

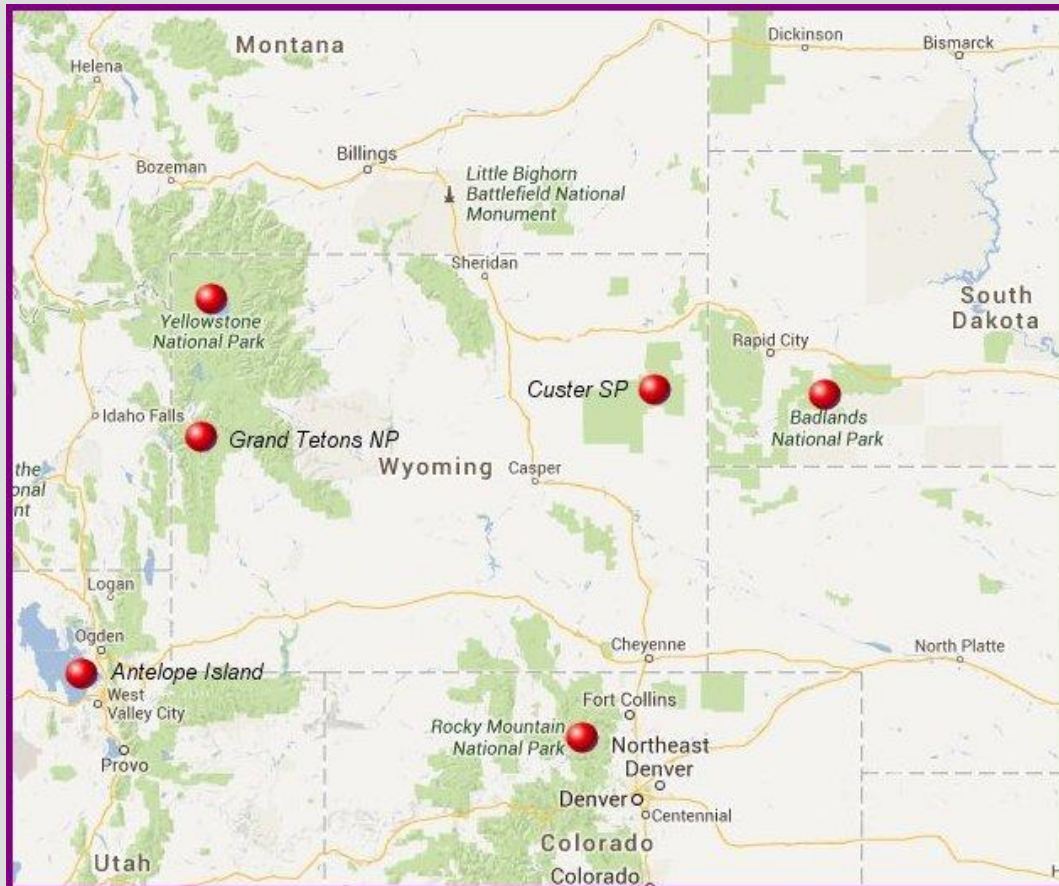
# Midwest states



USA



8<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2013



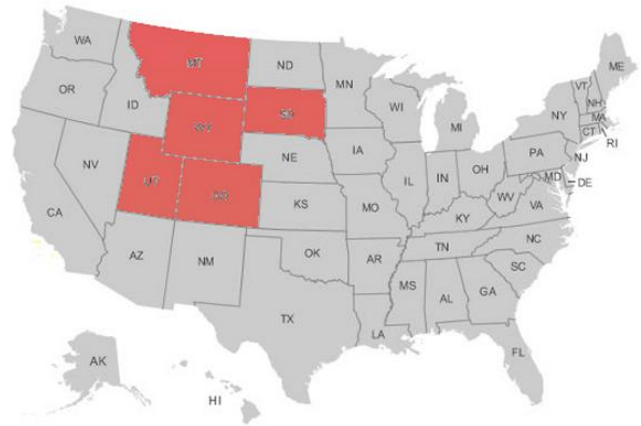
June 9 <sup>th</sup> & 10 <sup>th</sup>	Estes Park, Rocky Mountain NP, Colorado
June 12 <sup>th</sup>	Custer SP, South Dakota
June 13 <sup>th</sup>	Badlands NP, South Dakota
June 15 <sup>th</sup> & 17 <sup>th</sup>	Yellowstone NP, Wyoming & Montana
June 16 <sup>th</sup>	Grand Tetons NP, Wyoming
June 18 <sup>th</sup>	Wolftracker, North Yellowstone NP, Wyoming
June 20 <sup>th</sup>	Antelope Island, Salt Lake City, Utah

## US MIDWEST – Wyoming, Colorado, South Dakota, & Montana

June 8<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup>, 2013

### Introduction

After a superb trip to neighbouring Arizona and Utah some years earlier, a return to Colorado to explore the other side of the Rockies was always on the cards. When we looked at planning the itinerary, it became obvious that an inverted horseshoe route, taking in a more northerly area, was suited to our needs. This would then include the Rockies themselves, the Badlands of South Dakota, and most importantly,



Yellowstone National Park. This meant an arrival at Denver in Colorado, and a departure from Salt Lake City. As usual in the States, distances are much greater than we are used to in the UK and even Europe as a whole, with the greatest journey being around 10 hours between Rapid City in South Dakota and Yellowstone. This did mean that we experienced a variety of impressive National Parks, with scenery and wildlife in general as the main target, and birds more or less seen as an incidental to this.

The bases used on our journey were Estes Park, which is a characterful small town right next to the entrance to the Rocky Mountain National Park, Rapid City, a functional place plonked in the centre of the Custer National Park (or Mount Rushmore if you are in the typical tourist trail!) and the Badlands, and West Yellowstone for the first few days for Yellowstone National Park (again, better for the Old Faithful brigade and also Grand Teton National Park), with a finish off in Gardiner for the North Entrance of Yellowstone (better for access to the wildlife richer North loop). We hired our car beforehand, and the midsize we wanted was inexpensive and more than adequate for its task - don't believe the usual upgrade rubbish that offers a more powerful engine for the mountains. A sat nav unit was indispensable for driving - we bought an expansion SD card for North America for our own portable Garmin unit in the UK for around £45, which was a lot cheaper than hiring at the car firm.

June is probably an ideal time to visit the area. We noticed that many of the park roads, particularly in Yellowstone, are closed right up until May, presumably due to Winter snow, which was still evident in the peaks. We had been keeping a close eye in the weather before we left and expected it to be quite cool with variable precipitation. The variability in this became evident. We had almost unbroken sunshine throughout, with temperatures up to the 90'sC in the Rockies, and 80'sC elsewhere. However, we arrived at Yellowstone in sleet and the temperature gauge showing only a few degrees above

freezing. A heavy rain shower fell in Rapid City one late evening. The watch word is to be prepared - the gloves, hat and mac may be necessary at this time of year on any given visit. We did experience a few minor bites from insects, but these were generally not a nuisance.

## Accommodation



### Denver - Embassy Suites.

The airport seems to have been built fairly recently, and with it a clutch of attendant hotels with complementary shuttle services such as this. The free breakfast was immense, including freshly cooked omelettes and pancakes. The surroundings are worth a look prebreakfast, since the hotel is next to some open land.

### Estes Park - Discovery Lodge.

This is a privately run hotel, built at the start of a run of chain lodgings, which also means it is a closer walk to town. They have an emphasis on environmental awareness, and the rooms are very comfortable. Main downside is that this was the only place we stayed at which didn't include breakfast in our booking, and had no air conditioning. On the other hand, there was quite a bit of birdlife in the back yard to keep up interest. Estes Park is not only handy for Rocky Mountain National Park, but is not a bad place to stay in itself, offering an interesting array of restaurants.



