

Yellowstone & Tetons

17 – 30 June 2006

Trip Report

Leader:

Peg Abbott

Diary

Saturday, 17 June Arrival in Billings

The long flight from England, with stopover in Minneapolis came to an end as we greeted our guide, Peg Abbott, in Billings, MT. Peg offered snacks and the promise of a not too early morning to follow, and all had a good night's rest. As it was a late arrival we went straight to bed!

Sunday, 18 June Montana Prairie

Today was a beautiful day in all regards. Blue sky, sunshine, almost no wind and about 75 degrees – just right. We picked up our local guide, Helen Carlson and found our first birds right in her yard – **Yellow Warbler, American Robin, House Wren, House Finch** and a much larger species – **Wild Turkey**. Her residential area has large trees, and the turkeys breed here, safe from major predators. We then drove along the beautiful sandstone bluffs that frame the city of Billings, and on out into the prairie that stretches for miles. At a friend of Helen's home, we checked the feeders and were delighted to find **Pinyon Jays**, not a common bird in the area. From here we drove to Broadview, where one of our first sightings was a group of **Pronghorn** in a farm field. Throughout the day we saw many, even a few with small fawns.

After fortifying ourselves with an espresso coffee at the local mercantile in this tiny farm town, we got to our birding in earnest. In an unplowed field, we searched diligently, and were rewarded with sightings of **McCown's Longspur**, a bird much sought after by U.S. birders. It's snappy in its black and white breeding plumage, and as the grass was tall, we had to catch them while they flew up to perform flight song, much like a lark. We also had great looks at a pair of **Ferruginous Hawk**, and a quicker look at **Northern Harrier**. At a nearby windbreak (trees planted by homesteaders to protect them from fierce prairie winds) we found **Eastern and Western Kingbirds**, and a **Western Wood Pewee**. A **Bullock's Oriole** brought several ooh's and aah's with its bright plumage.

This year, Hailstone National Wildlife Refuge ponds had water in them, so we headed for this prairie pothole lake, arriving at the small check dam just in time to see two **Golden Eagles**. We had a grand time studying a full adult, and a likely three-year old plumage in the two birds, and they cooperated fully, banking in the light. Even closer to us were dozens of **American Avocet** and hundreds of **Wilson's Phalarope**. We found a few **Willet**, and as we watched we were serenaded continuously by **Horned Lark** and **Western Meadowlark**.

Our last major stop for the day was a farm road that we walked, in search of **Chestnut-collared Longspur**. There is a grand sense of space out here in 'Big Sky Country' and our attention was brought back quickly as Peg yelled 'owl'! A **Short-eared Owl** had flushed and flew quite a ways to land on a fence, long enough to put our scopes on it, wow! Then Helen took us over to a potential **Burrowing Owl** location amidst a huge **Black-tailed Prairie Dog** community and we found five or six individuals of this smaller species. Over a dozen **Long-**

billed Curlew, and a **White-tailed Jackrabbit** shared the same area. What a day! We celebrated with dinner in the hotel restaurant.

Monday, 19 June Two Moon Park, Billings / Over the Beartooth to Cooke City

We began the morning in lush cottonwood riparian forest at a city park that Helen Carlson, our local guide helped established and continues to safeguard from development. Together we found **Yellow-breasted Chat**, which were uncharacteristically bold – singing from exposed perches. **White Pelican**, **Spotted Sandpiper** and **Great Blue Heron** were found along the Yellowstone River, which ran full and muddy due to still melting snows in its mountain source. We hoped to see several species more common to the Eastern U.S. here, and with luck we had good looks at **American Redstart**, **Brown Thrasher** and **Red-eyed Vireo**. We even went sleuthing to find an **Ovenbird**, which gave us only fleeting glimpses as it sang with gusto. We spotted a **White-tailed Deer**, and a **Common Yellowthroat** in the willows, and **Bank Swallow (Sand Martin)** in an eroded bank of the river. All agreed it was a splendid and productive morning!

After packing up our things, we started out late morning to arrive at Red Lodge in time for a picnic lunch – with **American Dipper**, which nest under the city park bridge. En route Jill spotted a pair of **Sandhill Crane** with a very young chick, and we had great looks at a **Wilson's Snipe** perched up on a fence post. Clouds were developing in earnest over the high Beartooth Plateau, and we watched them with some trepidation.

But the weather gods were smiling on us, and we threaded our way up and over the mountain through spectacular shafts of light as the clouds played around us. While it was blustery, it did not affect our wildlife viewing. At a vista point that shows off the classic glacial U-shaped valley of Rock Creek, we spotted **Yellow-bellied Marmot** and **Pika** in a rockslide. We found our first **Mountain Chickadee**, and had glimpses of **Clark's Nutcracker**, which so far this year had proved to be elusive. Going over the wide expanse of tundra, we took several stops to check out all the ground hugging alpine flowers – **Forget-Me-Not**, a small **Potentilla**, **Marsh Marigold**, **Sky Pilot** and more.... We had great looks at **American Pipit**, and the **Black Rosy Finch** as well. Crossing over the 10,000 ft. elevation mark was a first for several, and we admired the ancient basement rock so boldly sculptured here by glaciers. Julian spotted a **Mountain Goat** billy crossing a precipitous cliff and snowfield, and then we found several other groups of females, some lounging as if at the beach.

We enjoyed tea and coffee at Beartooth Lake, though the antics of a **Common Raven** stealing chicks from an American Robin's nest was a bit of drama. Views of the Absarokas were spectacular as we descended the pass, and by dinner we had settled into lodgings and enjoyed feasting at the Beartooth Café.

