



Alberta, Canada, 20th July - 10th August 2003



Our family holiday started with a 9 hour flight from Manchester to Calgary Airport arriving in early afternoon, after picking up our car hire we set off east into the prairies where we were going to spend the first three nights near Brooks. It was very hot (high 30's). We were on the edge of the eastern Alberta irrigation area with grasslands scattered with sloughs giving way to the badlands, perfect for birding. The sloughs held a large variety of birds including Am White Pelican, 5 species of grebes including the large western grebe, Black Tern, 13 species of ducks and 15 species of waders including Am Avocet, Black-necked Stilt and Wilson's Phalarope.



There were very few trees but where there were they were full of birds. The most notable being Baltimore Oriole (stunning), Gray Catbird, Am Goldfinch, Eastern and Western Kingbirds and Great Horned Owl, The prairies had one of our favorite birds for the trip, Western Meadowlark and also Chestnut-collared Longspurs, Prairie Falcon and Ferruginous Hawk.



Eastern Kingbird



Chestnut-collared Longspur & Western Meadowlark

On the fourth day we headed North out of the prairies and into parkland where we stopped near Edmonton. This area is all lakes and woodlands. One day we visited Beaverhill Lake, this lake is about 20 miles long and has a greatest depth of 6 feet. As soon as we arrived, still 1km from the lake shore, we could see thousands and thousands of shorebirds, gulls and ducks, it was a staggering sight as we approached the lake, fighting against the heat haze. In total on the 200m stretch of shoreline visible in the haze we could identify 15 species of wader and this was only the very start of the migration period. Some of these waders were, Willet, Wilson's and Red-necked Phalarope, Stilt, Least, Western and Baird's Sandpipers and American Avocet.



Killdeer

At our B&B the owner had feeders that were inundated by Ruby-throated Hummingbirds with White-breasted Nuthatches in the trees. In the nearby town, Tofield, there were lots of Purple Martin boxes full of birds.



Ruby-throated Hummingbird

Elk Island National Park was a good site for mammals with Bison, Moose, Beavers and Ground-squirrels plentiful. In these woods there was the characteristic song of the White-throated Sparrows and lots of woodpeckers.



Bison

From here we headed to the cooler Rocky Mountains on the 10th day but on arrival we discovered bush fires, far from cool. We stayed in Jasper and on the first morning, to get away from the smoke which had blanketed the valley, we headed up the chairlift at the Whistlers. We were the first to arrive at the summit and were rewarded with a group of incredibly confiding White-tailed Ptarmigan. Also Gray-crowned Rosy-finch, Golden Eagle and lots of small rodents Pika, golden-mantled ground squirrels and hoary marmots.



White-tailed Ptarmigan

After 3 nights we headed south to Castle Mountain near Banff. On the way down a visit to Lake Louise produced Clark's Nutcracker. At the log cabin there was a group of bread eating Gray Jays and Calliope Hummingbirds, Dark-eyed Junco, Varied Thrush, and nearby Am Dipper with Black Swifts over head and an Osprey nest on the road bridge.



Dark-eyed Junco & Clark's Nutcracker

On the 3rd August we headed back to the edge of the prairies at Black Diamond. On the way here we stopped at a garage, not to fill up but because there was a magnificent show of 9+ Rufous Hummingbirds. Near Black Diamond we stumbled over a party of 70+ Mountain Bluebirds and Say's Pheobe, a nice bonus for an evening drive. Earlier in the day we visited a scenic waterfall, to our surprise a single duckling was fighting against the falls determined to get to the top, most probably a Harlequin Duck. Birds of prey were numerous in this area, mainly Swainson's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawks, Bald Eagles and Am Kestrels.



Rufous Hummingbird



Say's Pheobe

For the last four days we headed to the very picturesque Warterton National Park which lies on the US-Canada border. This journey produced Wild Turkey, Red Crossbill and Cedar Waxwing.



Cedar Waxwing

An evening visit to a small lake resulted in a female Moose emerging from the forest for its evening meal which appeared to be on the bed of the lake. The first time we've seen a swimming Moose. An Early morning drive around the forest meant that we could see Spruce and Blue Grouse on the grass verges. Whilst out in the Rockies you have always got to be alert for the berry eaters which might cross your path, bears. We saw 5 Black Bears on the holiday but to our relief they were all from the car.

In the town site of Waterton there was a family of Bighorn Sheep and Mule Deer. Bird wise there was a few Violet-green Swallows and at a waterfall on the edge of the town there was an Am Dipper under the bridge and after a while a family of Harlequin Ducks popped up at the base of the waterfall, 1 female and 4 Juvs.



American Dipper



& Harlequin Duck

On the last day we got up early and on a road side lake there where two large white birds, Trumpeter Swans, the first and most endangered species of the trip and also a Common Loon with a colony of Cliff Swallows on the bridge. Whilst we were there the swans became very agitated and to our surprise a group of 3 Coyotes came down to the lake shore.



Mule Deer & Trumpeter Swan

On the way back to Calgary we stopped at Frank Lake. This was alive with birds, White-Faced Ibis, Cinnamon Teal, Northern Harrier and Marsh Wren. Then on it was to the airport where we had a 5 hour delay but this did not affect the fact that we have had a great 3 weeks birding. TOTAL SPECIES - 194 not to mention 23 species of mammals and all those that remained unidentified!



Photographs taken by Margaret, Nicola and Mark Breaks