### Rapid City - Best Western Town & Country.



Much like the rather soulless town itself, the hotel is purely a means to an end, and no better or worse than any of the other chains along this quite busy stretch of road. Breakfast was "included" with our booking after a fight, but is merely a \$5 voucher towards breakfast at the adjoining diner.



*Yellowstone Lodge, West Yellowstone*



*Yellowstone Village, Gardiner*

**Yellowstone.** We originally booked all 5 nights at the Yellowstone Lodge in West Yellowstone, since this small town is next to the more popular West entrance to the park. The room we were given was large, and the location on the edge of town, only a short walk from the rather limited choice of restaurants (Bullwinkle's is probably the pick of them). After deciding on the Wolftracker day in the park, where the favoured entrance is the North one, we had 2 nights in the Yellowstone Village Inn on the outskirts of Gardiner. This was again absolutely fine, and I would recommend taking a meal at The Mine, a family grill just across and down the road.



**Salt Lake City - Fairfield Suites and Hotel.**

Take your pick for one of the many airport hotels here. Complimentary breakfast and free airport shuttle is probably a standard, and the location and lodging suited just fine.

**SITES VISITED**

**Rocky Mountain National Park**

Even before we left Denver, in fact not even outside of the perimeter of the overnight stop at the Embassy Suites Hotel near to the airport, there were some Stateside birds to

be munched on, even if they were all fairly common. The new airport has also spawned a new hatchling clutch of servicing hotels nearby, so they look potentially stale from a birding point of view. Yet a short pre breakfast walk around the perimeter found a batch of Western Kingbirds, both noisy and approachable. Brewer's Blackbirds were in only slightly lower numbers, but were just as brash, and held the morning light well in the glossy sheen on the plumage. American Robins were a little more shy, but a couple of singing Western Meadowlarks were easily located in the low stubble.

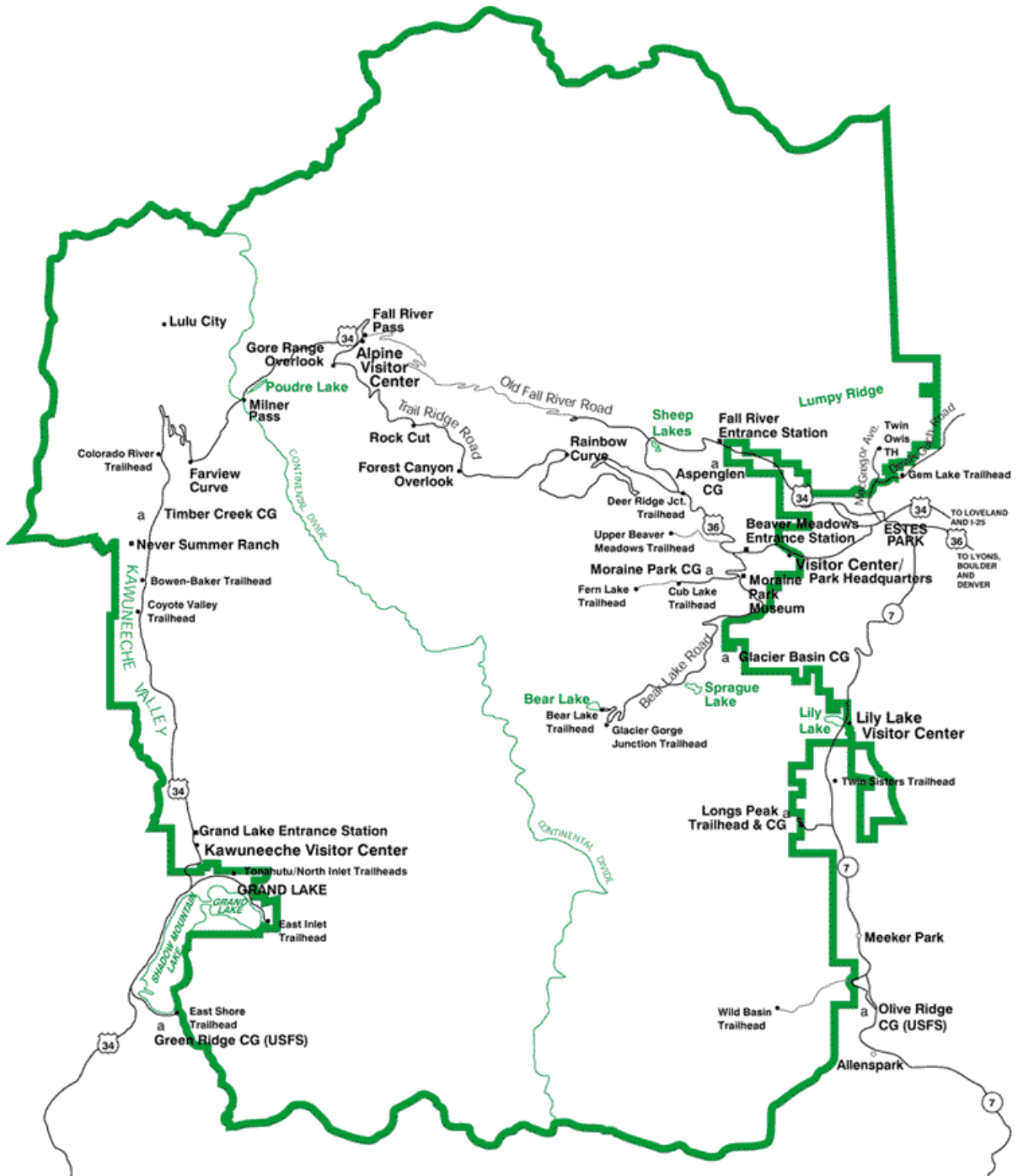


The real holidaying began on arrival at Estes Park, our base of the Rocky Mountain National Park. Or to be exact, just before arriving here. Only a couple of miles short of the town, we pulled into a popular roadside stop. The main attraction for the populace was the performance by Least Chipmunks and Golden-mantled Ground Squirrels. A Red Squirrel skulked in the background. Mingling with these was a Steller's Jay, and a slightly more evasive Clark's Nutcracker.



From our accommodation at Discovery Lodge on Big Thomson Avenue, which seems to be the main "strip" of hotels in the town, the common residents of the area could be seen well even in the back yard - House Finch, Violet Green Swallow, and Broad-tailed Hummingbird were all noisy, boisterous, and easy to see. The 4 miles walk around Lake Estes is also on the doorstep from here, with most of the birds seen again being the expected ones - Common Grackles and Turkey Vultures

in particular. The walk is pleasant and flat, although the herd of calving Elk presented something of a barrier at the time of our visit, with a portion of the walk cordoned off. Even more common than the Elk are numerous Wyoming Ground Squirrels, which are very hard to miss. The lake itself offered no more than common Mallard and Canada Goose, and these in low numbers. A sit down on the northern shore did turn up a pair of Spotted Sandpipers and lone Mountain Chickadee. Overhead was productive, with three different raptors in the form of Ferruginous Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, and Prairie Falcon. Pride of place in the Estes locale is the Rocky Mountain National Park. Even without the addition of wildlife it contains, this is worthy of a visit due to the stunning scenery



throughout. Costing only \$20 for a week long pass, this peach of a park has glades and loose forest at its lower end, which thins out to surround brilliant vistas from many lookouts and short trails, to the still snow-covered tops of the spartan alpine peaks. The Elk take pride place in the lower altitudes, and you must be extremely unlucky not to come across these on any given visit. Taking the route 34 first along the Trail Ridge Road means skirting the meadows of Horseshoe Park, where these beasts are more or less guaranteed. A closer inspection is also worthwhile, since Wyoming Ground Squirrels are also here. In one of the trees adjacent to the road, a male Mountain Bluebird shared a branch with an American Robin, and a Broad-tailed Hummingbird was busy feeding and occasionally resting, picked up by its high pitched trilling. The conifers are also the home of Pygmy Nuthatch.