Tuesday, 20 June Lamar Valley / Slough Creek

We got a leisurely start to the morning and enjoyed a cooked breakfast; pancakes with maple syrup being a big hit at the Grizzly Pad. On to Yellowstone National Park, where John spotted a **Mule Deer** with twin fawns just inside the Entrance Gate. What a delight – still spotted and frisky, they ran circles around their mother. Once into Lamar Valley we found **Pronghorn** and **American Bison** also with frisky young. We stopped at many of the scenic vistas and a number of good birding spots, sleuthing out **Brewer's Sparrow** and some of the smaller songbirds. Near the picnic area at Soda Butte, where we'd pulled out to scan for possible **Harlequin Duck** our attention was drawn to a car stopped in the road just beyond us. It had stopped for a **Black Bear**! We were able to walk out to the site, where we had splendid views of this bear ripping apart a log, feeding on grass and flowers, and scratching itself well on a small tree that was leaning over and perfect for the job.

It was a bright sunny day, with high clouds, good for viewing raptors. At lunch Julian called out '**Prairie Falcon**' just as the bird went about 30 feet above our picnic table flying quickly

– wow! It pulled up into a dead tree so we all got fine looks. We enjoyed lunch right on the stream edge, the myriad butterflies out on the wet sands collecting minerals, and an **Osprey**, which flew above and on up Slough Creek. The flowers on a walk after lunch were lovely – **Mule's Ears, Wild Onion, Lupine, Yellow Lousewort** and more. As clouds rolled in, however, the mosquitoes did as well, and we made a retreat – after getting some fine views of **Williamson's Sapsucker** and **Hairy Woodpecker**.

After a break back at the hotel, we went out with a friend to check on the progress of a **Great Gray Owl**, which had two chicks out of the nest and were waiting on the third. With great anticipation we climbed a fairly steep hill, but were richly rewarded by views of the Absaroka Mountains and by seeing the nest of a **Red-naped Sapsucker** en route. We crossed several meadows, and then heard the chattering of squirrels, often a sign that the owls were around. What a thrill to find the female, relaxed on her perch in an old growth spruce, surrounded by lichen and moss covered branches, preening herself and looking out on her realm of ancient trees. We checked the nest and found the last little one lying prostrate over the top. For a moment we worried some mishap had taken place, when a noise from the mother alerted it and up came its head – all was well. With a bit of searching we found another of the large fuzzy chicks, and from a safe distance we watched it. The mother came and went – it was a magical evening!

Wednesday, 21 June

Lamar Valley

Happy Solstice! We honored the longest day of the year by being out for sunrise and for sunset, with a good break in-between but a day packed with remarkable scenery and wildlife sightings. Peg provided some early coffee and we traveled down to the Lamar Valley, following Warm Springs and then Soda Butte Creeks through lovely forested glades. We passed **American Elk, Mule Deer, Pronghorn** and **American Bison** en route, and spotted a **Canada Goose** with six goslings swimming the fast current of the Lamar. Peg monitored the activity of wolf watchers on her radio, and as little was yet happening we watched sunrise break over the meeting of Soda Butte Creek and the Lamar River at Confluence. A large herd of **American Bison** were coming our way, and we had a magical time listening to their grunts, and watching the antics of the young bulls sparring. While the rut is still a month off they obviously plan to be ready and our cameras were clicking as they pushed and shoved and faced off to prove their strength and to find their position in the hierarchy. The still red-colored calves found this amusing as well, occasionally jumping and running as well. Several of the larger bulls made an impressive crossing of the stream, while the mothers with young made a wise decision and turned back to wander off across the sage covered bench. Peg and David kept looking over to a small hill on the far tree line as their eye caught movement of a shiny black animal, but it never emerged to show a full body form. Assuming it was a Black Bear, perhaps with an elk calf; we moved on but glassed the area from another angle. Bingo – a black **Gray Wolf!** A few other researchers spotted it at the same time and the radio was crackling. For the next half hour or so we had fantastic views of this wolf as it howled, traveled through the sagebrush, and sniffed former tracks of other wolves in the valley. Several of our group had really hoped to hear howling, and that we did – long eerie tones in the early morning air. Peg broke out the picnic breakfast as the wolf went into the trees.

Fortified by our tailgate picnic, we continued on to the Tower Falls Area. At a bridge over the Yellowstone River, we had superb looks at a female **Harlequin Duck**. Our walk to the view of Tower Falls was a nice stretch, and produced **Violet-green Swallow**, and two more **Harlequin Ducks**, basking on the sandy river shore. We got good looks at **Western Warbling Vireo**, but the real thrill was seeing a herd of **Bighorn Sheep** navigate a very steep cliff to reach a favored resting spot. Several of the group just had to try some delicious ice-cream while others shopped for a few goodies to take home. We then repositioned to see the **Bighorn Sheep** from another angle – one that let us also watch **White-collared Swifts** on a spectacular volcanic cliff, and an **Osprey** on a nest directly below. We also stopped to see a nearby **Peregrine Falcon** nest, where four small downy chicks lay prostrate on the nest scrape.

On then, to Mammoth Hot Springs, and a first glimpse at several of the geologic wonders of the park. We took some time to see the Visitor's Center, and then headed back for an afternoon break at the hotel.

Dinner was at the delightful Log Cabin restaurant in Silver Gate, but as we pulled in Cindy Hartman excitedly found us and said 'the marten is there...' So we quick stalled on our seating time, and ran over to the Hartman's gallery to see a small female **American Pine Marten** hop from branch to branch, and stare at us full on from its perch. Wonderful!! We enjoyed fresh trout and steaks, and then went back into Lamar Valley. While it was a quiet evening on the wildlife front, we had good camaraderie with other wolf watchers and a rainbow over the valley. We stood quite awhile at Pelican Creek, where a visitor had seen two of the Druid Wolf Pack emerge with three pups, but alas, they slipped on through to forest cover and we had to be content to end the night with sightings of a grazing Black Bear.

