



## **COLORADO “Chicken Odyssey” - TRIP REPORT April 8-18, 2004**

**By Adrian Binns**

**Leaders: Adrian Binns and Mike Fritz**

### **Day 1 / April 9 : Barr Lake State Park; Beebe Draw; Loloff Reservoir; Lindies Lake; Pawnee Grasslands; Rte 71 North of Fort Morgan**

A cold raw start to the day got worse as the day progressed. Temperatures never got out of the low 30's and there was a steady rain, but despite the unexpected start to the trip we had a very successful day hitting our target species. Beginning at Barr Lake State Park we picked up a White-throated Sparrow amongst the numerous White-crowned at the nature center feeders and after some searching the Harris' Sparrow that had been present for most of the winter was located. After watching it fly off for a short while, it was relocated and everyone got scope views of it. Other good birds included a Red-shafted Flicker, Osprey, numerous Pheasants and a Downy Woodpecker at the feeders. On the lake was a mixed raft of Ruddy Duck, Shoveler, Green-winged Teal, Gadwall, American Wigeon and Mallard. Passing through Beebe Draw most of our birding was done from inside the vans as the rain intensified. We managed to pick up Rough-legged and Swainson's Hawk, Franklin Gulls, Great-tailed Grackle, Blue-winged Teal and Wilson's Snipe. At Loloff we stopped for distant Yellow-headed Blackbirds in the cattails and did the best we could with the viewing conditions at the lake. 3 Greater Scaup, which are rare in Colorado were quickly picked out, and several pairs of Cinnamon Teal including 2 drakes chasing each other was a nice sight, but as the mist began enveloping the pond we spotted 2 Baird Sandpipers working the far side, before it was completely enshrouded. Both yellowlegs, American Avocet, Redhead and Lesser Scaup rounded out a nice start to our waterfowl and shorebird totals. Driving to the Pawnee's we slid the vans in the mud to an unannounced stop at Lindies Lake which held a flotilla of some 150 American White Pelican's in full breeding regalia at very close quarters, accompanied by several California Gulls.

With the vast expanse of the Pawnee's before us our first stop produced a rain soaked Burrowing Owl and a couple of Mountain Plovers. Shortly after, another pair of Mountain Plovers was spotted a lot closer to the road and we had great binocular views. From here we headed to a reliable Chestnut-collared Longspur spot, and sure enough after walking several hundred yards we found about half a dozen birds chasing each other. Unfortunately the rain put a hold on any courting behavior and dampened our views. Next we headed off to look for McCown's Longspurs, finding a Loggerhead Shrike along the way and then locating a flock of some 20 birds that were very co-operative feeding along a track, giving us great comparisons of the 2 longspurs. From the Pawnee's we had a long drive to Wray, that was punctuated with a spectacular sighting of a male Short-eared Owl flying besides the road, before it perched on a fence post at close range.

## **Day 2 / April 10 : Kitzmiller Lek & Ranch; Bonny Lake SP; Nee Noshe & Neeskah Reservoir**

By 5:34AM the first clucks and cackles of the Greater Prairie-chickens were heard and before long there were a number of them booming as we could make out their silhouettes through our bins. As darkness gave way to a little light we were able to witness 2 dozen males facing off with each other over a large area of the lek. The dominant males held center court while those trying out for the first time, namely young birds, were relegated to the outside. Occasionally one would get bold enough to fly into the center only to be driven away by a male whose territory he had just imposed on. He will get his chance in the center, but not before several years on the perimeter. After about half an hour, a group of 3 females worked their way through the subordinates to reach the center and vie for the attention of the dominant males. They were joined by several others and by 6:30AM a total of 18 females were noted. We watched as females chased each other and males displaying by bowing with pinnae and tail erect while stomping their feet and inflating their tympani (air sacs) to make the booming sounds. We witnessed about 6 very brief copulations that involved 3 or 4 males. Other birds we saw while in the blind included 3 Burrowing Owls, Horned Larks, Vesper Sparrow and 5 flyby Long-billed Curlews. By 7:35AM the action had died down and some females headed for the hills, so we closed the blind and made our way to the Kitzmiller's excellent breakfast feast. Returning to the motel in the school bus we spotted a far off group of white geese, and as soon as we got in to the motel we headed out in our vans to check on the geese. Our hunch was correct and they were in fact Ross' Geese, actually 14 of them and as it turned out they were the best looks we had on the trip.