One of the best stops was 3 miles short of the Alpine visitor centre, where a trail led to some impressive rocks. Yellow-bellied Marmots seem to be almost touchable here, with one sunning itself next to the toilets. Buff-bellied Pipits were performing song flights, with Shorelarks visible when their song was followed. Most impressive was a pair of Mountain Bluebirds building a nest - amongst the woodwork of the visitor centre itself! They were even watched and photographed through the window of the coffee shop.

### **Black Hills, South Dakota**

We were based in Rapid City, whose main claim to fame is being on the doorstep of Mount Rushmore, and its less well known native American and ongoing carving of Crazy Horse. A sumptuous day can be had at both, I am sure, but the fees of \$30 total for both can be saved by viewing from the main highways (it IS possible to do this for both), and make haste to **Custer State Park**, which is sandwiched between the two, and offers the delectable wildlife alternative. As with many of the locations within this large country, this park is a lot larger than it seems in planning. There are a few entry points, each charging the princely sum of \$15 per car for a 7 day pass. The route 16A is the main access road, passes the Norbeck visitors centre, but is fairly quiet overall.



*Bison on the open grassland*

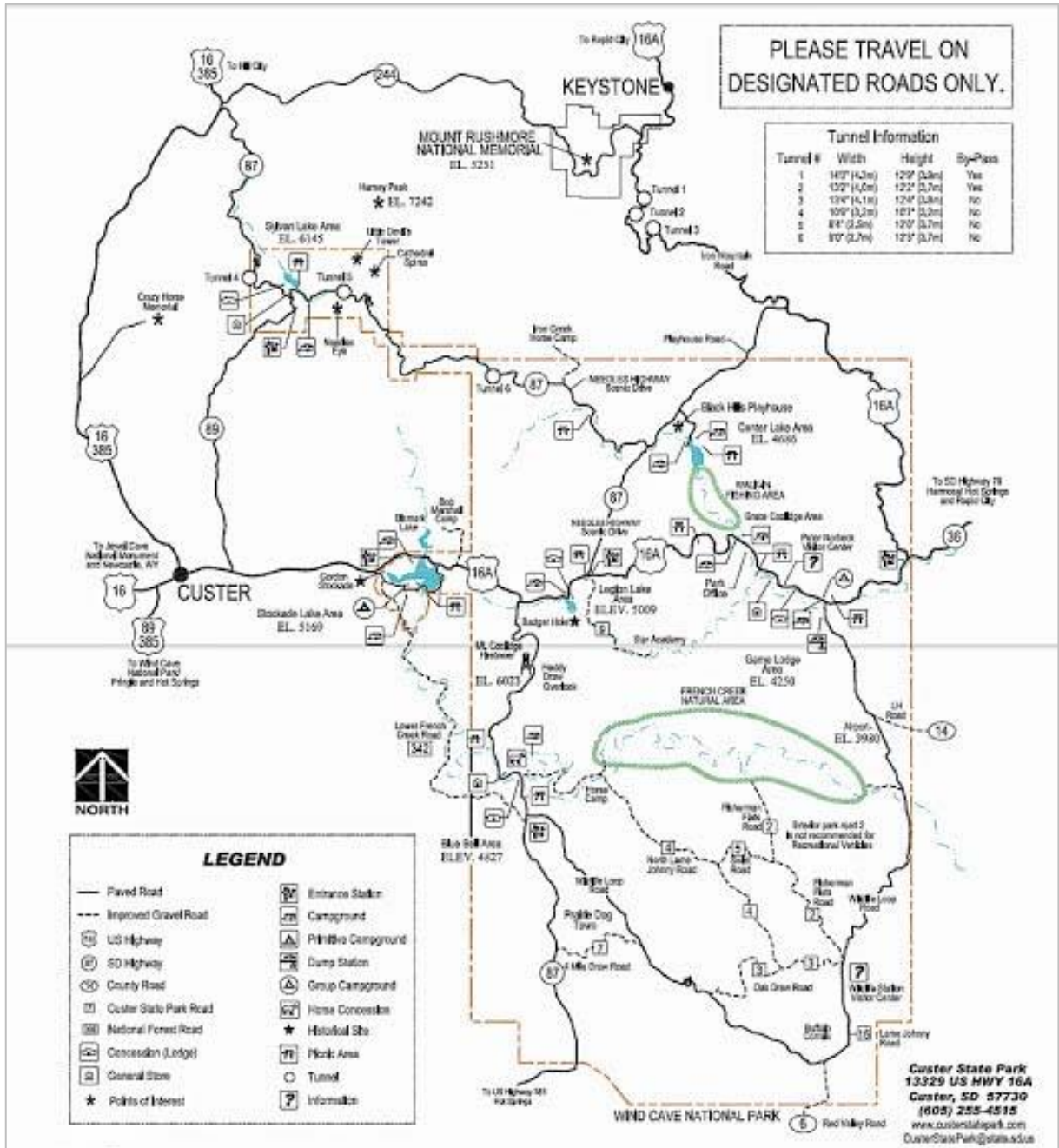


*Sylvan Lake*

We entered from Keystone along the initial part of the 16A, which is a narrow byway, passing through mainly coniferous woodland. Stopping off at the Norbeck pullout was good for the localised white-winged race of Dark-eyed Junco, and also a well sized flock



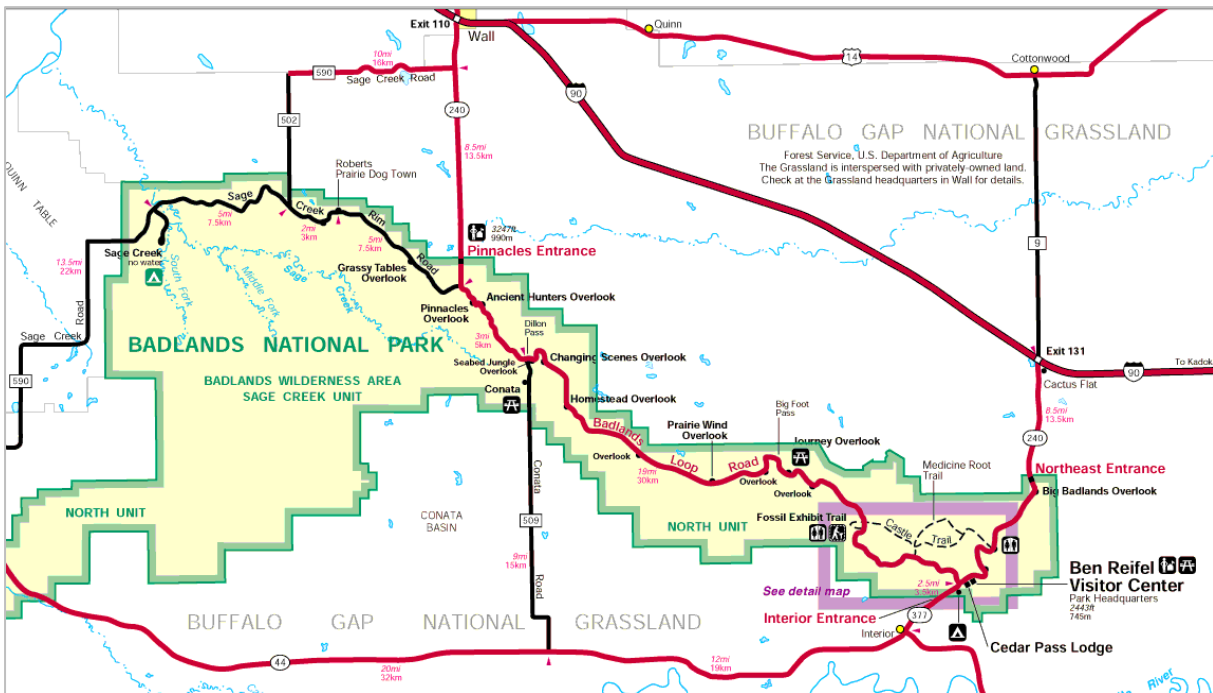
of Red Crossbills. After passing briefly through the visitor centre, we took the Needles Highway scenic drive, where we passed the first (lone) American Bison, and also marvelled at the great scenery at the top. The nearby Sylvan Lake was worth a circumnavigation. In addition to the common American Robins and Red-winged Blackbirds, with Violet-Green Swallows overhead, a couple of Cordilleran Flycatchers were found, and Pine Siskins were flying to and fro.