Thursday, 22 June Lamar Valley / Dunraven Pass / Yellowstone Falls / Hayden Valley / Lake

After an early run down Lamar Valley, we returned to pack up our things, pick up some deli sandwiches from Buns and Beds and then continue our journey up and over Dunraven Pass. A walk around Calcite Springs, with its excellent geology displays, was beautiful and afforded a great view of an **Osprey** nest, with three tiny chicks – perhaps just a day old. The male delicately fed these little ones strips of a large trout; the female shaded them with her wings. Such care – it was a joy to observe. Further down the road, we perched on a rock wall to watch for the adult Peregrines to come in to feed their four fuzzy chicks. We had heard one scream from the boardwalk at Calcite Springs, but after an hour and half of watching, we had to be content to observe just the young. We did find **Red-breasted Nuthatch, Mountain Bluebird, Cordilleran Flycatcher** and **Williamson's Sapsucker** in the waiting, and had a grand time watching the **Osprey** from another angle.

Dunraven Pass still had snow in the upper reaches, and at a Vista point we were able to get excellent looks at **Clark's Nutcracker** and a **Prairie Falcon**. Further down the road, at a picnic area, we found a lovely clump of late-blooming **Glacier Lilies**, and a **Hairy Woodpecker** that fed quite low on a downed log.

Much of the afternoon we spent gazing at the beauty of the Upper and Lower Falls of the Yellowstone, and the myriad colors of the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, from several vantage points. A National Park Ranger presented the geology of the area in a talk at Artist's Point. We found **Cassin's Finch** and some lovely **Violet-green Swallows**, as well as another **Osprey** nest with just hatched young. Continuing through Hayden Valley, we marveled at the number of **American Bison** with young. At Trout Creek we watched **Rough-winged Swallow** in a nesting colony on a cut bank of the creek. We settled into our cabins at Lake at day's end, and enjoyed our delicious dinner, with views of the Lake from our table.

Friday, 23 June Hayden Valley / Lake / Steamboat Point / Lake Butte

We ventured out into beautiful, expansive Hayden Valley at dawn, hoping to find bears and wolves. The air was crisp as we found a vantage point, where with luck; the alpha female of the **Hayden Wolf Pack** was bedded in a small clearing, taking a break from her pups. She was a long way off, but with her white face visible in the scope. She seemed restless and got up and down, walked in and out of the trees. John spotted another **Gray Wolf** coming in from the left – we had some magical moments watching the two of them make eye contact. The male splashed across a small bend of the river, while she took off like a jet, running after a **Mule Deer** that had wandered in too close. Her hunt was unsuccessful, but we appreciated the moment!

Heading on to Canyon for a good hot breakfast, we saw **American Wigeon, White Pelican** and a variety of Ducks. Blue skies graced our views of the Upper and Lower Falls, and we enjoyed a wander along the rushing Yellowstone River in search of **American Dipper**,

nesting under the bridge. There were huge herds of **American Bison** with calves, and here as well as in Lamar, the males showed a restlessness, often butting heads and playing at the hierarchical fighting that would come into its own just a few weeks from now as bison enter the rut. Three males put on a good show for us dust bathing along the river.

We ventured out along the northern shore of the Lake, to see some thermal features at Steamboat Point, and to search for ducks and waders. A **Great Blue Heron** posed nicely, but the main duck pond was swarming with mosquitoes and we retreated to the van content with fine views of **Bufflehead**. A **Bald Eagle** soaring above the hills and the beach was fine. From here, we drove up to the scenic vista at Lake Butte, and enjoyed a host of wildflowers and several butterflies including **Western Tiger Swallowtail**, **Red Admiral** and a fritillary we did not identify to species. We walked down through the recent burn, listening for woodpeckers, but found instead **Morning Dove** and **Western Wood Pewee**. John called out 'I have chicks!' While watching a lovely **Mountain Bluebird**, he'd found a **Red-tailed Hawk** nest with three downy young on top of a broken off snag. The parent bird made several passes overhead, emitting a loud scream, but did not come in for a landing. Brave chicks out there in the hot sun and driving rain, nature hones them young!

We took an afternoon rest, and after an early delicious dinner at the hotel, we returned to Hayden Valley, wanting some more time with wolves. We stopped at Le Hardy Rapids for one more look at **Harlequin Ducks**, this time finding 5 males and a female adorning the same picturesque rocks. A bonus bird here was **American Dipper**, dipping along in search of aquatic insects close to shore, out of the main rugged current. A **White Pelican** rode the whitewater with ease. At Mud Volcano, without the crowds, we wandered a boardwalk trail that revealed sulphur fumes and bubbling mud, and enjoyed the antics of a very tame **Common Raven**. On to Hayden, where twilight was casting lovely long shadows, highlighting the fur of a HUGE male **Grizzly Bear** across the river. This was our fourth Grizzly of the trip, and our best viewing. In this fine light, we could see facial expressions and all the detail of a silvertip ruff with caramel on the face - wow! We shared our scopes with several amazed visitors, and finally moved on to our viewing spot this morning for wolves. While there was no activity here tonight, we enjoyed the sunset light, and a fly by of both **Swainson's Hawk** (over our heads) and along the river, a **Bald Eagle**. Our final sighting was a very young (likely 2 day old) **American Bison** calf and its mother, crossing the road, then a small river to join the herd. We passed through a group of over 500 bison, with **American Elk** mingled in on the way home. David commented that it was like seeing the great herds of past – thank heavens for the foresight of early explorers who worked for the protection of Yellowstone.