By late morning we reached Bonny Lake and while searching the cedar grove for Long-eared Owls, Theresa heard clicking which she thought sounded like a rail. Soon 2 possible nest sites were located, but neither showed signs of an owl, and as we scanned the surrounding trees Mike spotted a well-concealed Long-ear three-quarters of the way up a cedar tree. The clicking turned out to be the bill snapping. We all got good views of the bird and then moved around to the other side and had even better views as well as seeing a second bird that was just below the first. An Eastern Bluebird pair as well as Blue Jay and Yellow-shafted Flickers were seen near the owl. On the lake we got within 50 yards of 150 Sandhill Cranes, which did not seem phased by our appearances, and picked up Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead and American Coot amongst thousands of other ducks.

On the way to Nee Noshe Reservoir we spotted a Golden Eagle and several Great-horned Owl nests with adults on them, stopping to view a nest close to the road, only to find the mother hiding 3 young from the cold and drizzle. By mid afternoon we arrived at Nee Noshe and Neeskah and found that the weather had actually worked in our favor, by dropping a wide variety of shorebirds, but created tough driving conditions. Slipping and sliding our way through the tracks, one van slid off the road and found the field to have better traction than the road! Baird's seemed as if they were all over the place and at least 3 pairs of Snowy Plovers were seen well. Working the edge amongst those 2 species was a Least, Semipalmated and several Western Sandpipers, Dunlin and both yellowlegs. On the water we found half a dozen Eared Grebe, a dozen Bonaparte's and several Franklin Gulls showing gorgeous pink coloration. Distant Cliff Swallows were also seen.

## **Day 3 / April 11: Campo Lek; Comanche Grasslands; Cottonwood Canyon**

The morning's drive to the lek was longer than usual, poor road conditions made the drive slow and tense, but we got there ahead of one other vehicle. Butch, Karin and Nerses opted for the matchbox-sized blind and were not disappointed with their choice. For the first time in 3 days we had no rain, which was a blessing, and were greeted with a Horned Lark singing as well as a chorus of baying Coyotes. On this overcast morning, the Easter sermon began at 5:27AM with

several Lesser Prairie Chickens clucking and cackling and before long we were seeing birds moving back and forth across their lek, which happened to be on a raised ridge surrounded by grasses and yucca's. Once we had light we were able to pick out an astounding 12 birds, far more than are usually reported at this lek. We were able to see the differences between the two prairie chickens – the darker purple tympani; darker throat; less foot stomping; more running around and jumping as well as hear a completely different vocalization that did not consist of any of the Greater's booming. A highlight included several birds perched in full view on top of yucca stalks, no doubt to see if any females were approaching or to draw attention to themselves. We only saw 1 female and to be honest she did not really seem very interested in the males – maybe it just was not a good day for them. Eastern Meadowlark's were heard singing amongst a few Western's and we got to watch a Cassin's Sparrow skylarking as part of its display. By 7:35AM activity had dwindled to a minimum and we moved on, having witness another great spectacle.

Moving through the Comanche Grasslands we picked up a 'Kriders' Red-tail Hawk and 2 Say's Phoebe's before pulling into an abandoned building for a much needed bathroom stop. Here we were rewarded with wonderful views of 2 Barn Owls as they flew out of a 2 story shed and over to a grass field. On the way to our Ferruginous Hawk spot we came across a very soaked dark morph Swainson's Hawk drying out on a fence post, and walked through a grass field where great looks were had of Vesper Sparrow's and a Grasshopper Sparrow sang 4 times before we were able to locate it briefly. A Ferruginous was on a nest in a lone tree in the middle of a vast expanse of flat grasses while her mate was spotted flying sorties from a tree along a distant fence line.

After a full and lengthy breakfast, and making sure Ron picked up his 725 ABA bird – a Eurasian Collared Dove outside the Grassland Grille, we were off to Cottonwood Canyon, a picturesque section of southeast Colorado which holds various Southwestern species non existent elsewhere in Colorado. Townsend's Solitaire's were first seen, followed by numerous Canyon Towhee's and at the bridge we picked up a calling male Ladder-backed Woodpecker which was being followed by a male Downy Woodpecker! Not only had we never seen this before, we could not work out what was going on! A check of a cottonwood stand produced Rock Wren, Pine Siskin's, an Eastern Bluebird and 2 Great Blue Heron nests next to a Swainson's nest followed by a stand of Gambel's Oak which produced Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Bewick's Wren, Wild Turkey and Spotted Towhee. On the way to the campground a Greater Roadrunner was spotted next to the road and we enjoyed great looks before we high-tailed it out of there. Within a mile stretch we were surprised to come across 4 family groups of Lewis's Woodpecker's, each consisting of a minimum of 8 birds – certainly the most we had ever seen. The area around the campground produced our first bit of sunshine on the trip; Wilson's Snipe, Wood Ducks, Bushtits, Canyon Wren, Hairy Woodpecker and Eastern Phoebe. Heading out of the canyon we came across a group of Mule Deer jumping the fence to cross the road; 17 Desert Bighorn Sheep that were lazing about a winter wheat pasture and a stunning view of a Golden Eagle with a full crop being harassed by a Red-tailed Hawk. On the long ride to Pueblo, Mike almost put a third species on the grill, but luckily the Bobwhite made it across in time.