The Southern part of the park, which is enclosed by the Wildlife Loop road, is the best for mammals. The herds of American Bison are the most famed of these, with a stable population of 950 or so providing ample opportunity to come across them in collections on the grasslands. We even became part of a true "bison jam", with a small herd parking the bus across the road, preventing the traffic from moving. The two small towns of Black-tailed Prairie Dogs were a real treat, with many visible, and one in particular almost daring in its approach to our stationary vehicle. The only other big critter of note

was Pronghorn, a most inelegant looking beast, but fascinating nevertheless. Most were singles or pairs at a distance, until a group of four were finally passed next to the road. Near to them, a pair of Mountain Bluebirds were using a nest box as home, with singing Western Meadowlarks as company. Apart from the numerous Common Grackles and Red-winged Blackbirds, the only other bird of note was a Swainson's Hawk which seemed to be doing a mini flight display.

## Badlands National Park



At just over an hour's drive East of Rapid City, this park is well worth a visit for the day. \$15 buys a 7 day pass to a stunning geological spectacle, where the elements have eroded some impressive rock formations. A map is handed out at the entrance station, and is really all that is needed for the visit. Covering the area is quite straight forward, since there is one main Road, the Badlands Loop, which runs the length, merging into the gravelled Rim Road. This in turn goes North as the route 502 and East as the Sage Creek Road. Most of the park is covered in the car, stopping for views and wildlife either at well signed lookout points on the way, or whenever wildlife appears. There are also some short trails at the Eastern end. The Cliff Shelf Trail turned up a Say's Phoebe, Chipping Sparrow, and Black-billed Magpie. The Door Trail offers a short wander into the badlands architecture, and also holds singing Rock Wren and Say's Phoebe, as well as breeding Cliff Swallows.





For much of the length of the Badlands Loop Road, the main birds are many Red-winged Blackbirds and Western Meadowlarks, although there are the odd Western Kingbirds and a single Loggerhead Shrike. The first interesting mammals were reached at the Homestead Overlook, where a couple of family parties of Bighorn Sheep were perched on rocky outcrops just below the road. These included lambs, presumably ewes which had shortish horns and were collared. A group of 6 rams in a "bachelor party", most sporting a fine pair of large horns, were a little further along, just beyond the start of the Rim Road. 4 miles along this road is the beginning of a very large Black-tailed Prairie Dog town, with many of the showy individuals right next to the track. Some were heard calling when a Prairie Falcon passed overhead. This part of the grassy prairie also held a large herd of American Bison.

The most interesting part of the park for birds is the route 502, turning East into the 590, or Sage Creek Road. It is at first gravelled, then tarmac, and passes through some excellent grassland. Shorelarks were the first to show in amongst the Prairie Dogs. Once the "town" was left behind, an Eastern Kingbird preceded some good grassland birds. Lark Buntings were quite regular, and one had Blue Grosbeaks for company. A Spotted Towhee was on the fence just before a small lake to the South, which held a handful of American White Pelicans.



## Yellowstone National Park



Despite the number of visitors we encountered, the magnificence of this park dwarfs the human content. The entrance fee is only \$25 per car for a 7 day pass, and as usual for this country, the size of the park is much larger than you would imagine. Covering only the South loop took us all day, and much of this was to take in the range of geysers and geothermal array of features that are a must when visiting here. After a very chilly arrival, with the sleet hitting the car windscreen in temperatures as low as 38C, the next day demonstrated the variation in weather systems here with highs of almost 70C, and unbroken clear skies. Driving is deliberately and thankfully slow, with top speeds allowed of 45mph, and this certainly lends itself to much greater scrutiny of passing wildlife. Examples were Coyote and Western Tanager during our first few miles on the first day.

**The South Loop.** Not only are the geysers and lookouts worth seeing in themselves, they can also turn up birds. Waiting for Grand Geysers and Old Faithful to erupt in sequence, we found Mountain Bluebird, White-crowned & Chipping Sparrows, Brown-headed Cowbird, and Pine Siskin on the walkways between. Midway Geysers Basin had a successful fishing Osprey on the river next to it. One of the best areas was the base of the Yellowstone River, where it joined the Lake. Small numbers of Lesser Scaup had been seen on the shoreline, and a single Bald Eagle flew over Fisherman's Bridge, with a group of 22 Barrow's Goldeneye on the West Thumb. More Barrow's Goldeneye were on the river itself with a drake American Wigeon nearby. The LeHardy's Rapids were interesting in their own right, but the group of 4 male Harlequin Ducks playing on the torrent were even more captivating.



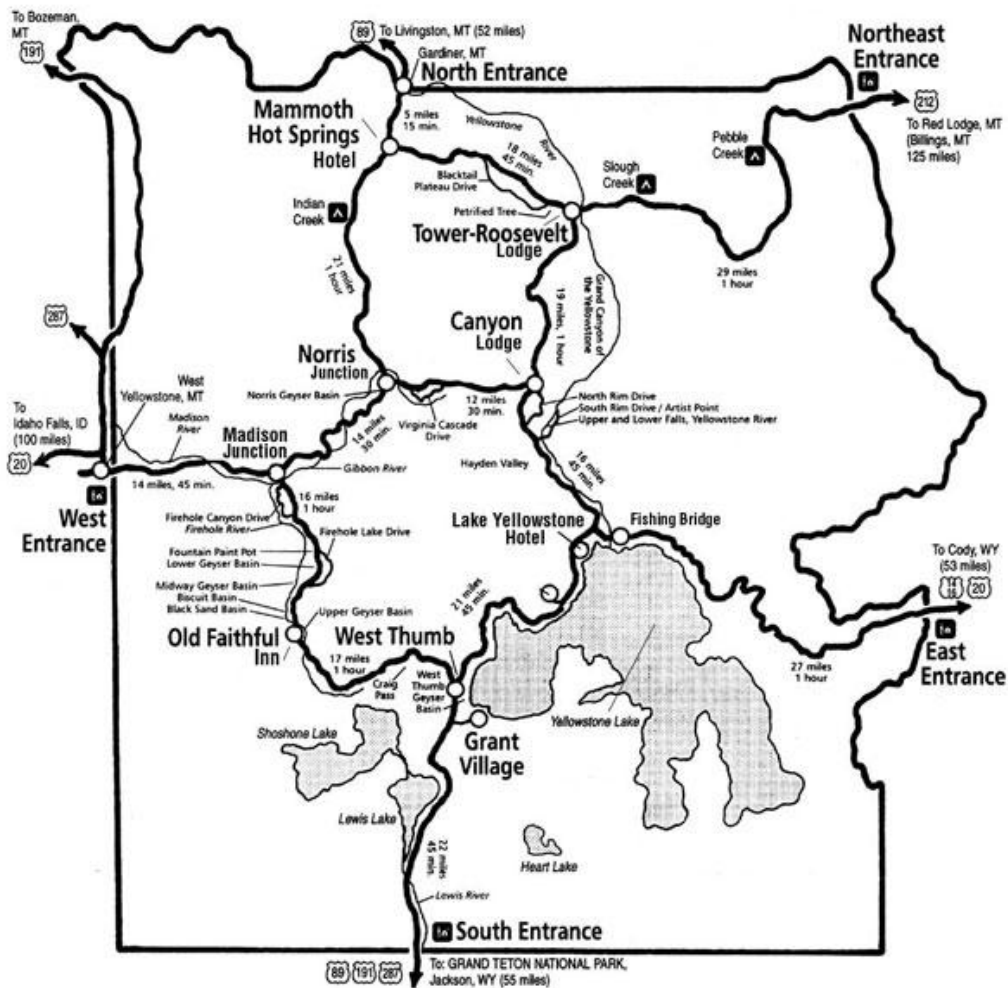


*Yellowstone Lake – Western Arm*



*LeHardy's Rapids*

The river followed along the Hayden Valley, which lived up to its reputation as a good spot for American Bison. The river and banks held copious Canada Geese, but amongst them was a group of 4 Goosanders, and White Pelican a little further up. Perhaps the most astonishing find was a Mountain Goat "jam", where a group of cars had pinpointed a lone Mountain Goat lying down on the upper almost vertical slopes above one of the smaller rivers early evening. Even leaving the park, on the road to the West exit, is worth vigilance - we saw a perched Bald Eagle and Osprey at the same spot at 7pm.