Saturday, 24 June Lake / Old Faithful / Snake River / Grand Teton National Park

We left Lake just after breakfast to cross the Continental Divide over Craig Pass and descend into the Upper Geyser Basin, where 25% of the world's geysers would await our gazing. We found **Greater Scaup** in a small embayment of Lake Yellowstone, and watched with delight as a **Belted Kingfisher** dove and caught a fish, then thrashed it on a branch. For many of the group, our several hours of meandering about the boardwalk trails near Old Faithful were a highlight of the trip – such a surreal world of color and texture, sounds and light. We were fortunate to see Old Faithful, Lion and Grotto Geyser all in eruption.

We had lunch at the Snowlodge, and then followed the Snake River south past Lewis Lake, Moose Falls and the South Entrance. At Moose Falls we found a cooperative **American Dipper** which was feeding diligently in fast current. Overhead an immature **Bald Eagle** had a tussle with a much smaller **Red-tailed Hawk**. That first view of the Grand Tetons rising boldly above Jackson Lake was a thrill, and in stopping for photos we got fine looks at **Willow Flycatcher**, **White-crowned Sparrow** and **Song Sparrow**.

After an afternoon break at our log cabin accommodations at Colter Bay, and dinner on the deck at Dornan's with a splendid view of the Grand Teton, the group met Michael, a local guide and boatman, for the evening sunset 10-mile raft trip on the Snake River. A new bird

for the trip was **Common Nighthawk**, and a new mammal was **American Beaver**. We saw two Moose, an **American Elk** with a calf, and many **Spotted Sandpiper**. Drifting along under all that scenery – almost overload!

Sunday, 25 June**Grand Teton National Park**

We started at 10:45 this morning, giving everyone free time to walk the trails by the lake, or take in the wonderful museum at Colter Bay which has excellent displays of Native American history and handicrafts of this area. Refreshed, we headed out to visit the many scenic highlights of the park, enjoying birding, scenic vistas and geology. We first ventured out on a dirt road leading to the Two Ocean Lake trailhead, where in dense willow we found **Wilson's Warbler**. Walking up to a Vista Point, we found **Cassin's Finch, Mountain Chickadee and Western Tanager**. We then drove over to Jackson Lake Lodge to walk a trail under the lodge over to a grove of Aspen. We were delighted to find active nests of **Northern Flicker, Red-naped Sapsucker and American Kestrel**. We also found **Muskrat, Green-winged Teal, and Wilson's Snipe** in a small pond. Lunch in the bar, with a fine view of the Grand Tetons was fun. From here we took the Inner Park Road, stopping often for photos, and taking a close look at the geologic features – particularly a dike on Mt. Moran, and the glacial topography of the area. Birding on the trail around Jenny Lake was quiet by late afternoon, so we decided to head for the bright lights of Jackson.

Just outside of town, the ponds were very productive, and afforded us great views of a pair of **Trumpeter Swan**. The most abundant duck was new for our trip – **Ring-necked Duck**, and we also found a pair of **Redhead**, and several pair of **Gadwall**. The many large **Canada Goose** goslings were entertaining, as were the displaying **Yellow-headed Blackbirds**. We had an hour to look around town and do some shopping, then met back at the Cadillac Grille on the square for an excellent meal.

Monday, 26 June**Grand Teton National Park**

We returned up Signal Mountain this morning, hoping too see a male **Blue Grouse** display, but it was quite quiet, and we had to be content to admire the abundant **Lupine**, and two species of orchid, the **Pink-striped and Spotted**. We also had a mixed flock with both **Yellow-rumped and Orange-crowned Warblers**, several brilliant **Western Tanagers and Western Warbling Vireo**. We opted then for a hike, a four-mile loop trail to Taggart Lake, under the glorious view of Buck Mountain and other craggy peaks of the Grand Tetons. The birds were most cooperative! Right away John spotted a tiny **Calliope Hummingbird**, a male which put on quite a display. Nearby two male **Downy Woodpeckers** vied with each other on opposite sides of a dead tree. We spotted a singing **Dusky Flycatcher**, and several **Cedar Waxwing** flew overhead. After hearing **Swainson's Thrush** for most of the last two days, we were happy to get a cracking view of it above us on a dead limb. Tortoise shell butterflies were everywhere; we'd see them by the dozen, mixed in with **Little Blue's** and a **Weidemeyer's Admiral**. Several pair of **Common Merganser (Goosander)** were present on the lake, and we enjoyed this lunch spot thoroughly. Views of the Grand Tetons were our backdrop; and an **Olive-sided Flycatcher** called and changed perches across the lake. We started up the trail after lunch, and Peg was able to 'pish' in a group of **warblers** – **Yellow**, and more importantly the **McGuillivrays**, often a secretive one. We all got super views and **Broad-tailed Hummingbird** came in as well. Julian was the one to spot a magnificent adult **Golden Eagle**, flying in a cirque basin high of the mountains above us. That was quite a change in scale! Another **Swainson's Thrush** 'teed-up' for us on a post, but even more spectacular was the male **Lazuli Bunting** which did the same, allowing us to come within 20 ft. as it sang away. Further down the trail Jill and John spotted a new bird – the **Fox Sparrow** we had been searching for. In going down into the willows to see it closer, we were rewarded with sightings of **Black-headed Grosbeak** and **Calliope Hummingbird** as well. As we tried to call out the **Fox Sparrow**, in zoomed an adult **Peregrine Falcon** – wow! All this was a great birding finale, and we headed to the car park for refreshing cold drinks. After a nice

What a joy to wake to the sounds of gulls and terns, a bit of maritime flavor so far from the sea. By 6:15 David has spotted an adult **Bald Eagle**, just across the river, which remained perched there throughout our breakfast! We drove north today, through agricultural fields where we met several of our species from the prairie days early on in the trip including **Long-billed Curlew** and **Horned Lark**. In one field we found 14 **Sandhill Cranes**, and around them another dozen or so – wow! A chocolate colored dark phase **Swainson' Hawk** was nice to see perched up on a phone poll. But birding was difficult on the busy highway (not busy at all by British standards!) and we soon turned off to an amazing quiet valley, first stopping at Henry's Lake. Here we saw several ducks, and **Red-necked Grebe**. We past countless **Mountain Bluebird**, more pair of cranes, **Tree Swallows** on their nest boxes, and **Northern Flickers**. We found a **Red-naped Sapsucker** nest low in some aspen trees, and later found several more nests of this boldly patterned woodpecker.