#### **Day 4 / April 12 : Brush Hollow SWA; Vasco Pond; Royal Gorge; Buena Vista; Granite; Loveland Ski Basin**

Today started off very raw and overcast. Our first stop was Brush Hollow SWA, where Western Bluebirds, Sage Thrasher and Say's Phoebe greeted us at the gate. A scan of the lake recorded Osprey and distant Clarke's Grebes. Walking our way through the juniper we were unable to rustle up a Juniper Titmouse, but did come across a mixed flock of Bushtits, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 'pink sided' Juncos and a Townsend's Solitaire. A quick stop at Vasco Pond produced a pair of Belted Kingfishers, female Common Mergansers and a good variety of swallows

including, Barn, Rough-wing, Tree, Cliff and several Violet-greens and then it was onto Royal Gorge where we had hundreds and hundreds of White-throated Swifts and a Western Scrub Jay. Driving along the Arkansas River towards Salida, we came across a herd of Bighorn Sheep crossing the road and watched them amble their way along the mountainside.

Lunch was taken at the scenic overlook at Buena Vista with the majestic Rockies as a backdrop and Least and Unita Chipmunks running between the junipers. Here we had seven species of corvids, beginning with Black-billed Magpies, Crows and Raven, Stellars and Scrub Jay, Clark's Nutcracker and as we were leaving Ron spotted several Pinyon Jay's which turned out to be a roving flock of 76 birds, giving us great looks at birds perched, on the ground and in flight. A stop in Granite rewarded us with Cassin's Finch, Fox Sparrow, Black-capped Chickadee's and an uncountable Chukar! Our last stop was for the Rosy-finches at Loveland Ski Basin, but the numbers being reported were very few and after 2 hours of waiting and watching all we got was a handful Brown-capped; several pairs of Pine Grosbeak, 'gray-headed' Juncos' and a Coyote that must make the daily rounds once most everyone has left, as he on several occasions came with yards of us.

#### **Day 5 / April 13 : Loveland Ski Basin; Guanella Pass; Windy Gap Reservoir; Arapaho NWR; Walden Reservoir**

A return visit to Loveland was necessary to clean up on the rosy-finches, but despite an absolutely gorgeous hour before the crowds descended upon the slopes, all we had was about a dozen birds, the same Brown-caps as yesterday and a male Gray-crowned which never left the top of the spruce tree. A male Pine Grosbeak put in an appearance, as did a Mountain Chickadee. Following a hearty breakfast at the Happy Cooker, we worked our way up Guanella Pass. It must have been plowed in the last couple of days, as we had no trouble getting to the top. We stopped at the meadow as a small group of birds flew into a spruce and had great eye level looks at a female Red Crossbill followed by a Clarke's Nutcracker and a male Goshawk that was spotted flying high behind the nutcracker. With a bright cloudless sky and balmy temperatures we spread out and scanned and searched for the White-tailed Ptarmigan for several hours. On this day we had to settle for outstanding scenery, as one could not be located. Returning down the pass we picked up a stunning male Red-naped Sapsucker and the second van had a Golden-crowned Kinglet. Our second butterfly (the first being a Cabbage White) of the trip was spotted just before meeting its demise, this being a colorful Hoary Comma.

After lunch we headed to Windy Gap Reservoir, where we had wonderful comparisons of Common and Barrow's Goldeneye as well as Redheads, Ring-necked Duck and a Western Grebe. As we reached the Arapaho NWR we were greeted by several immature Golden Eagles, one in flight and one perched on a telegraph pole. As it turned out the wildlife drive was closed, due to muddy conditions from the 6 inches of snow that they received 48 hours previously, but we did manage great looks at a singing Sage Thrasher as well as Richardson's Ground Squirrels and White-tailed Prairie Dogs. After a quick check in at the motel it was off to Walden Reservoir, where we had a wide assortment of waterfowl including Red-breasted Merganser, American Avocet, Canvasback and good numbers of Eared Grebe as we were mooned by a girl in a passing car! The first of several Prairie Falcons on the trip was seen briefly as it swiftly made its way through the park.