**The North Loop**, which also incorporates Lamar Valley, is reputed to be the best spot for wildlife viewing. We followed the road from Madison, stopping off at a couple of spots on the way and picking off Chipping & White-crowned Sparrows, Mountain Bluebird and a trio of male Elk on the way to Norris. We took the road North to Mammoth Hot Springs, where we passed a couple of Sandhill Cranes in a meadow, before spending some time on the Mammoth Hot Springs Terraces. Not only do these offer yet another form of geothermal wonder, but also held a pair of Mountain Bluebirds and Western Tanagers.

The Blacktail Plateau Drive was a gem for Black Bears. We were caught up in a bear jam for some time, spending up to half an hour watching a mother Black Bear with its 1 month old offspring down below. A huge male Moose was also in this small valley, with a Red-tailed Hawk flying in. On the way back along this road, a youngish lone Black Bear had been found, and we started off our own bear jam when we located a mother and almost full grown cub. Overhead, another Red-tailed Hawk was wheeling, with a Brewer's Sparrow singing opposite a pond holding 5 Ruddy Duck. The coniferous forests along Black Plateau Drive hold Dusky Grouse, as witnessed by a female sat on the road one mid morning. A female Belted Kingfisher was watching over the river flowing down from Mammoth to the North Entrance to the park.

## Wolftracker

Since the introduction of Wolves back into the park in the mid 1990's, they have become one of the wildlife must sees in Yellowstone. However, they are still not great in numbers, and are generally difficult to see, often being in non accessible parts of the park from the road, or some distance away on the slopes. We decided to look for some assistance in this task and came across Wolftracker.com after a short search. They can organise anything from a day tour upwards, using a lot of expertise and knowledge in the park and its wildlife. While the cost is rather high at around \$600 for the day, this is irrespective of the amount of people in the party, and the day we had with McNeil Lyons was certainly worth it. While wildlife cannot be guaranteed, we saw three dog species and both bears, and some excellent birds as almost incidentals in addition to this.

The day starts early, 5-5.30am, which is always the best time for this type of venture, and they prefer to pick up in Gardiner, since it lies next to the Northern entrance to Yellowstone National Park, which is also the best area for wildlife. Our day, which went on until our return at 2.30pm, was wholly spent in the Blacktail Plateau Drive and Lamar Valley area. McNeil had planned to listen on the radio for any wolf sightings from others in the company, and had an idea of where he wanted to look. He also asked what our other preferences might be - the list was full!



We had already passed a large herd of Elk on the outskirts of Mammoth, and picked up Sora on one of the roadside pools, when the message came through that Wolves had

been seen at Slough Creek in the Lamar Valley. These were frequent visitors to a bison carcass, hidden on a distant hillside. After a short wait, we picked up a light and a dark Wolf around this spot, but two black Wolves from the same pack behind us were much closer on a nearby hillside. While waiting, Chipping & Brewer's Sparrows tantalised from song posts in the sage brush.

We then made our way to the Lamar Valley, where among the herds of Bison and occasional Pronghorn, we were shown a den on a nearby hillside which had 4 playful Coyote pups outside. Our return later would follow one of the parents trying for some Uinta Ground Squirrels. In the distance, on a high slope just below the snowline, telescopes could just pick out a mother Grizzly Bear with her 2 cubs. A Sage Thrasher was singing from the sage brush, and Brewer's Sparrow from a nearby perch.

We were taken on a short half mile hike (upwards) to Trout and Buck Lakes, ostensibly to look for the possibility of otter feeding on the spawning trout. None put in a show, but it proved an excellent spot. Top billing was an adult brown coloured Black Bear slowly making its way through the tree covered glade near to where we stood. Buck lake held Green-winged Teal and female Barrow's Goldeneye. The birdlife around this glade was in constant song. Chipping Sparrows, Dark-eyed Juncos, and Audubon's Warblers were commonplace, with a couple of male Western Tanagers plying to and fro. A single Mountain Chickadee was above Trout Lake, and perhaps bird of the locale should go to the male Williamson's Sapsucker which passed through.



*Trout Lake*



*Buck Lake*





After a fulfilling morning with brilliant wildlife and beautiful scenery, the return was made all the more pleasant with stops at an Osprey nest, handily placed just below our eyeline next to the river below, and a Golden Eagle nest, with chick on a cliff face. Finale entrants were a Red Fox which insisted on its very own fox jam when it stopped for a pee on the road, and Elk which also caused a jam as we crawled back through Mammoth. All in all an excellent day out. Many passers by also benefited from our finding various animals and birds, but they didn't have the full experience which we had, including the knowledge and enthusiasm of McNeil, our guide.

Having had such a good day, and with late afternoon still to spare, we decided to go back ourselves to the Lamar Valley to check on an American Badger site McNeil had pointed out. The omens and a good day were with us, since we chanced on a Coyote with food plying its way along the road not far from Mammoth Hot Springs. After passing the regulation bear jam at Elk Creek, where the mother and cubs were apparently still performing, we headed straight for the badger sett next to the road and just short of the Lamar River bridge. Fortune was indeed with us yet again. As we pulled up, the Badger exited the sett, and ran along the scrub in front of us, took the underpass route, and was seen hot footing its way behind us to what looked like alternative burrows. To cap the day, 2 Bighorn Sheep were on the rocks above the road just down from Mammoth Hot Springs, and 2 Mule Deer, only our second pair for the park, were quietly grazing in a front yard in Gardiner as we left our restaurant in the evening.

### **Teton national Park**

This is the place to go to for mountain views. Entrance is included with the Yellowstone National Park entrance fee, and the journey to it if you are staying in West Yellowstone





as we were is 2 hours by park roads. Well paved roads run adjacent to the 40 miles long Teton range, which on a good sunny day as we had are stunning. This is backed by the large man made Jackson Lake, open grassland, and some areas of conifers. The area can be covered in a loop, which encloses part of the flow of the Snake River.

After picking up a pair of female Moose at the Jackson Lake junction, we tried for more at Oxbow Bend lookout, which is supposed to be more of a likely spot for them. They weren't party to this bit of info however, although American White Pelicans overflew and also landed on the spot, with Gadwall and American Wigeon on the river. A Yellow Warbler was close to the overlook, with a Song Sparrow singing in the brush and an Osprey over.

Taking the Teton Park Road first, the dam held a healthy population of Cliff Swallows under the bridge. Further along at the Jenny Lake lookout, a group of Red-breasted Nuthatches were overhead. Despite the crowds, the Jenny Lake visitor centre was quite



good for birds on the short trails from it, which were overall also devoid of people. Yellow Warbler was again here, with singing Ruby-crowned Kinglet overhead, and Red-breasted Nuthatch. The centre buildings were busy with Violet-green & Tree Swallows, with Brown-headed Cowbirds eager for crumbs.