In a grove of bud-worm killed Spruce, we set off to find **Three-toed Woodpecker**, a tough bird to find. We first found a **Hairy Woodpecker** nest, then a **Williamson's Sapsucker**, close, but... Persistence pays off however, and in following the route Peg had seen one fly, we found a female intent on feeding, working her beak well into the bark of a spruce. She allowed very close approach and seemed totally focused in feeding – a great find. The whole experience in this **Aspen** grove was magical, as the forest floor was lined with flowers of every color of the rainbow – **Indian Paintbrush**, **Sticky Geranium**, **Lupine**, **Lousewort**, **Yellow Columbine** and more. We finally pulled ourselves away from this bonanza area for woodpeckers, and headed towards Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, one of the gems of the American Wildlife Refuge System.

The landscape of the Centennial Mountain Valley was moving to all of us today. Snow in the mountains set off the incredible green of the valley floor; lakes shimmered on this fine day. We drove through vast wetlands, sage uplands and aspen and mixed conifer forest, finding species of interest in each new habitat. At a deserted homestead from the 1930's we found **American Rock Wren** – just before our attention was diverted to a **Bald Eagle** zooming by overhead. We had lunch in a lovely aspen grove, enjoying fresh spring water, and both birds and butterflies at the lakeshore. Scanning through scores of **White Pelican**, **Lesser Scaup** and other ducks, we found several **Clark's Grebe**, a few with their babies on their backs – fun! **Pronghorn** rested in the sage; we found both **Mule Deer** and **White-tailed Deer**. At the more open, second boat ramp to the lakes, Julian spotted an agitated **Moose** across the vista, running rapidly cross the open terrain. Colors of **White-faced Ibis**, new for us today, were brilliant against the blue sky as they flew back and forth to feed in the marsh. **American Avocet** were numerous at the next pond, resting and feeding alongside **Franklin's Gulls** and **Black-necked Stilt**. Jill found a pair of **Semi-palmated Plover**, a new addition to our Travelling Naturalist's list. Chicks of several species were trying out their new skills while hunting **Northern Harrier** cruised by. David called out '**Bald Eagle**' as we watched the whole pond blow up – suddenly the sky was full of **American Avocet** and others. Two cheeky **American Avocet** mobbed the eagle as it flew away! We finished up mid-afternoon and headed back to our lovely lodge on the Snake River for a break.

After dinner, we could not resist making one last foray. Everyone had hopes of seeing male **Moose** but alas, we had to be content with our cow and calf from the day previous. We had teases from **Marsh Wren** as it called and moved in the reeds, and just as the last light made viewing difficult, a new species came in, calling. **Pine Grosbeak** – we had fleeting glimpses at the female. But oh, the calls of **Sandhill Crane** were marvelous, resonant for a long distance across the marsh. Overhead **Common Nighthawk** hunted in its acrobatic way, threading between **Forster's Terns** and **Franklin's Gulls**. With pink light in the sky we headed back to our lodgings quite content.

Thursday, 29 June Island Park to Bozeman, via Quake Lake, Hegben Lake and Yellowstone National Park

We enjoyed one last morning of waking to calls of gulls and terns. The kitchen nicely obliged our request for early and prompt breakfast, so we were able to take time en route to visit the

excellent National Forest Visitor Center for the Earthquake Area of Quake Lake. What a dramatic testament to the power of earth movement! We watched **Double-crested Cormorant** and **Osprey** along the shore of Quake, and then Hegben Lakes, then drove through lush mixed conifer forest in the narrow Gallatin River Canyon as we headed north. Everyone soaked in last views of mountains and the incredible bloom of Mule's Ears and other wildflowers that cloaked the meadows. We arrived at the airport in time for all to check in with ease. It was time for our flock to disperse, but with promises to reunite another day for another Travelling Naturalist adventure!

