



**MONTANA & YELLOWSTONE
WITH CASSIA CROSSBILL EXTENSION
JUNE 16-23, 2021 | Tour leader: Josh Engel
IN COLLABORATION WITH ILLINOIS AUDUBON SOCIETY**

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This trip takes place in one of the truly spectacular parts of the country, where we wind our way through prairies, across mountains, along rivers, and through sagebrush. Every day brings new habitats and new birds, all in stunning scenery. After a forced hiatus thanks to covid-19 in 2020, we were thrilled to be back in the American West. The birding, too, was incredible. The prairies gave up the full suite of prairie birds--Sprague's Pipit, Baird's Sparrow, Ferruginous Hawk, Thick-billed and Chestnut-collared Longspur, Mountain Plover, and more. The mountains provided Black Rosy Finch, in the sage we found Sagebrush Sparrow, in wetlands Clark's Grebe, along rivers American Dipper, including a nest. Of course there were lots of birds in between as well: the likes of Burrowing Owl, Williamson's Sapsucker, Clark's Nutcracker, Evening Grosbeak, and more. The extension came through for us as well, with Cassia Crossbill, Common Poorwill, Barn Owl, Flammulated Owl (alas, heard only, but at very close range), and a variety of western birds at the northern edge of their range. There were surprises, too, none more surprising than the kind birder who stopped to say hi and ended up taking us to view a family of Saw-whet Owls.

Of course we had a great group to enjoy the whole thing with in a region bustling with activity as it emerged from the covid pandemic. It was a pleasure to be traveling again!

Rather than a full trip report, see the annotated trip list below for highlights and details.

Top 5 Birds as voted by the group

1. American Dipper
2. Northern Saw-whet Owl
3. Mountain Plover
4. (tie) Cassia Crossbill & Black Rosy Finch



BIRD LIST. 158 species (including 5 heard only and 1 leader only). Taxonomy follows the Clements/eBird Checklist, 2019 update. Former (or alternate) English names are in parentheses. (heard) = heard only; (leader) = tour leader only. (E)=Extension only, (E)*=driving back to Bozeman only (something of an “extension to the extension”). The global IUCN red list status is listed for threatened and near-threatened species: CR=Critically Endangered, EN=Endangered, VU=Vulnerable, NT=Near-threatened.

Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>
Trumpeter Swan	<i>Cygnus buccinator</i>
A pair was nesting in the appropriately named Swan Lake in Yellowstone	
Blue-winged Teal	<i>Spatula discolor</i>
Cinnamon Teal	<i>Spatula cyanoptera</i>
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>
American Wigeon	<i>Mareca americana</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>
Redhead	<i>Aythya americana</i>

Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris*
 Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*
 Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola*
 Barrow's Goldeneye *Bucephala islandica*

We were lucky to find a pair lingering at Cottonwood Reservoir

Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*
 Common Merganser *Mergus merganser*
 Wild Turkey *Meleagris gallopavo*
 Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps*
 Red-necked Grebe (E) *Podiceps grisegena*

Nice views of breeding plumaged birds at a state park in Idaho

Eared Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*
 Western Grebe *Aechmophorus occidentalis*
 Clark's Grebe *Aechmophorus clarkii*

We had a great comparison of Clark's and Western Grebes right next to each other in Idaho

Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) *Columba livia*
 Eurasian Collared-Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*
 Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura*
 Common Nighthawk *Chordeiles minor*
 Common Poorwill (E) *Phalaenoptilus nuttallii*

Amazing views of one sitting on the road as we came down the South Hills at night

White-throated Swift *Aeronautes saxatalis*
 Black-chinned Hummingbird (E) *Archilochus alexandri*
 Broad-tailed Hummingbird *Selasphorus platycercus*
 Calliope Hummingbird *Selasphorus calliope*
 Sora (heard) (E) *Porzana carolina*

American Coot *Fulica americana*
 Sandhill Crane *Antigone canadensis*
 Black-necked Stilt *Himantopus mexicanus*
 American Avocet *Recurvirostra americana*
 Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus*
 Mountain Plover *Charadrius montanus*

A trip highlight was seeing an adult with two chicks in the grasslands north of Harlowton

Long-billed Curlew *Numenius americanus*

We loved seeing Long-billed Curlew chicks--who knew that their bills started out so short?