The moose overlook only a short way along the Willson Road provided just that - a mother and calf Moose, playing hide and seek in the bushes next to the pond. A Northern Flicker flew through with a couple of secretive Chipping Sparrows and not so shy Cordilleran Flycatcher just below the onlookers. For those not fortunate enough to see Bison as yet, herds were in the Antelope Flats and from Gros Ventre Road.

## Salt Lake City

Our itinerary defined that it would be most practical to travel South from Yellowstone and fly from Salt Lake City, and see what delights we could dig up there. For those not wanting to partake in religious or city based activities, there is also the alternative platter on offer at Antelope Island. This is a rather barren island within the salt lake now joined to the mainland by a 7 mile causeway. However, there is enough vegetation and other food to support a herd of 800 or so Bison, introduced at the end of the 19th century, and antelope & deer in the form of Pronghorn & Mule. We saw all 3, as well as a Coyote wandering along the shoreline.

We didn't do the island justice at the end of some splendid wildlife viewing over the last two weeks, just popping into the visitor centre and driving to the ranch and back along the eastern shore. Some of the best birding to be had was on the causeway itself. After a Yellow-headed Blackbird flew across the start of the causeway, where an entrance fee of \$9 per car is charged, each edge of the roadway belongs to hundreds of California Gulls, small groups of Black-necked Grebes, and a large collection of American Avocets. Many other waders were along here also, but were left to their own identities today.

The visitor centre itself was worth a stop, with small numbers of Cliff Swallows amongst the colony of Barn Swallows. A Western Meadowlark was singing just below, a Chukar on the boundary wall, and a pair of Rock Wrens on the rocks in front of the building.

## SPECIES SEEN

### **Wild Turkey**

*Meleagris gallopavo*

The only bird seen was a female in the grasses at Custer State Park

### **Dusky Grouse**

*Dendragapus obscurus*

Female on road in conifers along Black Plateau Drive, Yellowstone NP

### **Chukar Partridge**

*Alectoris chukar*

Antelope Island SP is supposed to hold one of the largest concentrations of this introduced species in the States, and the 2 birds calling around the visitor centre were possibly an indication of this

### **Canada Goose**

*Branta canadensis*

Very common throughout, apart from the day we spent in the Badlands, when none were seen

### **Gadwall**

*Anas strepera*

2 Oxbow Bend, Teton

### **American Wigeon**

*Anas Americana*

Male on Yellowstone River, Yellowstone NP; 3 Oxbow Bend, Teton



### **Mallard**

*Anas platyrhynchos*

Quite common Estes Park; 4 Custer State Park

### **Green-winged Teal**

*Anas carolinensis*

Pair Trout Lake, Yellowstone NP; Pair on pool between Tower and Canyon, Yellowstone NP

### **Ring-necked Duck**

*Aythya collaris*

16 in pairs on Lily Lake, route 7 South of Estes Park



### **Lesser Scaup**

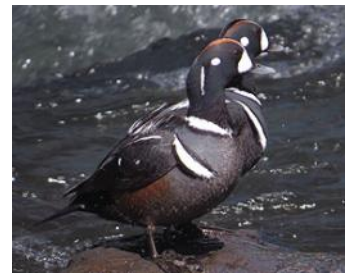
*Aythya affinis*

10 on Lake Yellowstone, Yellowstone NP

### **Harlequin Duck**

*Histrionicus histrionicus*

A very pleasant surprise was finding a group of 4 fully plumaged males together at the LeHardy's rapids on the Yellowstone River. They were happy to stay in one small area of the swiftly flowing waters while we watched them in the water and on the rocks



### **Barrow's Goldeneye**

*Bucephala islandica*

All goldeneye seen were of this species. The males and females generally seemed to

have found their own groups, with a large group of drakes on a lagoon near the Yellowstone Lake West Thumb, and only females above Trout Lake, Yellowstone NP. (Group of 22 on Lake adjoining Yellowstone Lake, and further ~10 on Yellowstone River, Yellowstone NP; 1 on small pool near Continental Divide, Yellowstone NP; 5 females on Trout Lake, Yellowstone NP)



**Common Merganser (Goosander)** *Mergus merganser*

Group of 4 on Yellowstone River, Yellowstone NP; Female on river along Blacktail Plateau Drive, Yellowstone NP

**Ruddy Duck** *Oxyura jamaicensis*

5 on pond towards end of Blacktail Plateau drive, Yellowstone NP

**Black-necked Grebe** *Podiceps nigricollis*

~80 off Antelope Island SP causeway

**Great Blue Heron** *Ardea herodias*

1 in river on journey from Rapid City to West Yellowstone; 1 in river, Yellowstone NP

**American White Pelican** *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*

~6 on small lake to South of Sage Creek Road, Badlands; 1 in Yellowstone River, Yellowstone NP; 3 over, and 3 on river near Jackson Lake Junction, Teton



**Double-crested Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax auritus*

1 Oxbow Bend, Teton

**Turkey Vulture** *Cathartes aura*

The only location which seemed to lack these was within Yellowstone NP; 1 Rocky Mountain NP; ~15 Estes Park; 4 Custer State Park; ~20 Badlands NP; 3 on route from Yellowstone NP to Salt Lake City, in Idaho



**Western Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus*

3 near to West Yellowstone; 1 caught fish next to midway geyser basin, Yellowstone NP; 1 Teton, 1 on way to West exit, Yellowstone NP; Adult on nest, Blacktail Plateau Drive, Yellowstone NP



**Bald Eagle**

*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*

1 over Fisherman's Bridge, Yellowstone NP; 1 caused jam, on way to West exit, Yellowstone NP; 1 perched on tree next to river towards West Entrance, Yellowstone NP (The latter 2 birds may have been the same individual seen on consecutive days)



**Swainson's Hawk**

*Buteo swainsoni*

1 Custer State Park

**Red-tailed Hawk**

*Buteo jamaicensis*

1 over Estes Park; 2 separate birds over blacktail plateau drive, Yellowstone NP; 6 Lamar Valley & Blacktail Plateau Drive, Yellowstone NP ~12 over roads on route from Yellowstone NP to Salt Lake City



**Ferruginous Hawk**

*Buteo regalis*

1 over Estes Park

**Golden Eagle**

*Aquila chrysaetos*

Adult at nest containing at least 1 immature, Slough Creek, Yellowstone NP



**American Kestrel**

*Falco sparverius*

2 on journey from Estes Park to Rapid City; 1 at Potholes Turnout, Teton; 6 hunting along Interstate from Yellowstone NP to Salt Lake City

**Prairie Falcon**

*Falco mexicanus*

1 circling low over Estes Park; 1 over Prairie Dog town, Badlands NP

**Sora**

*Porzana carolina*

1 on pond Lamar Valley, Yellowstone NP



**American Coot**

*Fulica americana*

1 Lily Lake, en route 7 South from Estes Park; 1 Moose lookout, Willson Road, Teton; Few birds in occasional pools, Lamar Valley & Blacktail Plateau Drive, Yellowstone NP

**Sandhill Crane**

*Grus canadensis*

2 north of roaring plateau, Yellowstone NP; 2 on meadow above Lamar Valley

**American Avocet**

*Recurvirostra americana*

~150 along Antelope Island SP causeway



**Long-billed Curlew**

*Numenius americanus*

3 in field next to road en route from Yellowstone NP to Salt Lake City

**Spotted Sandpiper**

*Actitis macularius*

Pair on Lake Estes, Estes Park; Pair and separate bird on small rivers, Yellowstone NP; 1 on Trout Lake, Yellowstone NP

**Franklin's Gull**

*Leucophaeus pipixcan*

3 Antelope Island SP causeway

**California Gull**

*Larus californicus*

Abundant Antelope Island SP causeway and some over the island

**Mourning Dove**

*Zenaida macroura*

~10 Rocky Mountain NP; ~20 Badlands NP; 3 over road en route from Yellowstone NP to Salt Lake City