Species List

Birds

Common Loon (Great Northern Diver)	A breeding adult with two black fuzzy chicks seen on Indian Lake in Southern Yellowstone, swimming at the edge of Yellow Pond Lilies while a cow Moose entered the pond for a feed!
Pied-billed Grebe	Seen on six days of our journey, mainly lone individuals
Red-necked Grebe	Beautiful breeding plumage adults seen at Silver Lake, Harriman State Park, ID
Eared (Black-necked) Grebe	Seen at Red Rock Lakes NWR and Harriman State Park
Western Grebe	Seen at Red Rock Lakes NWR and Harriman State Park
*Clark's Grebe	Breeding individuals seen, one with chicks on its back, Red Rock Lakes NWR
Double-crested Cormorant	Yellowstone River near Billings, Yellowstone Lake, Colter Bay and final two days on the west side of the ecosystem.
Am. White Pelican	Seen almost each day, often in flight, or at close range, preening and feeding on the river. Those jetting down the rapids at Le Hardy Rapids were a treat!
Great Blue Heron	Seen on six days, including the raft trip on the Snake River
*Black-crowned Night-heron	One individual spotted by Jill, feeding in the outlet of Silver Lake at Harriman State Park
White-faced Ibis	Flocks overhead and feeding in bulrush habitat at Red Rock Lakes NWR
Trumpeter Swan	Our first pair seen at the National Elk Refuge in Jackson, then seen on several ponds in Southern Yellowstone and Grand Teton, then at Harriman Lake SP and Red Rock Lakes NWR. At Red Rock Lakes, we found a pair with 4 healthy cygnets.
Ruddy Duck	Seen on two days of our journey
Canada Goose	Seen daily, many with good-sized goslings
American Wigeon	Seen in Yellowstone National Park and at Red Rock Lakes
Gadwall	Seen on five days of the journey
Green-winged Teal	A beautiful male was seen at close range near Jackson Lake Lodge in the Grand Tetons, then another at Red Rock Lakes NWR
Mallard	Seen daily and very common
Cinnamon Teal	Seen near Lake in Yellowstone and then a good number of bright males gathered together at Red Rock Lakes (before the Bald Eagle made a pass and sent them aloft!)
Northern Shoveler	A flock seen our last day at Red Rock Lakes NWR
Canvasback	One female seen from the boat launch at Red Rock Lakes NWR
Redhead	Pairs seen on three days of our journey
Ring-necked Duck	Very common in Grand Teton and Harriman SP, Red Rock Lakes
Greater Scaup	One pair seen along the shore of Yellowstone Lake, and another near the check dam at Red Rock Lakes NWR
Lesser Scaup	Next to Mallard, our most common duck, seen on six days of the journey
*Harlequin Duck	Females seen on the Yellowstone below Tower at two locations, and then a real thrill – SEVEN males loafing about on rocks and feeding in the rapids at Le Hardy Rapids, wow!
Bufflehead	Seen on five days of our journey, one flying out of the forest from a nest hole
Barrow's Goldeneye	Pairs and groups of males or females seen regularly – six days of the

	journey
Common Merganser (Goosander)	Seen on seven days of the journey
Turkey Vulture	Seen near Billings, and again in Grand Tetons and areas to the West.
Osprey	Seen every day of our journey. Two nests in Yellowstone held chicks just hatched out, being fed strips of Cutthroat Trout very gently by the male with his smaller beak.
Bald Eagle	Seen on five days of our journey, always spectacular! A nest was seen on the raft trip on the Snake River
Northern (Hen) Harrier	Seen on the prairie near Billings, then in open habitats around Grand Teton and Red Rock Lakes. A male hunting close to the road in Red Rock Lakes was memorable.
Cooper's Hawk	A quick sighting above the trees at Slough Creek, Yellowstone
Swainson's Hawk	Great looks at just fledged young birds on fenceposts on the prairie. Both dark and light phased birds then seen on 4 additional days of the journey.
Red-tailed Hawk	Seen daily. John found a nest atop a burned stump near Lake Butte, with three large fledglings.
Ferruginous Hawk	Great looks on our prairie day near Billings
Golden Eagle	Seen well on the prairie, and then Julian spotted a gorgeous adult flying in front of a cirque basin above our hiking trail in Grand Tetons
American Kestrel	Seen on eight days of the journey
Prairie Falcon	Julian called out a flying bird just above our heads while feasting at picnic at Slough Creek. We had another close individual off Dunraven Pass, and another more distant bird was seen on the prairie near Billings
Peregrine Falcon	We watched chicks on a nest near Tower on two days, and then were delighted with a close in flyby in a meadow at the end of our hike in Grand Teton.
Wild Turkey	Two successful wild breeding birds were quite happy in Helen Carlson's yard in Billings – town being a great place to avoid predation.
Blue Grouse	Seen on Dunraven Pass
Ruffed Grouse	Seen as we came back from our Great Gray Owl watching.
Ring-necked (Common) Pheasant	Seen at Two Moon Park, Billings, and also the prairie
Sandhill Crane	The first sighting was in an agricultural field near Red Lodge, MT., then we found them several days in Yellowstone, and most other locations visited. Two pair calling intently at Silver Lake our final evening were memorable.
American Coot	Seen first at Floating Island Lake, Yellowstone
*Black-necked Stilt	Seen at Hailstone NWR on the prairie, then at Red Rock Lakes
American Avocet	First seen in large numbers and at close range at Hailstone, then Indian Lake, and Red Rock Lakes
Killdeer	Seen on five days of our tour
*Semi-palmated Sandpiper	A pair seen at Red Rock Lakes
Long-billed Curlew	Good number seen near the Burrowing Owl colony on the prairie, then again in agricultural fields near Island Park, ID
Upland Sandpiper	Seen on our prairie day in Billings, near Molt
Spotted Sandpiper	Seen almost daily, very common
Willet	A few individuals at Hailstone NWR, and a single bird at Red Rock Lakes
Wilson's Phalarope	Several hundred birds at Hailstone, and again at Red Rock Lakes
Common Snipe	One perched up on a fence post allowing close approach near Roberts en route to Beartooth, several were seen in Yellowstone while in wetland habitat, and near Jackson Lake in Grand Teton we watched one bathe and preen, allowing close enough approach for photos!
Ring-billed Gull	Seen on four days of our journey
California Gull	Seen on five days of the journey, one at Harriman State Park was trying to grey on small ducklings
Franklin's Gull	Seen on three days. Incredible numbers at Red Rock Lakes!
Caspian Tern	Seen at Harriman State Park, and off the porches of our lodge at Island Park
Forster's Tern	Seen at Harriman SP and Red Rock Lakes
Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon)	Seen in urban areas and near Molt
American Morning Dove	Seen on six days of our journey, most obvious on the prairie