#### **Day 6 / April 14 : Coalmont Lek; Rabbit Ears Pass; FR400/Glenn Echo; Hayden Lek**

An early start was necessary to get to the Greater Sage Grouse lek, and as soon as we pulled in we could hear the popping of the air sacs. As darkness faded about a dozen males were

visible all in close proximity to each other and we could see these majestic birds in their full glory; spiked tails fanned out, and white ruffs expanding as their air sacs inflated to maximum capacity for a second as they make their popping sound. Several other males entered the arena from the surrounding sage and were soon joined by five females. Males would display to whoever would pay attention and occasionally chase a younger male out of their territory. The females were quite happy wandering about in the center of the lek with about 5 males vying for their attention. It was not long before a female lay down and copulation took place, and this was followed shortly thereafter by 4 other copulations, though it looked as if one of the females did not participate on this day. After copulation the females wandered off the lek and by 6:30AM only 1 was left along with a dozen males and the activity had by now quieted down considerably. One flew off and the rest soon followed. From here we decided to check a neighboring road, and as luck would have it, we came across the mother lode displaying on either side of the road – at least 64 of them given us unbelievable looks at the air sacs, tail feather patterns and filoplumes.

Heading towards Steamboat Springs, a light morph Rough-legged Hawk was perched on a post; an immature Golden Eagle was on a telegraph pole and at Rabbit Ears Pass a Gray Jay was spotted perched on a short spruce beside the road, which prompted us to stop. It soon flew off before the second van could get a look at it, but we did get great views of Pine Grosbeaks, Hairy Woodpecker and heard Red-breasted Nuthatch and Golden-crowned Kinglets.

After breakfast we made our way along Forest Road 400 North West of Steamboat Springs to check on numerous feeders and pick up American Dipper. It did not take long to locate several pairs, as they were nest building under 2 bridges less than a mile apart. We watched as they picked up moss and flew to the nest, which at this stage looked as though it was only half built. Evening Grosbeaks were calling and soon located while the feeders at a ranch held Stellar's Jay, Black-capped and Mountain Chickadee and Cassin's Finch. Along the Yampa River 2 Bald Eagle nests were spotted including one that had a pair at the nest. Lunch was taken north of Hayden, but was delayed a while as Michael found a female Blue Grouse while looking for a convenient spot to relieve himself! She was very cooperative affording us great views at close quarters. Searches of the oaks lead to flushing a male that flew off into a dense section and was never relocated. Spotted Towhee's and Cooper's Hawks were nest building and a Vesper Sparrow was singing. Being the warmest day of the trip to date, we actually had a good showing of butterflies, including numerous Sara's Orange-Tips, several Old World Swallowtails and Mourning Cloaks as well as a Sheridan's Hairstreak. Golden-mantled Ground Squirrels and Least Chipmunk's were running about near the Blue Grouse spot and a Yellow-bellied Marmot or two were seen along the forest road.

### **Day 7 / April 15: Rte 20 lek south east of Hayden; Coal Canyon; Steve's house in Palisade's; Blue Mesa Reservoir**

By 5:45AM we could hear the clucking and tail rattling of Sharp-tailed Grouse. The lek was at the top of a hill, with patches of tall grasses, about 100 yards below us. Once it was light enough to see, we could make out their elaborate and synchronized display. With wings outstretched and bowed, they would all come to a complete stand still for at times as long as a minute. Then all together they would start up again, moving around in circles, cackling and clucking, showing off their purple tympani and occasionally running off in a short straight line. Five females were on the lek to attract the attention of the males, and we witnessed 3 copulation's, though Larry no doubt saw more. On one occasion a younger male was driven off the lek, only to fly to the next nearest hill, which just happened to be right where we were standing, but due to the tall grasses where he was displaying, most of the time he was just out of sight, with the exception of when he would jump up or fly a short distance. The show went on until 7:05AM when a 2<sup>nd</sup> year Bald Eagle was spotted heading towards to the lek, which alerted us to the possibility that the show

was about to end. By the time the grouse had spotted the eagle, one took off followed by 33 others and this morning's wonderful show was over. Returning to Craig we stopped for the Bald Eagle that was now perched by a roadside pond, which had a pair of Sandhill Cranes working the edge, as well as an assortment of waterfowl.

