



Alberta Birds and Dinosaurs Trip Report (Jun 3 - 7, 2025)

[Link: Alberta Birds and Dinosaurs Trip Report \(Jun 3 - 7, 2025\)](#)



Our group

What a whirlwind tour this was. Full days of birding in perfect weather meant it was hard to keep on schedule as the bird highlights just kept coming and slowing us down! An amazing visit to the Royal Tyrrell Museum included a behind-the-scenes tour, and we were inundated with jaw-dropping fossils

one after another. Truly a remarkable and unforgettable tour that had it all.

Day 1: Meet-and-greet dinner at the hotel.

Day 2: Irricana Sloughs, Horseshoe and Horsethief Canyons

The first part of the day was all about the sloughs and the piles of ducks and shorebirds that reside there. Setting up our spotting scopes at each site allowed us to leisurely study and enjoy everybody in their finest breeding regalia! At our first stop the reed beds were full of gaudy Yellow-headed Blackbirds singing their hearts out, while the pond had White-winged Scoter, Ruddy Ducks, Canvasback, Lesser Scaup, American Wigeon, Gadwall, Northern Shoveler and Blue-winged Teal. The next slough netted us some gorgeous Cinnamon Teal and singles of Northern Pintail and Green-winged Teal. Shorebirds were well represented with the very elegant Black-necked Stilt and American Avocet, Marbled Godwit, Wilson's Phalarope, and Willet. Heaps of Eared Grebes started to make an appearance on the ponds with their finely separated wispy yellow plumes showing nicely. Hundreds of American White Pelican were fishing in a few places, and Ring-necked Duck was also added to the list. Other waterbirds revealed themselves such as Red-necked Grebe and Forster's Tern.



Yellow-headed Blackbird © Michael Kennedy



American Avocet © Michael Kennedy

A healthy picnic lunch was had at Horseshoe Canyon, and Vesper Sparrow, Cedar Waxwing, and Spotted Towhee kept everyone busy while we laid out the spread. Appetites satiated, dessert came in the form of Mountain Bluebird served on a fencepost as it bought lunch to it's babies inside a nesting box. Descending into the canyon, we viewed Rock Wren and Say's Phoebe along the cliffs, while Least Flycatcher and Gray Catbird preferred the shrubbery. After a few minutes spent looking for dinosaur fossils, and Jody quickly pointed out some shards of dinosaur bone and petrified wood. Butterflies are front and centre on this tour as well, and the dainty Melissa Blue with it's distinctive orange spots was differentiated from the previously seen Western Tailed-Blue.



Horseshoe Canyon © Adam Timpf



Mountain Bluebird carrying food for nestlings © Adam Timpf

A final breathtaking stop at Horsethief Canyon where a cooperative Lark Sparrow added to the day list, while another Rock Wren and Mountain Bluebird made appearances.



Horsethief Canyon © Jody Allair

Day 3: Shortgrass Prairie and Dinosaur Provincial Park

Before we could set our scope up on an active Ferruginous Hawk nest, a Prairie Falcon came bombing in out of nowhere and was quickly harassed by a noisy Willet. Disappearing as quickly as it arrived, while searching for it we also turned up a Western Kingbird, Swainson's Hawk, and Baltimore Oriole. After enjoying the Ferruginous family, one last surprise revealed itself as a Common Nighthawk took flight and put on a great aerial display in amazing morning light.



Common Nighthawk © Michael Kennedy



Ferruginous Hawk family © Michael Kennedy

Cruising down some roads there were Loggerhead Shrikes on some roadside fences, Western Meadowlarks were everywhere, and Swainson's Hawks were downright abundant. At another choice location, we had Sprague's Pipit singing overhead but they were frustratingly difficult to spot against the clear blue sky. A pair of Upland Sandpipers announced their arrival with their distinctive whistle as they flew in and we enjoyed prolonged scope views of this iconic grassland shorebird.



Western Meadowlarks © Michael Kennedy



Swainson's Hawk © Michael Kennedy

Moving along, from the van we picked up a Short-eared Owl sitting in the grass just off the road, before taking flight over the grasslands and giving everyone a look. The second Prairie Falcon of the day caused us to pull over and watch it circling in the sky before it tucked in its wings and dropped like a rock! Stooping after some unknown prey, it was a special moment to watch this falcon show off its incredible speed and hunting technique. The morning was already filled with highlights but the next stop produced more grassland icons. A pair of Long-billed Curlews with their ridiculously long and curved bills were walking not far from the road while Chestnut-collared Longspurs displayed beside the vans. A female even perched on a fence wire so we could get scope views of her long claws on the hind toes. A distant Marbled Godwit added to the shorebird tally for the day.



Long-billed Curlew © Adam Timpf



Chestnut-collared Longspur © Adam Timpf

After a refreshment stop in Cessford, we were off to the Dinosaur Provincial Park viewpoint where we enjoyed spectacular views of the park, as well as Mountain Bluebird, Vesper and Lark Sparrow, and a cool butterfly called an Anise Swallowtail. Another delicious picnic lunch, and more sightings of birds like Rock Wren, Clay-coloured Sparrow, and Spotted Towhee, while Violet-green Swallows were new for the trip with their iridescent green backs. The big highlight here was watching a Prairie Rattlesnake bask in her crevice from a safe and respectable distance. We made one more quick stop in the park to observe a dinosaur skeleton laying in situ that's been protected for visitors to see exactly how it was found.



Dinosaur Provincial Park © Adam Timpf



Prairie Rattlesnake © Adam Timpf

The day that wouldn't end continued with a brief stop at the Hoodoos, a rock formation that looks otherworldly, and a delicious dinner at the Last Chance Saloon where we had a male Ring-necked Pheasant afterwards.



Hoodoos © Adam Timpf

Day 4: McMullen Island and the Royal Tyrrell Museum for Palaeontology

This morning we started at McMullen Island at Midland Provincial Park, switching things up and looking for forest inhabitants like woodpeckers, thrushes, and flycatchers. We recorded Downy, Hairy, and Pileated Woodpeckers, as well as Northern Flickers that showed intermediate traits of both the Red-shafted and Yellow-shafted subspecies. Black-capped Chickadees were feeding their babies, while White-breasted Nuthatches crept along the cottonwoods. Veery were singing in a few spots, but remained out of sight, while a few perched California Gulls along the river allowed for some gull study.



Visiting the Royal Tyrrell Museum for Palaeontology in Drumheller is a major highlight of this trip, and made even more special by a behind-the-scenes tour that was arranged for our very lucky group. Not only were we able to enjoy world-class dinosaur fossils in a work-class museum, but we were able to see many fossils that aren't on display, fossils that are being worked on, and talk to experts in their fields about the museum and the prehistoric plants and animals housed there. Truly a remarkable place that puts into perspective how incredible the fossil deposits are in Alberta.



The incredibly well preserved dinosaur Borealpelta markmitchelli © Adam Timpf



Behind the scenes © Jody Allair

Following the museum we made our way to Orkney Viewpoint, briefly stopping on the way to look at a Bald Eagle nest. At the viewpoint we added a few new (albeit distant) birds in the form of Belted Kingfisher and Common Merganser along the river. Making tracks for our hotel in Calgary the final bird species of the trip was a Gray Partridge that flew across the road.



Orkney viewpoint © Jody Allair

At our final dinner together we reminisced about the bird and fossil highlights, and how it was a remarkably successful tour that fit so many incredible moments into just a few days.

Day 5: Departure from the hotel.

[Alberta Birds and Dinosaurs Tour \(June 3 - 7, 2025\) eBird list](#)