Great Grey Owl	A trip favorite for many, we were able to view a nest with just fledged chicks. The mother came in to feed and uttered quiet calls, magical!
Burrowing Owl	We saw six or more individuals at the colony near Molt
Short-eared Owl	A nice surprise while walking the road at Molt, good looks
Common Nighthawk	First seen on the river trip, then again over Silver Lake.
Chimney Swift	Quick sightings while driving under Interstate bridges near Billings
White-throated Swift	Great aerial dynamics above Tower in Yellowstone, seen on three days while in the park
*Calliope Hummingbird	Wonderful views of males at two locations while hiking in Grand Teton, then at a feeder en route to Mesa Falls
Broad-tailed Hummingbird	Seen on three days of the journey, great behavior seen from our outside dining area at Moose
Belted Kingfisher	Wonderful views at a scenic pull-off on Yellowstone Lake, then again on the river by our hotel in Island Park
Red-naped Sapsucker	We got MANY good looks, at several nests and while feeding on four days of our journey
Williamson's Sapsucker	We found a nest walking up Slough Creek, then again on the way into Red Rock Lakes NWR, also in Hayden Valley area
Downy Woodpecker	First seen at Two Moon Park near Billings, then on two other days
Hairy Woodpecker	Seen on five days of our journey, a close individual feeding on a downed log off Dunraven Pass and then a nesting pair en route into Red Rock Lakes NWR
Am. Three-toed Woodpecker	We worked very hard for this sighting but were rewarded by seeing a female at very close range, with great feeding behavior displayed. One was also heard off Signal Mtn. Rd in the Grand Tetons
Northern Flicker	Our most common woodpecker, seen daily
Olive-sided Flycatcher	Our 'whoop three beers' bird, heard on several days, and then after slogging over deadfall to disappointment, we finally got great views of one 'teed-up' on a prominent dead snag.
Western Wood Pewee	Seen on six days, one of the more common flycatchers
Willow Flycatcher	One individual, on the shore of Jackson Lake in the Grand Tetons
Least Flycatcher	Heard or seen on three days of the journey
Hammond's Flycatcher	Great views near Tower in Yellowstone, on two different days
American Dusky Flycatcher	Great views in sagebrush / mixed conifer habitat in Tetons
Cordilleran Flycatcher	Seen on three days of the journey
Say's Phoebe	Great views in a subdivision near Billings, then on the prairie
Western Kingbird	Seen only on the prairie near Billings
Eastern Kingbird	Seen on prairie near Billings, then agricultural land and Silver Lake area on the west side
Horned (Shore) Lark	Prairie and tundra – our two open habitats
Tree Swallow	Seen almost every day, a common nest box inhabitant
Violet-green Swallow	Seen almost daily in good number
Northern Rough-winged Swallowtail	Seen in Hayden Valley, Yellowstone, nesting colony
Bank Swallow (Sand Martin)	Seen in cut bank of Yellowstone River, Two Moon Park, Billings
Barn Swallow	Seen on six days of the journey
Cliff Swallow	Seen daily in huge numbers, nests under bridges and on building, even the outhouse at a rest stop in Lamar Valley!
American (Buff-bellied) Pipit	Seen well on tundra habitat of the Beartooth Pass.
Loggerhead Shrike	As with last year, we found only one – in the windbreak of the prairie near Billings
Cedar Waxwing	Flocks heard and seen on several days
American Dipper	Always popular, we found several, the best views at Moose Falls in Southern Yellowstone
American Rock Wren	Red Rock Lakes NWR, near abandoned ranch buildings
Marsh Wren	Fleeting glimpses and heard only, at Silver Lake in Harriman State Park and also Red Rock Lakes
House Wren	Fairly common, seen or heard on 7 days
Gray Catbird	Seen well at Two Moon Park and Helen's yard in Billings

*Sage Thrasher	Heard only, while viewing wolves, we didn't pay attention!
Brown Thrasher	Great views at Two Moon Park, Billings
Mountain Bluebird	One of our more common birds, such a beauty. Seen daily.
Swainson's Thrush	Seen well on our hike in the Tetons and heard on four other days
Hermit Thrush	Heard only again this year, distant flutes in the woods...
American Robin	Very common, seen daily
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Seen or heard almost each day
Black-capped Chickadee	Seen well at Two Moon Park, Billings
Mountain Chickadee	Seen most days once in Yellowstone and beyond. Our first one was at the Rock Creek lookout on Beartooth Hwy.
Red-breasted Nuthatch	Seen on two days of our journey
White-breasted Nuthatch	Heard or seen on three days of the journey
Pinyon Jay	A flock in a residential area near Billings
Steller's Jay	Great views in Cooke City and in Yellowstone
Gray Jay	Seen on five days of the journey, often at close range
American Magpie	Seen on all but two days of the journey, many fledglings
Clark's Nutcracker	Far less common this year than others, but still seen on seven days
American Crow	Seen in agricultural areas and at Slough Creek in Yellowstone
Common Raven	Seen daily, but always a favorite, so personable.
Common (European) Starling	Seen on four days
McCown's Longspur	Seen near Broadview, breeding males in flight display
Chestnut-collared Longspur	Several breeding males, and females seen near Molt
Lark Bunting	Abundant this year, all through our prairie exploration
Fox Sparrow	Finally found on our hike in Grand Teton, singing male
Song Sparrow	Fairly common, first seen at Two Moon Park, Billings
Lincoln's Sparrow	Seen in Southern Yellowstone on Grassy Lake Road
White-crowned Sparrow	Seen in Yellowstone at several locations
Dark-eyed Junco	Very common, some young fledglings
Savannah Sparrow	Seen on five days of the journey, in open habitats
Chipping Sparrow	Very common, some at very close range
Brewer's Sparrow	Seen or heard on seven days
Vesper Sparrow	Great looks at singing breeding males at several locations
*Spotted Towhee	Seen well at Two Moon Park, Billings
Green-tailed Towhee	Seen well off Signal Mountain, Grand Tetons
Black-headed Grosbeak	Seen at Two Moon Park and again at Tetons and Red Rock Lakes
Lazuli Bunting	Another trip favorite, a great view from our Tetons hike, and also off the Grassy Lake Road in southern Yellowstone
Western Tanager	Such a beauty, seen on six days
*Ovenbird	A surprise and new for the Travelling Naturalist list – heard incessantly and seen fleetingly at Two Moon Park, quite the searching though! This is a late bird, they go north to breed....
Orange-crowned Warbler	Heard or seen on three days
Yellow Warbler	Very common when near willow habitat
Yellow-rumped Warbler	Our most common, but lovely warbler, seen on 9 days
*American Redstart	Seen well at Two Moon Park, Billings
Common Yellowthroat	seen well at Two Moon and heard on three other days
MacGillivray's Warbler	Great views near Taggart Lake, Grand Tetons
Wilson's Warbler	Seen well in willows near Two Ocean Lake trailhead
Yellow-breasted Chat	Remarkable views at Two Moon Park near Billings, several singing males perched right out in the open.
Red-eyed Vireo	Two Moon Park, Billings
Western Warbling Vireo	Quite common, seen on 8 days of the journey.
Pine Siskin	Seen on all but two days
American Goldfinch	Seen at Two Moon Park, and again in Grand Tetons
Black Rosy-finch	Great looks on Beartooth Pass
Cassin's Finch	Yellowstone and Cooke City, on seven days of the journey in total
Pine Grosbeak	Our final evening at Silver Lake we had quick views of a female as a pair came into tall pines by the lake

