

MONTANA OWL WORKSHOP

APRIL 25 – 30, 2013

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TOUR REPORT
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By Denver Holt

I would not have thought last year's Montana Owl Workshop could have been matched. After all, we saw 8 species of owls, and Victor Emanuel was with us. Yet, to my surprise, this year we again saw 8 species. Indeed, we got Barn, Great Horned, Great Gray, Northern Pygmy, Northern Saw-whet, Boreal, Long-eared, and Short-eared. The only differences were the Snowy Owl we saw last year and the American Barn Owl we saw this year.

The Barn Owl roosted calmly in an old barn. Based on its color, it looked to be a female. In between the horses and mules and their droppings, we set our scopes and viewed the owl from 50 feet. As usual, Great Horned Owls were common and we found at least 10 nests with moderate to large-sized chicks—superb looks. The density of Great Horned Owls here is one of the highest I know of anywhere, with a pair about every square mile, or equivalent to every old farm house with mature trees.

I didn't think last year's Great Gray Owl observation could be topped, but it was tied. We put ourselves in good position for an evening observation, and one of our participants noted a large low-flying bird gliding through the forest. Within five minutes we had it. We rolled everyone under the barbwire fence, hiked to the meadow, and viewed the owl for an hour. As if that weren't good enough, we heard a second owl and found it perched high in a fir tree within the forest. It was a pair and they were courting.

Once again we scored well with elusive cavity nesters. We watched a male and female Northern Pygmy-Owl hanging out near a nest. Here they preened, copulated, and flitted around the area. Later that morning we found a nesting female Saw-whet Owl. She sat at the cavity entrance and obliged us for several minutes before becoming bored and dropping back down. As always, the search for the Boreal Owl is a hard one, and during our last opportunity, within the last minutes of the tour, at the last nest box, on the last day, in a blizzard—we found a female. She also obliged us for several minutes and dropped back into the cavity. In each of these cases we viewed the owls from less than 100 feet and had outstanding scope looks.

We found a nesting Long-eared Owl, but she was very difficult to observe. However, this was a great example of the owl's cryptic life style and behavior. Fortunately, as part of a long-term study, we were able to observe researchers band adults and discuss the Long-eared Owl project, the need for wildlife research, and adaptations in owls. This portion of the trip is always educational as it lets the public know why we conduct wildlife research and some of the methods used, and presents a first-hand look into this profession.

We rounded-off the species list with some good looks at Short-eared Owls as they cruised over the grasslands in moth-like flight. Short-eared Owls have declined dramatically in North America, so any looks at this handsome open country species are welcomed.

The owl workshop is a unique trip. It is far more than birding and field marks, as it introduces the participants to methods they can use to find owls. We delve into owl life history, evolutionary adaptations, and ornithology in general. It also gives a bit of insight into the world of wildlife research and wildlife researchers.

COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	#
Waterfowl	Anatidae	
Snow Goose	<i>Chen caerulescens</i>	x
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	x
Wood Duck	<i>Aix sponsa</i>	x
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	x
American Wigeon	<i>Anas americana</i>	x
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	x
Cinnamon Teal	<i>Anas cyanoptera</i>	x
Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	x
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	x
Green-winged Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	x
Canvasback	<i>Aythya valisineria</i>	x
Redhead	<i>Aythya americana</i>	x
Lesser Scaup	<i>Aythya affinis</i>	x
Bufflehead	<i>Bucephala albeola</i>	x
Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	x
Barrow's Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala islandica</i>	x
Hooded Merganser	<i>Lophodytes cucullatus</i>	x
Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	x
Ruddy Duck	<i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>	x
Trumpeter Swan	<i>Cygnus buccinator</i>	x
Pheasants, Grouse and Allies	Phasianidae	
Gray Partridge (I)	<i>Perdix perdix</i>	x
Ring-necked Pheasant (I)	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	x
Ruffed Grouse	<i>Bonasa umbellus</i>	H
Loons	Gaviidae	
Common Loon	<i>Gavia immer</i>	x
Grebes	Podicipedidae	
Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>	
Horned Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	x
Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>	x
Cormorants	Phalacrocoracidae	
Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>	x
Pelicans	Pelecanidae	
American White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i>	x
Hérons, Egrets and Bitterns	Ardeidae	
Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>	x
New World Vultures	Cathartidae	
Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>	x
Osprey	Pandionidae	
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	x
Hawks, Eagles and Kites	Accipitridae	
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	x
Northern Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	x
Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	x

