



# COLORADO BIRDING

**Prairies, Foothills, Sagebrush, and Rocky Mountains!**

**June 21-27, 2017**

**A birding trip organized by Colorado Birding Adventures  
and Seven Ponds Nature Center**



**Alpine Tundra RMNP July 2016**

Despite having no ocean coastline, Colorado's bird list of more than 500 species ranks in the top ten among U.S. states because of the great variety of habitat. We will explore the unique mix of habitat and birds of each of Colorado's five major life zones. The biggest variable is elevation--for example, within a fifty mile radius of Fort Collins, the elevation varies by nearly 10,000 feet. And every 1,000 foot change in elevation is similar to traveling north about 700 miles.

Birding Colorado in the summer months will bring us face-to-face with the breeding birds of the prairies and mountains. On this tour we will begin our birding in the Pawnee National Grasslands, then move on to the foothills of northern Colorado, and finish near the snow-capped peaks of Rocky Mountain National Park. Our tour will be led by

Colorado birding guide Carl Bendorf of *Colorado Birding Adventures*, and *Seven Ponds Nature Center* Executive Director Daryl Bernard.

## **TOUR ITINERARY**

Our daily activities will be flexible based on species we've seen to date and recent bird reports, but this outline provides a preliminary plan of how we will spend our days.



**DAY 1 - WEDNESDAY, JUNE 21 - Arrival in Denver; shuttle to Fort Collins; evening birding in the Fort Collins foothills.** At 5,003 feet in elevation, Ft. Collins is located right at the base of the foothills representing the transition between the vast eastern Colorado prairies and the soaring Rocky Mountains. After we pick up a picnic dinner, we'll make our first foray into the foothills and its many specialty birds including White-throated Swift, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Western Wood-Pewee, Hammond's, Dusky, and Cordilleran Flycatchers, Western Kingbird, Plumbeous Vireo, Black-billed Magpie, Violet-green Swallow, Mountain Chickadee, Bushtit,

Pygmy Nuthatch, Townsend's Solitaire, Virginia's Warbler, Bullock's Oriole, Spotted Towhee, and Lesser Goldfinch. We will have more chances for foothills birding over the coming days but tonight we will stay until dark to listen for Common Poorwill in Lory State Park and possibly spot one as they perch/hunt from the road. Night at the Best Western Kiva, Ft. Collins.

**DAY 2 - THURSDAY, JUNE 22 - Pawnee National Grasslands for the Dawn Chorus; birding throughout the day in the grasslands.** We'll Leave Ft. Collins very early to arrive in time for the spectacular dawn chorus at the Pawnee National Grasslands. Described by author/birder Pete Dunne as one of his favorite birding destinations, Pawnee is one of the most intact examples of short-grass prairie in the Great Basin and a must destination for any birder. We will have roughly 200,000 acres nearly to ourselves as we search for the resident breeding species including Ferruginous and Swainson's Hawks, Golden Eagle, Prairie Falcon, Burrowing Owl, Mountain Plover, Say's Phoebe, Rock Wren, Lark Bunting, McCown's and Chestnut-collared Longspur, and Brewer's and Cassin's Sparrows. We will also see the occasional Common Nighthawk utilizing the only available day-perch in sight--a roadside fence post. If we're lucky, we may even find Long-billed Curlew or Sage Thrasher. Bring your sun hats, there isn't much shade on the grasslands!



After a picnic lunch at Crow Valley Park (where all the Colorado birders go to look for eastern warblers!), we'll check several water areas on our way back to Ft. Collins for Cinnamon Teal, Western and Clark's Grebe, American Avocet, Black-necked Stilt, White-faced Ibis, and Yellow-headed Blackbird. Night in Ft. Collins.

**DAY 3 - FRIDAY, JUNE 23 - Foothills around Fort Collins and Boulder.** In the morning we will make several hiking forays into the foothills west and south of Ft. Collins to pick up birds missed on our first evening including Black-chinned Hummingbird, Lazuli Bunting, Yellow-breasted Chat, Woodhouses's Scrub-Jay (recently split from the Western Scrub-Jay), Pygmy Nuthatch, Canyon Wren, Bushtit, and Black-headed Grosbeak. We will also make a special effort to follow up on any recent sightings of the erratic Lewis's Woodpecker or Pinyon Jay. After lunch in Lyons we will bird



our way north and west and then drive up the scenic Cache la Poudre river valley (American Dippers!) with our first crossing of the Continental Divide at Cameron Pass at 10,276 feet. On our way down into North Park, we'll stop to look for Gray Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, Pine Grosbeak, and Red Crossbill. Night in Walden at the historic Chedsey Motel.

**DAY 4 - SATURDAY, JUNE 24 - Walden a.k.a. "North Park" (Jackson County).** North Park (one of Colorado's large high mountain valleys) is one of the best places in the state to see Greater Sage-Grouse outside of the spring lekking season and we'll start out early driving the back roads in sagebrush country. Other birds we may encounter in the Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge include Cinnamon Teal, American Avocet, Mountain Bluebird, Sage Thrasher, and Brewer's Sparrow. California Gulls and Eared Grebes nest on nearby Walden Reservoir. We will also make a special effort to locate Sagebrush Sparrow which is at the eastern edge of its range in North Park.