**White-throated Swift**

*Aeronautes saxatalis*

The only bird seen was a flypast over Badlands NP

**Broad-tailed Hummingbird**

*Selasphorus platycercus*

A common sound in the Estes Park area was that of the trilling made the males of this species. Many were sunsequently easy to see, being more intent on territory possession and occasional conflict than human approach. (1 seen, more heard Rocky Mountain NP; Very commonly heard (trilling sound made by tail feathers) Estes Park, ~8 of which were also seen)



**Belted Kingfisher**

*Megaceryle alcyon*

1 on river between North entrance and Mammoth, Yellowstone NP

**Williamson's Sapsucker**

*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*

1 above Trout Lake, Yellowstone NP



**Northern Flicker**

*Colaptes auratus*

2 separate birds, Teton

**Say's Phoebe**

*Sayornis saya*

1 on Cliff Shelf Trail, 1 on Door Trail, Badlands NP



**Cordilleran Flycatcher**

*Empidonax occidentalis*

The 2 birds seen in Custer State Park were possibly juveniles from the same brood. The shape of the eye ring to the rear was a great help in identification, with both birds a lot less yellowish than was expected. (2 Sylvan Lake Custer State Park; 1 at Elk Overlook, Teton NP)

**Western Kingbird**

*Tyrannus verticalis*

~20 embassy suites, Denver; 3 Lusk rest Stop; ~12 Badlands NP



**Eastern Kingbird**

*Tyrannus tyrannus*

1 along route 502, Badlands NP; 1 at rest stop in Wyoming

**Loggerhead Shrike**

*Lanius ludovicianus*

1 along Badlands Loop Road, Badlands NP

**Steller's Jay**

*Cyanocitta stelleri*

The sightings of single birds in different days at the roadside stop just outside of Estes Park may have been of the same individual



**Black-billed Magpie**

*Pica hudsonia*

1 journey Denver to Rocky Mountain NP, 5 Rocky Mountain NP; ~8 seen, + 1 pair with 2 immatures, Estes Park (latter next to Lake Estes); 1 Custer State Park; 1 Cliff Shelf Trail car park; 4 separate individuals on journey from Rapid City to West Yellowstone; 2 Lamar Valley, Yellowstone NP; 4 Salt Lake City area



**Clark's Nutcracker**

*Nucifraga columbiana*

1 just outside of Estes, 1 at Many Parks Curve, Rocky Mountain NP; 1 above Trout Lake, Yellowstone NP

**American Crow**

*Corvus brachyrhynchos*

1 at roadside stop just South of Estes Park on route 36; 4 Estes park to Rapid City; 3 Custer State Park; 2 singles, Badlands NP; 2 Yellowstone NP; 1 Lamar Valley, Yellowstone NP; ~12 Salt Lake City area

**Northern Raven**

*Corvus corax*

~6 Rocky Mountain NP; ~12 Yellowstone NP, including 6 within West Yellowstone; ~10 Teton; ~15 Yellowstone NP; ~6 Lamar Valley, Yellowstone NP



**Black-capped Chickadee**

*Poecile atricapillus*

1 heard at Sylvan Lake Custer State Park

**Mountain Chickadee**

*Poecile gambeli*

1 Lake Estes, Estes Park; 1 Jenny Lake overlook, Teton; 1 Trout Lake, Yellowstone NP



**Shorelark**

*Eremophila alpestris*

3 Rocky Mountain NP; 2 at junction of Rim Road and route 502, Badlands NP

**Tree Swallow**

*Tachycineta bicolor*

1 Custer State Park; Pair on dead trees next to Painted Pots trail; Common Jenny Lake Visitor Centre, Teton; Few Lamar Valley, Yellowstone NP



**Violet-green Swallow**

*Tachycineta thalassina*

An unexpectedly common bird in many of the areas visited. (1 Rocky Mountain NP, very common Estes Park; 1 over Sylvan Lake Custer State Park; Very common within West Yellowstone; Common Jenny Lake Visitor Centre, Teton; Common Yellowstone NP)

**Barn Swallow**

*Hirundo rustica*

Fairly common Estes Park Nesting colony at Antelope Island SP visitor centre

**American Cliff Swallow**

*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*

This species seems to have taken to nesting under man made bridges, and could be very common in many areas where they have founded large colonies. (~4 Estes Park; Common under road bridges Estes park to Rapid City; Common Badlands NP, where they were nesting under ledges; Common under bridges Yellowstone NP & Teton; Colonies nesting under restroom eaves and natural small cliffs, Lamar Valley, Yellowstone NP; Few birds amongst Barn Swallows at Antelope Island SP visitor centre



**Ruby-crowned Kinglet**

*Regulus calendula*

The bird seen was singing and even showed off the ruby crown which spawned its name (Jenny Lake Visitor Centre, Teton)





**Rock Wren**

*Salpinctes obsoletus*

Quite a few of the birds in the Badlands were singing from exposed rocky perches; 2 in front of Antelope Island SP visitor centre

**Pygmy Nuthatch**

*Sitta pygmaea*

1 in conifers next to meadow in Rocky Mountain NP

**Red-breasted Nuthatch**

*Sitta canadensis*

Flock of ~4 Jenny Lake Overlook & 1 Jenny Lake Visitor Centre, Teton



**Northern Mockingbird**

*Mimus polyglottos*

3 on Antelope Island SP

**Sage Thrasher**

*Oreoscoptes montanus*

1 singing Lamar Valley, Yellowstone NP

**Common Starling**

*Sturnus vulgaris*

~6 Estes Park; ~10 Yellowstone NP

**Mountain Bluebird**

*Sialia currucoides*

An unexpected number of these were seen in the northern part of the trip. (Pair building nest at Alpine Visitor Centre, Rocky Mountain NP; Male next to Fall River, Rocky Mountain NP; Male next to Fall River, Rocky Mountain NP; Pair using nest box by road through Custer State Park; 2 males and a female Badlands NP; Female next to Old Faithful, Yellowstone NP; Pair Mammoth terraces, pair artists paint pots, Yellowstone NP; 1 Elk Creek, Yellowstone NP; 1 male en route from Yellowstone NP to Salt Lake City



Male



Female

**American Robin**

*Turdus migratorius*

Very common almost everywhere; 2 Embassy Suites, Denver; ~4 Rocky Mountain NP; Very common Estes Park; Pair Lusk rest Stop; Common Custer State Park; ~8 Yellowstone NP; Quite common Teton; Common Lamar Valley, Yellowstone NP



**House Sparrow**

*Passer domesticus*

Quite common Estes Park

**Buff-bellied Pipit**

*Anthus rubescens*

~3 Rocky Mountain NP



**Pine Siskin**

*Carduelis pinus*

2 Custer State Park; 5 Yellowstone NP

**House Finch**

*Carpodacus mexicanus*

3 Discovery Lodge, Estes; ~20 Estes Park



**Red Crossbill**

*Loxia curvirostra*

A large group of 20-30 birds were passing through the Norbeck rest stop in Custer State Park. Initially seen feeding on pine cones, many were then found in groups on rocks below

**American Yellow Warbler**

*Setophaga aestiva*

1 Oxbow Bend & 1 Jenny Lake Visitor Centre, Teton



**Audubon's Warbler**

*Setophaga auduboni*

Common around Trout Lake, Lamar Valley, Yellowstone NP

**Bullock's Oriole**

*Icterus bullockii*

Female Embassy Suites, Denver

**Brown-headed Cowbird**

*Molothrus ater*

1 adult and 1 juvenile Badlands NP; 2 and 1 juvenile Yellowstone NP; Common Teton; Quite common North Loop, Yellowstone NP



**Red-winged Blackbird**

*Agelaius phoeniceus*

2 at small marsh, Rocky Mountain NP; 2 Lily Lake; 4 Rocky Mountain NP; ~20 Custer State Park; Common grassland and Badlands NP; ~8 Teton

