



Alberta Birds & Dinosaurs Trip Report (May 27 - 31, 2026)

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Day 1 - May 27

Our tour began at the hotel in Calgary where we met our group and got to know everyone over a nice meal. Everyone was excited to start exploring this incredible part of the country.

Day 2 - May 28 (Irricana Sloughs and Drumheller Valley)

With clear skies and warm weather in the forecast, we began our birds and dinos adventure birding around the Irricana sloughs. This amazingly productive area east of Calgary is an excellent place to observe most of Alberta's wetland breeding ducks, grebes and shorebirds. We started at Bruce Lake where the local celebrity pair of White-winged Scoters gave us distant views. White-winged Scoters are a rare breeding species in southern Alberta with the majority of birds breeding much further north into the Boreal Forest. Black Terns, displaying Wilson's Snipe and outstanding views of Yellow-headed Blackbirds rounded out a pretty great first stop. Throughout the morning we managed to round up all of our target species including Cinnamon Teal, American White Pelican, Red-necked and Eared Grebe, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet and Wilson's Phalarope.



American White Pelican © Yousif Attia

After a quick bathroom stop at Beiseker we headed off to Bleriot Ferry Provincial Recreation Area for a picnic lunch and some forest birding in the cool riparian Western Cottonwood forests along the Red Deer River. In addition to our first Western Wood Pewees, Brown Thrashers and a bonus Ruby-throated Hummingbird, we also spotted a regionally rare Sagebrush Checkerspot butterfly.



Sagebrush Checkerspot © Yousif Attia



Bleriot Ferry © Jody Allair

After lunch we traveled across the Red Deer River on the Bleriot Ferry (always a highlight with the group!) and made our way to Horsethief Canyon. While enjoying the incredible views we discussed the geologic history of the area and the keys to identifying all the various layers of sedimentary rock that make up the badlands. Our crew also got to hear our first Rock Wrens of the tour along with a bonus Orange-crowned Warbler. Right after leaving Horsethief Canyon we made a quick stop to admire a pair of Mountain Bluebirds and while watching these incredible birds, Yousif picked up a Prairie Falcon circling overhead. Our day wrapped up with an excellent dinner in Drumheller.

Day 3 - May 29 (Prairie Birding and Dinosaur Park)

We left Drumheller early, eager to experience the incomparable dawn chorus of the increasingly rare Canadian short grass prairies. Within minutes we managed to see Pronghorns and Coyotes out on the plains. Our first stop produced amazing views of nesting Ferruginous Hawks and Swainson's Hawks. Loggerhead Shrikes and Western Kingbirds were constantly trying to get our attention while a nearby Baird's Sparrow was singing just out of eye shot.



Birding the prairies © Jody Allair



American Badger © Yousif Attia

As we drove deeper into the prairies we had great encounters with Upland Sandpiper, Marbled Godwit, Willet, Horned Lark, Sprague's Pipit (found displaying overhead by Yousif), more Baird's Sparrows and Ferruginous Hawks. The big target this morning is getting to see Long-billed Curlew and displaying Chestnut-collared Longspurs. Two species that represent the short grass prairie region, and much like the ecosystem, are becoming increasingly rare in western Canada. We

managed great views of both species with some of the Chestnut-collared Longspurs even perched close by on the fence line. The bonus bird of the day was Lark Bunting. This species is having a northward irruption this spring and we were treated to the incredible display of several males. An absolutely outstanding morning of birding.



Lark Bunting © Yousif Attia



Ferruginous Hawk © Yousif Attia

From here we headed south to Dinosaur Provincial Park. Along the way we stopped to watch an American Badger actively digging up a burrow - a lifer mammal for almost all the participants. As is tradition, we stopped at the Dinosaur Park viewpoint to take in the spectacular views and also look for a couple regionally rare butterflies—which we found! Melissa Blue and the rare Anise Swallowtail appeared for our group right on cue. After a relaxing and scenic picnic lunch along the river we headed out on the trails to look for birds and with luck some snakes. The heat was really setting in this afternoon so the bird activity was a little quiet, however we did manage to find Lark Sparrows, a Rock Wren nest building inside an old Cliff Swallow nest and Violet-green Swallows. As we drove over the campground bridge a couple people from the back of the vans shouted out about a snake having a bath along the river. We quickly got out and had great views of a bathing Prairie Rattlesnake—another lifer for many of the participants.



Dinosaur Park Trail © Jody Allair

Reluctantly we had to leave this magical place and head back to Drumheller. Along the way we made a quick stop at the Hoodoos and had a wonderful dinner.

Day 4 - May 30 (McMullen Island and the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology)

Our day started with some birding at one of my favourite local birding spots - McMullen Island. Here we were treated to more forest birds including Veery, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (including a black-crowned morph female), Baltimore Oriole, Wood Duck and a Least Flycatcher nest building.



Yellow Warbler © Yousif Attia



Birding McMullen Island © Jody Allair

After a wonderful morning of birding, we headed to the museum to learn more about the prehistoric animals and plants that called this area home over 70 million years ago. Upon arriving we were treated to a behind the scenes tour with one of the curators where folks got to learn more about the collections and inner workings of this incredible place. We don't often get to have this experience and so this was a great bonus for our crew.



Behind the scenes at the Tyrrell Museum © Jody Allair

After lunch we spent a couple more hours exploring this world class facility. We then packed up and headed off to Orkney Viewpoint, after a quick stop to check out the baby Bald Eagles along the river. From here we managed to get absolutely outstanding eye level views of Violet-green Swallows while a Spotted Towhee did some hide and seek with our group. We then left the Red Deer River Valley and made our way back to the hotel in Calgary where we enjoyed a final meal and reminisced about all the amazing highlights from our whirlwind tour of this wonderful part of the world. Until next time.



Enjoying the view © Chris Ellingwood



Our group © Jody Allair