



## **Canadian Rockies: Waterton Lakes trip report (May 28 - Jun 2, 2024)**

[Link: Canadian Rockies: Waterton Lakes trip report \(May 28 - Jun 2, 2024\)](#)

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This year's Canadian Rockies: Waterton Lakes tour did not disappoint! The eastern slopes of the Canadian Rockies in Alberta are legendary for both landscape scenery and wildlife viewing opportunities. Neither disappointed as our group traveled west of Calgary to explore parts of Kananaskis Country, eventually working our way to Waterton Lakes National Park. We found 134 species of birds as well as iconic mammals, butterflies, and flora that make this part of the world so renowned.



*Waterton Lakes National Park © Gareth Thomson*



*Red Rock Canyon, Waterton Lakes National Park © Gareth Thomson*



*Red Rock Canyon © Jody Allair*

Mammals came out in full force: one guest was heard to murmur during our visit to Waterton Lakes National Park, paraphrasing a line from the Wizard of Oz: 'Bisons and Badgers and Bears, oh my!' Our numerous bear sightings included a foraging mother with 2 cubs of the year, who entertained us all with their playful boxing matches.



*Black bear and cubs © Elizabeth Szekeres*



*Bighorn Sheep © Elizabeth Szekeres*

Temperatures were lower than normal, and a late Spring meant that a few of the later-migrating birds had not yet arrived in the area - but it was still Spring, and the riot of birdsong and a full palate of resplendent colours had our guests leaning into the birding. This was a good natured and keen group, ranging in age from 29 to, well, older than 29: they all wanted to experience every birding opportunity, including the optional pre-breakfast birding and optional post-dinner birding.



*Dawn birding © Gareth Thomson*



*Birding in Waterton Lake burn © Jody Allair*



*Our group*

Experienced guide Jody Allair shared his knowledge at every return, sharing his love of winged mammals and winged insects, pointing out the difference between the Myrtle and Audubon subspecies of the Yellow-rumped Warbler, and helping us see the intergrades (birds that share characteristics of both subspecies).



*Jody with Uhler's Arctic © Gareth Thomson*



*Yellow-rumped Warbler (Audubon subspecies) © Chantel Imbealt*

Even this group's voracious appetite for birds was satiated at Frank Lake, a spectacular large lake and wetland complex just east of High River: guests simply did not know which way to look as the ecosystem gave a spectacular display of bird diversity and abundance, from the squadron of regal White Pelicans patrolling the airways, to rare views of a Sora Rail sharing its breakfast nook with a Yellow-headed Blackbird.



*Blind at Frank Lake © Gareth Thomson*

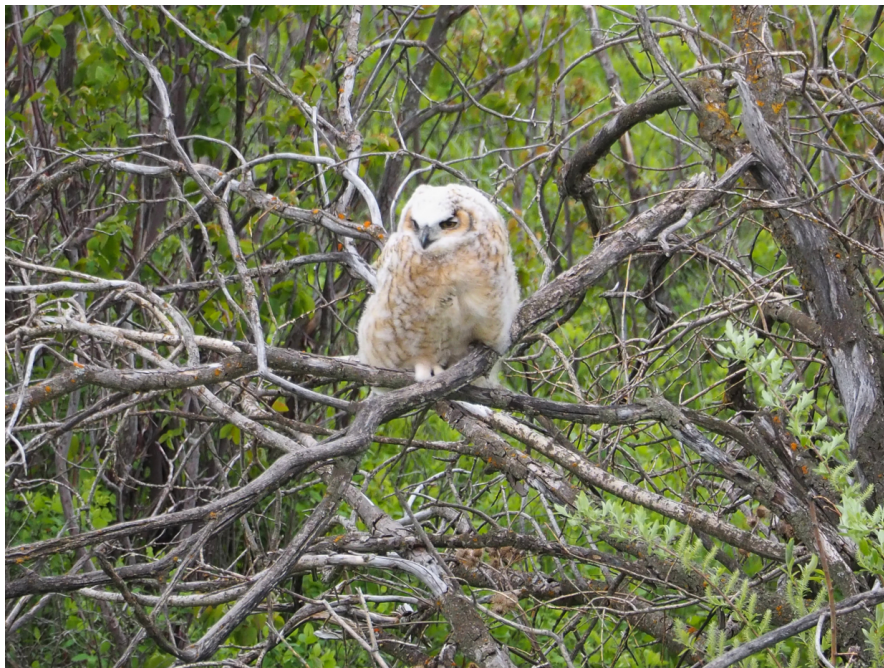


*White Pelicans © Elizabeth Szekeres*



*Sora Rail and Yellow-headed Blackbird*

Even the driving did not disappoint, with Swainson's Hawk, Western Meadowlark, and Mountain Bluebirds (as blue as the Alberta sky!) swirling around us as we drove, like confetti at a wedding. One keen-eyed guest spotted a recently fledged Great Horned Owl by the roadside; and later we all got great looks at a regal adult through our guides' telescopes.



*Great Horned Owl fledgling © Chantel Imbealt*



*Mountain Bluebird © Elizabeth Szekeres*

We were surprised and delighted to see an unprecedented swirl of no fewer than five turkey vultures circling overhead in Kananaskis Country, evidence of their recent range expansion. We viewed dazzling Harlequin Ducks most days, freshly returned from their migration - from the west, not the south, flying from the Pacific Ocean where they spend their winters.



*Harlequin Duck © Elizabeth Szekeres*

Some birds seemed intent on putting on a show for us, from numerous wonderful views of Western Tanagers, to a Red-naped Sapsucker that did all the normal sapsucker things - then channeled its

inner chickadee as it clung upside down to an aspen twig.



*Red-naped Sapsucker* © Elizabeth Szekeres



*Western Tanager* © Elizabeth Szekeres

And we were proud to invent a new bird collective noun: a Deluge of Dippers, including one pair that repeatedly dove through the mist at Waterton's Cameron Falls to feed three chicks in their mossy nest, mere inches from the pounding tumult of the cataract...



*American Dipper feeding three nestlings © Elizabeth Szekeres*

[Canadian Rockies: Waterton Lakes Bird List \(May 28 - Jun 2, 2024\)](#)