SOUTHERN IDAHO AND THE CASSIA CROSSBILL

June 6-12, 2023

Bradford/Percival

This, our fourth year in Idaho, proved to be a wonderful year for birds and scenery. We spent time in the small mountain town of Stanley, ID in the heart of the Sawtooth Mountains where we finally found American Dipper and Clark’s Nutcracker along with many other birds. The weather was splendid, the sights magnificent, and of course the tour group was wonderful as well.

After a comfortable night in Boise and an early morning miss on Chukar we headed north and east to private feeders in Idaho City where we had great looks at male and female White-headed Woodpeckers, along with numerous Cassin’s Finches, Spotted Towhee, White and Red-breasted Nuthatch, along with great photo opportunities for Calliope and Black-chinned Hummingbirds. What a treat this was. After a nice restroom break and a brief bird stop in Idaho City, we visited one of our favorite cemeteries, Pioneer Cemetery just north of Idaho City where we found Dusky Flycatcher, Cassin’s Vireo, Red Crossbill, and lovely looking Yellow-rumped Warblers in full breeding plumage. After Idaho City, we pressed on going north and east making stops at Hayfork Campground, Bad Bear Campground, Mores Creek Summit, and Whoop-Um-Up Campground finding Stellar’s Jay, MacGillivray’s and Townsend’s Warbler, Olive-sided and Hammond’s Flycatcher, and nice looks at several male Western Tanagers.

In Stanley we checked into the lovely High Country Inn where we enjoyed fine dining and pleasant Stanley hospitality. The Stanley Ranger Station Sewage Ponds were certainly productive offering up Cinnamon Teal, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Greater and Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Ruddy Duck, Wilson’s Phalarope, perched Bald Eagle, and Brewer’s Sparrow. The nearby Sawtooth Fish Hatchery produce many of the same duck species plus, a female Barrow’s Goldeneye and male Common Merganser, Ring-necked Duck, a nearby Golden Eagle being harassed by a male Northern Harrier, Violet-green and Northern Rough-winged Swallows, a nearby American Dipper that was dipping, a beautiful Mountain Bluebird, Brewer’s Blackbird, Western Tanager, and stunning looking Audubon’s Yellow-rumped Warbler. The town of Stanley is a charming mountain town that has a few birds to see as one walks to and from breakfast. We had Black-billed Magpies and Mountain Bluebirds watching us as we walked to breakfast, a Black-chinned Hummingbird bathing in a nearby fountain, and plenty of swallows, including Violet-green. We ended up seeing the Mountain Bluebird, the Idaho State Bird, on several occasions and loved seeing that particular shade of blue.

On our way to Twin Falls from Stanley we had to stop, observe, and photograph a most cooperative Clark’s Nutcracker, and a perched Loggerhead Shrike. In Twin Falls we settled in for two nights and plenty of birds, along with time at the “Niagara Falls of the West”, Shoshone Falls. Everyone loved the sights and sounds of this waterfall on the Snake River. We made our requisite stop at Diamondfield Jack Campground where we had nice looks at Cassia Crossbill, Cordilleran Flycatcher, Williamson’s Sapsucker, and on our way out of the campground a soaring Northern Goshawk that remained right above us allowing photos to be taken. What a great way to end our day in the mountains.

The following day we drove through sagebrush country to Brockman’s Hummingbird Feeding Station and surprisingly encountered a Gray Partridge that was on the side of the road, but not showing well, though well enough for some quick photos before we continued deeper into the sage. In the heart of the sage, we encountered our first of many Ferruginous and Swainson’s Hawks, California Quail, Warbling Vireo, a lone Gray Flycatcher pumping its tail, Sage Thrasher, Brewer’s and Lark Sparrow, a stunning male Lazuli Bunting, and the ever-present Yellow Warbler. Yellow Warbler appeared on more of our ebird checklists than any other species. The Brockman’s Feeding Station is sort of a marvel. There are about thirty well stocked feeders in a cluster of trees amid the sage that are maintained by someone, though I have never met them I gladly contribute to their sugar fund each tour. While sitting on the benches provided, we had close up views of Calliope, Broad-tailed, and Black-chinned Hummingbirds, along with a House Wren investigating a house. After the Brockman’s we returned to US 93, once again passing through the sage and once on US 93 it was a short thirty minute drive to lunch and birds in Jackpot, Nevada. Here we had an enjoyable picnic lunch while tallying Common Nighthawk, Western Kingbird, American Kestrel, and Prairie Falcon. An evening outing after dinner to the 81 Bypass Ponds east of Twin Falls proved worth the time with our first and only Ring-necked Pheasant, Pied-billed, Eared, and Western Grebe, American Avocet, Long-billed Curlew, our only Snowy Egret and only White-faced Ibis, Bank and Northern Rough-winged Swallow and Western Meadowlarks singing away.

After two nights in Twin Falls it was time to bird our way back to Boise, the Capital of Idaho and home to the Broncos of Boise State University. Our first stop, Hagerman WMA, proved to be a good one with Wood Duck, Franklin’s and California Gull, Caspian Tern, numerous American White Pelican, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Western and Eastern Kingbird, Black-billed Magpie, Marsh Wren, Bullock’s Oriole, a rare to Idaho, Great-tailed Grackle, Western Tanager, and Black-headed Grosbeak. While leaving the nearby Hagerman Rest Area, one of the finer in the state, we encountered a lone Great Egret, adding another species to our growing list that would eventually surpass all other Idaho Tour species lists. After crossing the Snake River once again we ended up at Mountain Home Reservoir for more ducks, more grebes, our first Black-necked Stilt, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Horned Lark, and Red-tailed Hawk. Stops at Indian Creek Reservoir and Blacks Creek Bird Reserve added Say’s Pheobe, Clark’s Grebe, and Forster’s Tern to our growing list of birds. Once in Boise we settled in for a fine dinner and then made our way to one last stop before flights home in the morning. We cruised past the Capital Building on our way to Hulls Gulch Reserve and Anna’s and Black-chinned Hummingbird, Western Wood-Pewee, numerous Bank Swallows visiting nests in the face of a nearby cliff, Bewick’s Wren, Lesser Goldfinch, Song Sparrow, and of course Yellow Warbler.

This was a wonderful tour to Idaho during a wonderful time of the year, temps were pleasant and birds plentiful. The views of the rugged Sawtooth Mountains, forming the boundary between Idaho and Montana, will soon not be forgotten.

We are probably going to skip Idaho in 2024, but plan to return in 2025.