Red (Common) Crossbill	Spotted near Round Prairie perched on a conifer in Yellowstone, then several sightings of flocks overhead
House Sparrow	Seen in urban areas and at Mammoth Hot Springs
Bullock's Oriole	Seen on our day in the prairie near Billings
Yellow-headed Blackbird	Seen on three days in wetland habitat
Red-winged Blackbird	Seen on seven days, also in wetland habitat but more widespread than Yellow-headed
Western Meadowlark	Great views on the prairie, then again in sagebrush in Yellowstone
Common Grackle	Seen on six days, less common than other blackbirds
Brewer's Blackbird	Common, seen on nine days of the journey
Brown-headed Cowbird	Seen daily

Mammals

Coyote	Seen on several days, one gobbling down a Uintah Ground Squirrel
Gray Wolf	We encountered two different packs, the Unknowns (two sightings) and the Hayden Valley Pack. We heard a lone black wolf howl for close to an hour, running through the sage. We watched the Unknown Pack yearlings chase a Pronghorn and the Hayden female chase a Mule Deer, once released from baby-sitting by another arriving adult. Wonderful – a trip highlight for many
Black Bear	Seen on three days, our first by Soda Butte picnic area was scratching its back on a bent over tree – fun!
Grizzly Bear	We saw four individuals on three different days, all fascinating. Probably the best view was a huge male in Hayden Valley, feeding in the sage and open meadow across the Yellowstone River.
American Pine Marten	We watched a small female that came into Dan Hartman's feeders – great looks one evening
American Elk	Seen, often with calves, on 8 days of our journey
Moose	Seen on four days of our journey, all females and females with calves.
Mule Deer	Great views of a female with twin fawns running about near the Northeast Entrance station. Seen 8 days.
White-tailed Deer	Seen on the prairie and at Red Rock Lakes
Pronghorn	First seen on our initial prairie day from Billings, then on six additional days. Many with fawns as well.
American Bison	A signature mammal for Yellowstone, seen on 6 days, with lots of frisky red calves
Mountain Goat	Seen on two days, the first spotted in a snowfield high on Beartooth Pass by Julian, the others on cliffs at Baronette Peak
Bighorn Sheep	A group of females with young seen near Tower on two days
American Red Squirrel	Seen every day once in forest habitat
Fox Squirrel	Two Moon Park, Billings
Yellow-bellied Marmot	Curious and rotund – seen on two days
Black-tailed Prairie Dog	Seen in a large colony near Molt
Uinta Ground Squirrel	Very common, seen every day once in Yellowstone
Richardson's Ground Squirrel	Seen abundantly on the prairie from Billings
Meadow Vole	Seen one day near shoreline of Jackson Lake at Colter Bay
Least Chipmunk	Our more common chipmunk, seen on 8 days
Yellow-pine Chipmunk	One seen well at Rock Creek overview, Beartooth Hwy.
American Beaver	Seen on the raft trip, Snake River
Muskrat	Seen in several smaller wetland ponds
American Pika	Great views in a talus slope off Beartooth Pass
Snowshoe Hare	One at Dan Hartman's home near Cooke City and then daily near our cabins at Colter Bay
White-tailed Jackrabbit	One seen at the prairie dog colony near Molt
Desert Cottontail	Prairie day from Billings

Amphibians

Western Chorus Frog heard at many locations

Reptiles

Western Wandering Garter Snake Taggert Lake hike, Tetons

Fish

Yellowstone Cut-throat Trout

Butterflies

While we did not keep daily butterfly lists we saw a number of species. These include:

Aphrodite Fritillary
Clouded Parnassian
Western Tiger Swallowtail
Baird's Swallowtail
Mustard White
Orange Tip
Clouded Sulphur
Melissa Blue
Lupine Blue
Hoary Comma
Fire Rim Tortoise Shell
Mourning Cloak (Camblewell Beauty)
American Red Admiral
Weidermayer's Admiral
Hayden's Ringlet
Monarch
Skipper, sp.

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