Rough-legged Hawk	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>	x
Falcons and Caracaras	Falconidae	
American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>	x
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	x
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	
Prairie Falcon	<i>Falco mexicanus</i>	
Rails, Gallinules and Coots	Rallidae	
American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>	x
Cranes	Gruidae	
Sandhill Crane	<i>Grus canadensis</i>	x
Plovers and Lapwings	Charadriidae	
Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	x
Stilts and Avocets	Recurvirostridae	
Black-necked Stilt	<i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>	x
American Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra americana</i>	x
Sandpipers and Allies	Scolopacidae	
Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>	x
Long-billed Curlew	<i>Numenius americanus</i>	x
Pectoral Sandpiper	<i>Calidris melanotos</i>	
Long-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>	
Wilson's Snipe	<i>Gallinago delicata</i>	x
Wilson's Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus tricolor</i>	
Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>	
Gulls, Terns and Skimmers	Laridae	
Bonaparte's Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus philadelphia</i>	
Franklin's Gull	<i>Leucophaeus pipixcan</i>	
Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>	x
California Gull	<i>Larus californicus</i>	x
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	x
Pigeons and Doves	Columbidae	
Rock Pigeon (I)	<i>Columba livia</i>	x
Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>	x
Eurasian Collared-Dove	<i>Strptopelia decaocto</i>	x
Owls	Strigidae	
Great Horned Owl	<i>Bubo virginianus</i>	x 12+
Northern Pygmy-Owl	<i>Glaucidium gnoma</i>	x 2
Great Gray Owl	<i>Strix nebulosa</i>	x 2
Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>	x 3
Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	x 3
Boreal Owl	<i>Aegolius funereus</i>	x 1
Northern Saw-whet Owl	<i>Aegolius acadicus</i>	x 1
Swifts	Apodidae	
White-throated Swift	<i>Aeronautes saxatalis</i>	x
Hummingbirds	Trochilidae	
Calliope Hummingbird	<i>Stellula calliope</i>	x
Kingfishers	Acledinidae	
Belted Kingfisher	<i>Cerlye alcyon</i>	x

Woodpeckers	Picidae	
Red-naped Sapsucker	<i>Sphyrapicus nuchalis</i>	x
Downy Woodpecker	<i>Picoides pubescens</i>	x
Hairy Woodpecker	<i>Picoides villosus</i>	x
Northern Flicker	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>	x
Pileated Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>	x
Tyrant Flycatchers	Tyrannidae	
Say's Phoebe	<i>Sayornis saya</i>	x
Western Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus verticalis</i>	x
Eastern Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus tyrannus</i>	
Crows, Jays and Magpies	Corvidae	
Steller's Jay	<i>Cyanocitta stelleri</i>	x
Black-billed Magpie	<i>Pica hudsonia</i>	x
American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	x
Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	x
Larks	Alaudidae	
Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>	x
Swallows	Hirundinidae	
Tree Swallow	<i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>	x
Violet-green Swallow	<i>Tachycineta thalassina</i>	x
Northern Rough-winged Swallow	<i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>	x
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	x
Chickadees and Tits	Paridae	
Black-capped Chickadee	<i>Poecile atricapillus</i>	x
Mountain Chickadee	<i>Poecile gambeli</i>	x
Nuthatches	Sittidae	
Red-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta canadensis</i>	x
White-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta carolinensis</i>	x
Creepers	Certhiidae	
Brown Creeper	<i>Certhia americana</i>	
Wrens	Troglodytidae	
Marsh Wren	<i>Cistothorus palustris</i>	x
Dippers	Cinclidae	
American Dipper	<i>Cinclus mexicanus</i>	
Kinglets	Regulidae	
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	<i>Regulus calendula</i>	x
Thrushes and Allies	Turdidae	
Mountain Bluebird	<i>Sialia currucoides</i>	x
Townsend's Solitaire	<i>Myadestes townsendi</i>	x
American Robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>	x
Varied Thrush	<i>Ixoreus naevius</i>	
Mockingbirds and Thrashers	Mimidae	
Starlings	Sturnidae	
European Starling (I)	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	x
Waxwings	Bombycillidae	
Cedar Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>	
Buntings, Sparrows and Allies	Emberizidae	

