mule deer and **black-tailed prairie dogs**. On the way back to Boulder I stopped at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal NP for more mule deer and prairie dogs, and a herd of **Bison** as well. The recently re-introduced Bison seem to be restricted to a limited part of the wildlife drive road, so seeing them did not feel like a natural wild animal experience.

6/10: On the way to Mount Blue Sky Recreation Area I saw a Golden-mantled ground squirrel. In the park there were a couple of pikas at the summit, several **mountain goats** and a couple of **bighorn sheep** at or near the summit, and yellow-bellied marmots everywhere. Later I saw a **mountain cottontail** in Boulder.



6/11: On the way to the airport, I stopped at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge again, where I saw lots of Black-tailed prairie dogs, several mountain cottontails, a bison, one **white-tailed deer** and a distant **Coyote** mother with three pups.



Distant coyote with three pups



Having a stretch

Species seen:

- 1) mule deer
- 2) red fox
- 3) golden-mantled ground squirrel
- 4) wapati
- 5) American pika
- 6) yellow-bellied marmots
- 7) moose
- 8) Wyoming ground squirrel
- 9) least chipmunk
- 10) red squirrel
- 11) pronghorn
- 12) white-tailed prairie dog
- 13) white-tailed jackrabbit
- 14) long-tailed weasel
- 15) eastern cottontail
- 16) black-tailed prairie dog
- 17) bison
- 18) mountain goat
- 19) bighorn sheep
- 20) mountain cottontail
- 21) white-tailed deer
- 22) coyote