**Brewer's Blackbird**

*Euphagus cyanocephalus*

~10 Embassy Suites, Denver; Common Lamar Valley, Yellowstone NP; Nesting birds around Gardiner; Common Salt Lake City area



**Common Grackle**

*Quiscalus quiscula*

Common Estes Park; Common Estes park to Rapid City; Common Custer State Park; Fairly common grassland and Badlands NP

**Western Meadowlark**

*Sturnella neglecta*

2 singing Embassy Suites, Denver; 1 singing Lusk rest stop; 4 Custer State Park; Common grassland and Badlands NP; 1 singing, Lamar Valley, Yellowstone NP; 2 singing Antelope Island SP



**Yellow-headed Blackbird**

*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*

1 flew over road at start of Antelope Island SP causeway

**Lark Bunting**

*Calamospiza melanocorys*

~8 males Estes park to Rapid City; 2 grassland, and ~5 Badlands NP, along route 502 and 590



**Song Sparrow**

*Melospiza melodia*

1 singing at Oxbow Bend, Tetons NP

**White-crowned Sparrow**

*Zonotrichia leucophrys*

Pair in West Yellowstone, 1 singing next to Old Faithful, Yellowstone NP; 1 singing Artists paint pots, Yellowstone NP



**Dark-eyed Junco**

*Junco hyemalis*

2 races were seen - the very dark white winged were in the Estes Park area, and Pink-sided around Trout Lake in Yellowstone NP. (Common in upper reaches of Custer State Park, particularly Norbeck rest stop along Needles route, of White-winged race; Common around Trout Lake, Yellowstone NP, of Pink-sided race)

**Chipping Sparrow**

*Spizella passerine*

1 Cliff Shelf trail, Badlands NP; 1 singing next to Old Faithful, Yellowstone NP; 2 Moose

Overlook, Willson Road, Teton; 1 singing artists paint pots, Yellowstone NP; ~12 around Slough Creek & Trout Lake, Yellowstone NP; 2 at rest stop, Idaho, en route from Yellowstone NP to Salt Lake City



**Brewer's Sparrow**

*Spizella breweri*

2 separate birds singing Lamar Valley, Yellowstone NP - one at Slough Creek, and one near Coyote lair at valley

**Lark Sparrow**

*Chondestes grammacus*

1 singing Lusk rest Stop; 2 Custer State Park

**Green-tailed Towhee**

*Pipilo chlorurus*

1 Rocky Mountain NP

**Spotted Towhee**

*Pipilo maculatus*

1 on fence along Sage Creek Road, Badlands NP

**Western Tanager**

*Piranga ludoviciana*

1 near to Madison, Yellowstone NP; Pair Mammoth terraces, 1 Blacktail plateau drive, Yellowstone NP; 3 birds around Trout Lake, Yellowstone NP



**Blue Grosbeak**

*Passerina caerulea*

2 males along route 502, Badlands NP

**TOTAL SPECIES = 93**

**MAMMALS**

**Red Squirrel**

*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*

The 2 sightings of this species may have been of the same individual, at a roadside stop on route 36 just South of Estes Park



**Black-tailed Prairie Dog**

*Cynomys ludovicianus*

A most amusing and captivating animal, forming very large "towns" on open grassland. The largest of these was in the Badlands, where the colony seemed to stretch over 2 miles. (2 small "towns" along wildlife trail through Custer State Park; Large "town" about 2 miles long Badlands NP)

**Yellow-bellied Marmot**

*Marmota flaviventris*

~12 Rocky Mountain National Park



**Uinta Ground Squirrel**

*Spermophilus armatus*

Colony Lamar Valley, Yellowstone NP, 3 centre of Mammoth Hot Springs, Yellowstone NP

**Wyoming Ground Squirrel**

*Spermophilus elegans*

Very common around Estes Park

**Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel**

*Spermophilus lateralis*

6 roadside stop on route 36 just South of Estes Park



**Least Chipmunk**

*Tamias minimus*

~5 at roadside stop on route 36 just South of Estes Park ; 1 Sylvan Lake Custer State Park; 1 Badlands NP (light coloured desert variation); 1 Trout Lake, Yellowstone NP

**Coyote**

*Canis latrans*

1 on main road from Madison to Old Faithful, Yellowstone National Park; Den with 4 cubs, and presumed parent in vicinity hunting ground squirrels, Lamar Valley, Yellowstone National Park; 1 on road just East of Mammoth Hot Springs, Yellowstone National Park; 1 near to Canyon junction, Yellowstone National Park; 1 Antelope Island SP



**Wolf**

*Canis lupus*

These were reintroduced into the park in the mid 1990's, after extermination over 100 years earlier. A clutch of monitored packs now roam free, but can be difficult to track down. We enlisted the help of Wolftracker.com in this task. (2 on distant hill, and 2 black individuals from same pack behind us at Slough Creek, Yellowstone National Park)

**Red Fox**

*Vulpes vulpes*

1 on road on exiting near Mammoth Lakes, Yellowstone National Park



**American Black Bear**

*Ursus americanus*

The short stretch along the few miles of Black Plateau Drive, towards the junction to the Lamar Valley, in Yellowstone National Park, seems to be a hot spot for sightings. This included a mother with 1-2 cubs which was faithful to Elk Creek while we were there. (2 mothers with cubs, and young cub lacktail Plateau drive; Yellowstone National Park; 1 black adult from Blacktail Plateau Drive; 1 brown adult in glade above Trout Lake, and same parent at Elk Creek as yesterday, Yellowstone National Park



**Brown Bear**

*Ursus arctos*

Mother with 2 cubs on slopes high above Lamar Valley, Yellowstone National Park

**American Badger**

*Taxidea taxus*

1 near bridge over Lamar River, Lamar Valley, Yellowstone National Park



**Moose**

*Alces alces*

2 near Jackson Lake junction & female with calf Willson Road, Teton



**Elk**

*Alces americanus*

~24 Estes and lower Rocky Mountain National Park (1 only higher slopes); ~20 around Estes Park; 2 males, and 3 separate females, Yellowstone National Park; 3 males, 1 separate male, and 2 females North Loop of Yellowstone National Park Large herd just outside and also within Mammoth, Yellowstone National Park

**Mule Deer**

*Odocoileus hemionus*

1 on route 7 South of Estes Park; 2 very early, Blacktail Plateau Drive, Yellowstone National Park; 2 Antelope Island SP



**White-tailed Deer**

*Odocoileus virginianus*

2 at west entrance of Custer State Park

**Pronghorn**

*Antilocapra americana*

Strangely, the greatest count of these antelope was on the journey from Rapid City to Yellowstone. (~25 journey from Estes Park to Rapid City; ~10 Custer State Park; Regularly seen on journey from Rapid City to West Yellowstone; 1 Teton; ~8 on North Loop, Yellowstone National Park; ~20 in Lamar Valley, Yellowstone National Park; 2 Antelope Island SP



**American Bison**

*Bison bison*

After the first few are seen, the temptation is to become a bit blasé about them, since they are regularly seen in singles up to large herds throughout the parks.(4 herds and a few extra line or small groups in Custer State Park; Large herd north of the Rim road on the plains at Badlands NP; 2 herds and several in singles or smaller numbers, mainly Hayden Valley, Yellowstone National Park; 2 herds Teton from Gros Ventre Road & on Antelope Flats; Scattered herds along Lamar Valley, Yellowstone National Park; Common in Lamar Valley, Yellowstone National Park; large herd Antelope Island SP)

**Mountain Goat**

*Oreamnos americanus*

1 on cliff face SW of Norris, Yellowstone National Park

**Bighorn Sheep**

*Ovis Canadensis*

3 groups Badlands NP - 1 of a bachelor group of 6 males, the other families with young numbering ~30 including the lambs; 2 on rocks just below Mammoth Hot Springs, Yellowstone National Park



**Total Mammal species = 20**