Wilson's Snipe *Gallinago delicata*
 Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor*
 Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*
 Willet *Tringa semipalmata*
 Franklin's Gull (E) *Leucophaeus pipixcan*
 Ring-billed Gull (E) *Larus delawarensis*
 Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*
 Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus*

American White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i>
Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
White-faced Ibis	<i>Plegadis chihi</i>
Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Northern Harrier	<i>Circus hudsonius</i>
Sharp-shinned Hawk	<i>Accipiter striatus</i>
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>
Swainson's Hawk	<i>Buteo swainsoni</i>
Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>
Ferruginous Hawk	<i>Buteo regalis</i>
Barn Owl (E)	<i>Tyto alba</i>

Very nice views outside of Twin Falls

Flammulated Owl (heard) (E) *Psilosops flammeolus*

We heard several, including at very close range, but just couldn't spot one

Burrowing Owl *Athene cunicularia*

It's always nice to see these guys around prairie dog colonies

Northern Saw-whet Owl (E) *Aegolius acadicus*

We had the unbelievable luck of running into a birder who knew where a group of fledglings was hanging out right next to a trail. We got incredible views and photos.

Williamson's Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus thyroideus*

It took some patience, but we eventually got decent looks in Yellowstone

Red-naped Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus nuchalis*

Lewis's Woodpecker (E) *Melanerpes lewis*

It was still in the same burned area in Idaho as we found it two years ago

Downy Woodpecker *Dryobates pubescens*

Hairy Woodpecker (E) *Dryobates villosus*

Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus*

American Kestrel *Falco sparverius*

Merlin *Falco columbarius*

We saw a beautiful example of the Prairie Merlin subspecies in the prairie north of Harlowton

Olive-sided Flycatcher - NT (E) *Contopus cooperi*

Western Wood-Pewee *Contopus sordidulus*

Least Flycatcher (heard) *Empidonax minimus*

Hammond's Flycatcher *Empidonax hammondii*

Gray Flycatcher *Empidonax wrightii*

Dusky Flycatcher *Empidonax oberholseri*

Cordilleran Flycatcher (E) *Empidonax occidentalis*

Western Kingbird *Tyrannus verticalis*

Plumbeous Vireo (E)* *Vireo plumbeus*

Warbling Vireo *Vireo gilvus*

Loggerhead Shrike - NT *Lanius ludovicianus*

Canada Jay	<i>Perisoreus canadensis</i>
Got lucky bumping into a family group in the mountains outside of Bozeman	
Steller's Jay	<i>Cyanocitta stelleri</i>
Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay (E)*	<i>Aphelocoma woodhouseii</i>
Good views of one in Idaho at the northern edge of its range	
Black-billed Magpie	<i>Pica hudsonia</i>
Clark's Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga columbiana</i>
American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>
Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Black-capped Chickadee	<i>Poecile atricapillus</i>
Mountain Chickadee	<i>Poecile gambeli</i>
Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>
Tree Swallow	<i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>
Violet-green Swallow	<i>Tachycineta thalassina</i>
Bank Swallow	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Cliff Swallow	<i>Petrochelidon pyrrhonota</i>
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	<i>Regulus calendula</i>
Red-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta canadensis</i>
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	<i>Polioptila caerulea</i>
Rock Wren	<i>Salpinctes obsoletus</i>
House Wren	<i>Troglodytes aedon</i>
Marsh Wren (heard) (E)	<i>Cistothorus palustris</i>
American Dipper	<i>Cinclus mexicanus</i>
We had a great time watching adults coming to a nest with three bright-mouthed chicks along a rocky river in Yellowstone	
European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Gray Catbird	<i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>
Sage Thrasher	<i>Oreoscoptes montanus</i>
We had nice views a couple of times	
Mountain Bluebird	<i>Sialia currucoides</i>
Swainson's Thrush (heard) (E)	<i>Catharus ustulatus</i>
American Robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>
Cedar Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
American Pipit	<i>Anthus rubescens</i>
Sprague's Pipit - VU	<i>Anthus spragueii</i>
We watched one in display flight, high in the sky, near Harlowton	
Evening Grosbeak - VU	<i>Coccothraustes vespertinus</i>
It was fortuitous to see a small group coming to feeders near Bozeman on the first day of the trip	
Black Rosy-Finch - EN	<i>Leucosticte atrata</i>

It took a bit of searching, but we eventually got great views of this rare finch high in the Bearthooth Mountains

House Finch *Haemorhous mexicanus*

Cassin's Finch *Haemorhous cassinii*

Red Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

Cassia Crossbill (E) *Loxia sinesciuris*

The main reason for the extension, we got very nice views of a small group of this recently described species, including watching a juvenile learning how to use its crossed bill to extract pine seeds