It was a long but scenic ride to Cameo, where we planned to eat lunch and look for the elusive Chukar. Our friend Steve had staked out a spot earlier in the week, and we followed his directions to a T. First climbing a steep track and then traversing the sage, outcroppings and scree before hearing a Chukar clucking. It was finally pinpointed between Butch and Mike while the group was assembled to get a look. The bird was hunkered down behind a small boulder making it tough for those above the bird to see, but it flushed shortly after and gave us great looks at it in flight as it flew off down the canyon never to be seen again. While having lunch a pair of Golden Eagles flew overhead and began their courting display, and these would be 2 of an amazing 7 birds we would see over the course of the day. After lunch we walked the sagebrush and juniper into the canyon finding Blue-grey Gnatcatcher, Brewer's Sparrow and a number of Black-throated Sparrows, and a Prairie Falcon was briefly spotted before disappearing into the "Bookcliffs". Also seen in the canyon were 2 groups of Wild Horses including a foal.

In the afternoon we made a customary stop to our friend Steve's house, to pick up Gambel's Quail, which happened to be singing atop a brush pile and also saw a pair of Lewis's Woodpeckers. While searching for a Western Screech Owl we came across a small nest in a spruce in his neighbor's yard, which happened to have a Great Horned Owl sitting on it. That quickly put an end to any hope of a screech owl! Our drive to Gunnison, which this year for the first time happened to be in the day light, was nothing short of superb, the scenery and landscape simply stunning. Along the way we added Cattle Egret to the list and a search for Sage Sparrow only turned up Sage Thrashers.

### **Day 8 / April 16: Waunita Hot Springs Lek; Parlin wetlands; Monarch Pass; Tunnel Drive; Canon City Arkansas Riverwalk; Brush Hollow SWA**

Under a crystal clear sky with the Milky Way in full view and a new moon fading behind the distant hills we watched as many as 14 Gunnison Sage Grouse displaying on their lek. Though throughout the week we had witnessed all the leks pretty much by ourselves, today was different with several other groups present – about 45 of us in all, with most in a blind and the rest of us behind a screen. Though the distance from the lek was great we were able to see the differences between this species and its cousin the Greater. The filoplumes were greater in number and longer, and thrown over their head as they expand their airsacs and strut. We could also see that the contrasts on the bands on their tails were stronger than the Greater's. Just as the light was getting bright enough for everyone to really enjoy the finer details, both Theresa and Marianne witnessed a Coyote rushing the lek causing the birds to flush, flying right over our heads. It was wonderful sight, but little compensation for the short time that we were able to study them. By 6:10AM the show was over, but everyone had one more life bird, include Butch for whom this was number 600.

After breakfast and watching Gunnison Prairie Dogs outside the motel, we made a stop at the Parlin wetlands that produced Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Wilson's Snipe and a group of 34 Sandhill Cranes. Reaching Monarch Pass a Gray Jay was spotted flying between perches and good views were had of this boreal species. In Canon City we visited Tunnel Drive and saw 2 cooperative Rufous-crowned Sparrow's, Rock Wren and got to hear Canyon Wren's, though Michael and Marianne did get a brief glimpse of it. An Osprey put on a good show circling around the steep canyon wall against a beautiful blue sky.

We took our lunch and a toast to Butch's 600 with champagne at the Canon City Riverwalk and followed it with a mile hike along the Arkansas where our first warbler of the trip was seen well – several 'myrtle' and an 'Audubon's' Yellow-rump Warbler. Three Evening Grosbeaks was a surprise close to the trail. On the river we saw Cinnamon and Blue-wing Teal; Wood Duck; a pair of Kingfishers and a Solitary Sandpiper. Flying overhead a group of 14 Franklin's Gulls and a mixed flock of swallows including Barn, Bank, Tree and Violet-green was seen. Our final stop was at Brush Hollow to look for Juniper Titmouse, which eluded us on our last visit. After spreading everybody out, a group of us picked up bushtits and a Chipping Sparrow while Mike ran into the VENT group, who were also having a tough time locating it. One of their group said, "I think I have a Titmouse", and sure enough we had as good a look at 2 birds as we have ever had on this trip.