Spotted Towhee	<i>Pipilo maculatus</i>	H
Savannah Sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>	x
Song Sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>	x
White-crowned Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>	x
Dark-eyed Junco	<i>Junco hyemalis</i>	x
Troupials and Allies	Icteridae	
Red-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>	x
Western Meadowlark	<i>Sturnella neglecta</i>	x
Yellow-headed Blackbird	<i>Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus</i>	x
Brewer's Blackbird	<i>Euphagus cyanocephalus</i>	x
Siskins, Crossbills and Allies	Fringillidae	
House Finch	<i>Carpodacus mexicanus</i>	x
Pine Siskin	<i>Spinus pinus</i>	x
Old World Sparrows	Passeridae	
House Sparrow (I)	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	x

MAMMALS

Squirrels	Sciuridae	
Hoary Marmot	<i>Marmota caligula</i>	
Yellow-bellied Marmot	<i>Marmota flaviventris</i>	x
Red-tailed Chipmunk	<i>Eutamias ruficaudus</i>	
Least Chipmunk	<i>Eutamias minimus</i>	
Yellow-pine Chipmunk	<i>Eutamias amoenus</i>	x
Richardson's Ground Squirrel	<i>Citellus richardsoni</i>	
Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel	<i>Citellus lateralis</i>	
Columbian Ground Squirrel	<i>Citellus columbianus</i>	x
Red Squirrel	<i>Tamiasciurus hudsonicus</i>	x
Fox Squirrel	<i>Sciurus niger</i>	x
Weasels, Skunks	Mustelidae	
American Marten	<i>Martes americana</i>	
Long-tailed Weasel	<i>Mustela frenata</i>	
Short-tailed Weasel	<i>Mustela erminea</i>	
River Otter	<i>Lutra canadensis</i>	x
Striped Skunk	<i>Mephitis mephitis</i>	x
Mice, Rats, Voles, Lemmings	Cricetidae	
Muskrat	<i>Odonatra zibethica</i>	x
Beaver	Castoridae	
Beaver	<i>Castor canadensis</i>	
Hares & Rabbits	Leporidae	
Mountain Cottontail	<i>Silvilagus nuttalli</i>	
White-tailed Jackrabbit	<i>Lepus townsendi</i>	
Snowshoe Hare	<i>Lepus americanus</i>	
Raccoons	Procyonidae	
Raccoon	<i>Procyon lotor</i>	
Porcupine	Erithizontidae	
Porcupine	<i>Erithizon dorsatum</i>	
Bears	Ursidae	
Black Bear	<i>Ursus americanus</i>	
Grizzly Bear	<i>Ursus horribilis</i>	
Cats	Felidae	
Bobcat	<i>Lynx rufus</i>	
Mountain Lion	<i>Felis concolor</i>	
Dogs	Canidae	
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes (vulpes) fulva</i>	
Coyote	<i>Canis latrans</i>	x
Pronghorn	Antilocapridae	
Pronghorn	<i>Antilocapra americana</i>	
Deer	Cervidae	
Mule Deer	<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>	x
White-tailed Deer	<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>	x
Elk	<i>Cervus canadensis</i>	x

Sheep, Goats Cattle

Bovidae

Mountain Goat

Oreamnos americanus

Bighorn Sheep

Ovis canadensis

American Bison

Bison bison

x

REPTILES

Turtles

Emydidae

Western Painted Turtle

Chrysemys picta belli

x