Pine Siskin *Spinus pinus*

American Goldfinch *Spinus tristis*

Chestnut-collared Longspur - VU *Calcarius ornatus*

McCown's Longspur *Rhynchophanes mccownii*

We got great views of both longspurs in the prairie north of Harlowton

Grasshopper Sparrow *Ammodramus savannarum*

Chipping Sparrow *Spizella passerina*

Brewer's Sparrow *Spizella breweri*

Lark Sparrow *Chondestes grammacus*

Lark Bunting *Calamospiza melanocorys*

Fox Sparrow (E) *Passerella iliaca*

Nice views of a "Slate-colored" Fox Sparrow in Idaho

Dark-eyed Junco *Junco hyemalis*

White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys*

Sagebrush Sparrow *Artemisiospiza nevadensis*

Another one that took some searching, but eventually we got nice scope views

Vesper Sparrow *Pooecetes gramineus*

Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis*

Baird's Sparrow *Centronyx bairdii*

Tremendous views of a singing bird north of Harlowton. We even ate breakfast along the road with it singing in the adjacent prairie the whole time.

Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia*

Lincoln's Sparrow *Melospiza lincolnii*

Green-tailed Towhee *Pipilo chlorurus*

Spotted Towhee *Pipilo maculatus*

Yellow-breasted Chat *Icteria virens*

Yellow-headed Blackbird *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*

Bobolink (leader) *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*

Western Meadowlark *Sturnella neglecta*

Bullock's Oriole *Icterus bullockii*

Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus*

Brown-headed Cowbird *Molothrus ater*

Brewer's Blackbird *Euphagus cyanocephalus*

Common Grackle - NT *Quiscalus quiscula*

Orange-crowned Warbler	<i>Leiothlypis celata</i>
MacGillivray's Warbler	<i>Geothlypis tolmiei</i>
Great views of singing birds	
Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>
Yellow Warbler	<i>Setophaga petechia</i>
Yellow-rumped Warbler	<i>Setophaga coronata</i>
Black-throated Gray Warbler (E)*	<i>Setophaga nigrescens</i>
Western Tanager	<i>Piranga ludoviciana</i>
Black-headed Grosbeak	<i>Pheucticus melanocephalus</i>
Lazuli Bunting	<i>Passerina amoena</i>

Always a show-stopper, we had incredible views of a male at Pictograph Caves (along with elsewhere)

MAMMAL LIST. Combined list for main tour and extension. 21 species. As there is no standardized list of English mammal names, the names used here are ones in common usage (alternate names are in parentheses). (heard) = heard only; (leader) = tour leader only. The global IUCN red list status is listed for threatened and near-threatened species: CR=Critically Endangered, EN=Endangered, VU=Vulnerable, NT=Near-threatened.

Coyote	<i>Canis latrans</i>
Gray (Timber) Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>
A distant individual hanging around a bison heard in Yellowstone	
American Black Bear	<i>Ursus americanus</i>
Amazing views of a mother with two small cubs in Yellowstone	
Grizzly (Brown) Bear	<i>Ursus arctos</i>
Seen on a distant hillside in Yellowstone	
Pronghorn (Antelope)	<i>Antilocapra americana</i>
American Bison	<i>Bison bison</i>
Mountain Goat	<i>Oreamnos americanus</i>
Moose	<i>Alces alces</i>
A few people saw a antlered male in Montana; the rest of the group saw a couple in the South Hills as we went up at night to look for owls	
Elk	<i>Cervus canadensis</i>
Mule Deer	<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>
White-tailed Deer	<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>
Desert Cottontail	<i>Sylvilagus audubonii</i>
Golden Mantled Ground Squirrel	<i>Callospermophilus lateralis</i>
Black-tailed Prairie Dog	<i>Cynomys ludovicianus</i>
Yellow-bellied Marmot	<i>Marmota flaviventris</i>
Uinta Chipmunk	<i>Neotamias umbrinus</i>
Red Squirrel	<i>Tamiasciurus hudsonicus</i>

Uinta Ground Squirrel

Richardson's Ground Squirrel

Piute Ground Squirrel (E)

Muskrat

Urocitellus armatus

Urocitellus richardsonii

Urocitellus mollis

Ondantra zibethicus



Dipper chicks being fed. Photo by Josh Engel.



Juvenile Northern Saw-whet Owl. Photo by Josh Engel.



Trumpeter Swan on Swan Lake in Yellowstone. Photo by Josh Engel.



Black Bear mama and cubs (at a safe distance!). Photo by Josh Engel.