### **Day 9 / April 17: Genesee Park; Loveland Ski Basin; Guanella Pass; Echo Lake on the road to Mt. Evans; Crawford Gulch Road**

An early morning start was needed for the long drive into the Rockies west of Denver. By 7:30AM we were birding Genesee Park, where we hoped to pick up new species in the Ponderosa Pines. Pygmy Nuthatches and Mountain Chickadees greeted us as soon as we arrived and we soon heard a Williamson's Sapsucker calling. Tracking it down we got great views of the male and female on a dead pine tapping a duet. A Brown Creeper flew into the same tree and soon all three birds flew off in different directions. We soon relocated the sapsuckers and noticed that there were two additional birds and watched as a pair of Western Bluebirds was investigating a potential nest site 8 feet up a large ponderosa pine tree trunk.

Our next stop was at Loveland for a return visit to see if the Black Rosy-Finch was around, but this morning was absolutely gorgeous with bright sunshine and high temperatures, and all we saw were Red-winged Blackbirds and siskins. The rosy's had no doubt left for greener pastures on this day. After picking up sandwiches for lunch it was off to Guanella and our date with North American's most elusive bird, the White-tailed Ptarmigan. Luck was definitely on our side as we pulled in. Joe Morlan and his friends were just reaching the car park, and after a few pleasantries, they pointed us in the right direction to 2 birds they had just seen. It took a few minutes, but sure enough there were the 2 birds - actually there were 8 birds in all, most hunkered down in the snow at the base of a boulder and blending in perfectly. Several got up and started to walk towards the willows where they picked the buds before being joined by the others. From there they continued up the hill towards a stand of stunted spruce before settling down around a group of boulders. We approached cautiously and managed to get within 20' of the group, delighting all the photographers. Being above the timberline at 11,000 plus feet in such a scenic setting on a picture perfect day with 8 ptarmigan at ones feet is one of those moments none of us are ever going to forget. Returning down the road we had a few Red Crossbills and siskins picking up grit on the road, and Ron, Tom, Carol and Harvey had a Fox Sparrow on their walk before I picked them up to return back up the hill to see the ptarmigan.

Karin needed one more bird to reach 600 so we headed up Mt. Evans road to Echo Lake to see if we could find an American Three-toed Woodpecker. Hairy Woodpecker we soon found and a Gray Jay came in to the parking area to look for handouts – we obliged with a few peanuts, but she would not come into those of us that had peanuts in the hand. Here we had great looks at a family of 3 Red Crossbills perched atop a spruce tree and walked up to the campground. The woodpecker could not be located, but we did come across a mixed flock that included Gray Jay, Mountain Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper and Golden-crowned Kinglet. Returning to the car park a Common Raven was spotted making some odd noises and soon after we realized why, as a young male Northern Goshawk came low over its head and over the

car park before circling close by for a while. This was number 600 for Karin. Butterscotch lollipops were handed out to everyone!

Ron had been chasing a couple of owl species all trip so we decided to head to an area where we had Northern Pygmy Owl four years earlier. All was quiet for the first quarter of a mile of our search, then I heard a distance response to my tape, and within minutes we had Western Bluebirds making all kinds of noise. A closer look at the birds revealed that they were mobbing a Pygmy Owl that had perched and was calling from the top of a dead tree. It flew into a spruce and eventually across the road onto a power line where it sat for 5 minutes for all of us to get unbelievable looks. As it turned out it was a lifer for all the participants and a fitting end to an outstanding day.

### **Day 10 / April 18: Loveland Ski Basin**

Our final morning was spent looking for the only target species to elude us to date, the Black Rosy-Finch. Yesterday's beautiful weather meant that it was unlikely the finch would show, and with the forecast looking as if it would turn worse at higher elevations over night we thought that this morning might give us our best chance, should the forecast hold up! Arriving just after 7AM the conditions were certainly worse than at any time during our 3 previous trips. The mountain peaks were dark and there was light snow falling. Everything so far was what we had hoped for; the only problem was there were no birds at the feeders! Pine Siskin's were heard and Pine Grosbeak were about and we even had 2 Western Meadowlarks (at 11, 400') in the car park! By 8 the snow and wind had picked up and 3 flocks of Horned Larks had passed through. Something odd was going on as it was strange to see these last two species at high elevation and yet no finches. Ten minutes later, with everyone's thoughts now on their flights home, a group of 20-some rosy finches came in, far more than we had previously had, and there amongst the Brown-capped, 2 male Black Rosy-Finch's. In the space of minutes everyone had turned from despair to being ecstatic, as it was a lifer for nearly everyone. What a way to end what turned out to be a very successful trip.