

Colorado – December 5 & 6, 2015



Helen Rijkens (helenrijkes@gmail.com)

In December Helen had to spend a week in Denver due to work obligations. This gave the opportunity to spend the weekend in the Rocky Mountains to search for some new birds.

Logistics

Friday afternoon I rented a car with Avis and drove into the mountains to the little town of Silverthorn which is conveniently located along the Interstate 70 at 1,5 hours drive from Denver. I stayed for 2 nights at the Luxury Inn (about \$80 per night).

The next two days I birded several spots in the neighbourhood. Since it was the middle of the winter bird activity was quite low but I still managed to see some nice species. I used Ebird.org for information about the birding hotspots. First day I birded around Silverthorn, the second day I started in Silverthorn and then visited Loveland Pass and Guanella Pass on the drive back to Denver.

Birding around Silverthorn

Most important spot I birded was at Wildernest. This is a bungalow park at the edge of Silverthorn which provided very good birding on two mornings one one afternoon. Especially the NE corner had much bird activity where I walked Spring Beauty Drive and the streets around several times (one of the houses here had bird feeders which attracted tens of Rosy Finches among others). I also drove around the lake (Dilon Reservoir) where I stopped to scan for waterfowl but without much success (only one distant group of Goldeneyes).

Birding at Loveland Pass and Guanella Pass

A big target bird for this weekend was the beautiful White-tailed Ptarmigan (all white in winter plumage). Based on Ebird sightings I tried my luck first at Loveland Pass. I stopped and scanned at two places along the highest part of the road but it was quite busy here with (local) tourists and I did not see any birds. I then drove on to Guanella Pass. This road starts at Georgetown and continues until the Guanella Pass campground. After this point the road was closed due to winter maintenance but I continued walking until you pass the last trees some 3-4 kms further up. This is know as a very good place for the Ptarmigan and after searching for an hour I found a group of 25+ birds (about 200m up and to the right of the Bierstadt trail).

Birding list

- **White-tailed Ptarmigan** – *Lagopus leucurus*: 25+ at Guanella Pass
- **Downy Woodpecker** – *Picoides pubescens*: several at Wildernest
- **Hairy Woodpecker** – *Picoides villosus*: 2+ at Wildernest

- **Steller's Jay** – *Cyanocitta stelleri*: common at Wildernest
- **Gray Jay** – *Perisoreus Canadensis*: 1 at Wildernest (Rocky Mountains plumage with mostly white head)
- **Black-billed Magpie** – *Pica hudsonia*: Common at Wildernest
- **Common Raven** – *Corvus corax*: Common
- **Black-capped Chicadee** – *Poecile atricapilla*: several at Wildernest
- **Mountain Chickadee** – *Poecile gambeli*: very common at Wildernest and several at Guanella Pass
- **Pygmy Nuthatch** – *Sitta pygmaea*: 2+ at Wildernest
- **Gray-crowned Rosy-finches** – *Leucosticte tephrocotis*: Mix group with Brown-capped of 100+ birds at Wildernest
- **Brown-capped Rosy-Finch** – *Leucosticte australis*: Mix group with Gray-crowned of 100+ birds at Wildernest
- **Red Crossbill** – *Loxia curvirostra*: Group of 10+ birds at Wildernest
- **Evening Grosbeak** – *Loxia leucoptera*: Group of 5 birds at Wildernest
- **Pine Grosbeak** – *Pinicola enucleator*: Several at Wildernest and another group of 5+ birds at Guanella Pass