In the afternoon, we'll drive/bird our way to Grand Lake, the western portal to Rocky Mountain National Park, where we will enjoy two nights in the unique rustic Daven Haven cabins, which all feature restrooms and full kitchens. Note: sleeping in some cabins feature a queen bed and a sleeper sofa.



**DAY 5 - SUNDAY, JUNE 25 - Rocky Mountain National Park - West Slope.** First thing, we will enter Rocky Mountain National Park and drive directly without stopping to the top of Trail Ridge Road (12,183 feet). Here we will be well above treeline on the highest continuously paved road in the U.S. and the breeding habitat of Brown-capped Rosy-Finch and White-tailed Ptarmigan. Both are relatively common but very difficult to locate and it's important to look before the summertime crowds spook the birds away from the trails. We will be moving slowly due to the altitude with

plenty of time to enjoy the spectacular scenery and the distraction of nesting Horned Larks and American Pipits calling overhead.



Later in the morning, we'll move down either the west or east slope through the sub-alpine (10,000-11,500') and montane (8,000-10,000') life zones which each have their own distinct mix of birds. Here we will find Williamson's and Red-naped Sapsuckers, American Three-toed Woodpecker, Gray Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, Steller's Jay, Green-tailed Towhee, and Western Tanager. Another night in the cabins at Grand Lake.





**DAY 6 - MONDAY, JUNE 26 - Rocky Mountain National Park - East Slope.**

Similar to the day before, we'll start again in the RMNP alpine tundra for a second chance at the rosy-finch and ptarmigan. Next, we will work our way back down the east slope through the most scenic and birding hotspots including the Lava Cliffs, Rainbow Curve, Endovalley, and more. By this time, we should have also seen plenty of Mountain Chickadees and Townsend's Solitaires so we will continue looking for any sub-alpine and montane species we've missed including Dusky Grouse, Band-tailed Pigeon, American Dipper, MacGillivray's Warbler, and Cassin's Finch. A specific goal for the afternoon will be a hike at Wild Basin hoping for a glimpse of a Northern Pygmy-Owl or a Black Swift soaring overhead with the White-throated Swifts. Of course, RMNP is also a great place for spotting Elk, Moose, Bighorn Sheep, Mountain Goats, and a plethora of smaller mammals.



**Along Trail Ridge Road June 2016**

Late in the afternoon, we will stop in Allenspark where numerous hummingbird feeders host hordes of Broad-tailed Hummingbirds with a possible Rufous or Black-chinned mixed in. Night in Denver for easy morning shuttle to Denver Airport.



**DAY 7 - TUESDAY, JUNE 27 - Departure for home.** We will be staying at a hotel near the Denver Airport with complimentary shuttle service to the airport. Schedule your return flight for any time Tuesday.

**PLEASE NOTE - Physical Requirements and Tour Pace:** Participants should be aware of the potential effects of altitude and take steps to prepare including proper hydration. We will start at lower elevations and our highest days will be toward the end of the trip. Our hiking will be geared for those who are acclimating. If you have health conditions (heart, breathing, etc.) or concerns about the impact of moderate activity at higher elevations, please consult with your physician.

Several of our days will start very early to put us in position for the best birding and allow us to take it easier in the afternoon heat. We will travel comfortably in vans with plenty of personal space, and our average driving will be roughly 100 miles a day with regular stops for bathrooms and birding.

## **Tour Leaders**

**Carl Bendorf** is a lifelong birder, Colorado resident, and experienced birding guide who founded Colorado Birding Adventures in 2016. Carl is past-president of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union, founder of Iowa Young Birders, and current member of the American Birding Association Board of Directors. Carl especially enjoys sharing Colorado's scenery and bird life in a friendly, relaxed, knowledgeable manner with all who join him on the grasslands and slopes of the Rocky Mountain state.

**Daryl Bernard** is a long-time birder and amateur naturalist who loves being outdoors and embraces every opportunity to share nature with others. Daryl is the Executive Director at Seven Ponds Nature Center in Lapeer County (starting date February 13, 2017).

Carl and Daryl are working together planning this trip so that every participant fully enjoys the experience. Our goal is to put you in position to see the birds and take in all the splendor of this region of Colorado.

## **Fee and Registration Information**

- Tour Fee: \$1600 per person in double occupancy from Denver
- Deposit: \$300
- Final Payment Due: May 5, 2017
- Group size is limited to 12 individuals and early registration is encouraged

**WHAT THE TOUR FEE INCLUDES:** full guide service - Carl will be with us every step of the way; lodging for six nights; all meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 7; van transportation, park entrance fees, pre-trip information and a post-trip mailing with a list of all species observed by the group.

**WHAT THE TOUR FEE DOES NOT INCLUDE:** your airfare to/from Denver; snacks and additional drinks; alcoholic beverages; laundry services; personal items; gratuity for our local birding guide (optional).

**REGISTRATION WILL OPEN ON TUESDAY, JANUARY 17, 2017**

**Registered participants will be mailed a registration form to return with their tour deposit.**

**To register for this tour, please call SEVEN PONDS NATURE CENTER at (810) 796-3200.**

**For more information, please contact Daryl Bernard at (989) 513-5195 or [dfbernard1963@gmail.com](mailto:dfbernard1963@gmail.com).**

**\*\*\*ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF CARL BENDORF\*\*\***