

Birding MALHEUR with the guy that wrote the book

September 7, 2024

By Harry Fuller

There were only four of us on this trip. We were overwhelmed by the birds about us. And the heat. And the smoke that must have prevented so many others from being here. By 1pm it was about 92 degrees at Frenchglen, so we abandoned the Malheur Basin and went upslope. Near the peak of Steens Mountain, 4pm, it was an energizing 66 degrees! We returned to the valley before 5PM—smoke mostly blown away.

There were no highlights, there was just one wonder after another. At least eight nighthawks insect hawking over the Refuge HQ around 8AM. Hundreds of greedy Yellow-headed Blackbirds emptying the feeders at HQ. Away from the feeders we found orange-crowned, yellow and Nashville Warbler. We heard distant cranes but didn't see them.

Next: The Narrows. Eared Grebe. Horned Larks coming in to quench their thirst. Dozens of Red-Necked Phalarope. A passing peregrine. Stilts. Cinnamon Teal and many other ducks. A few Least Sandpipers.

Not much along Harney Lake Road—no raptors, no owls. South to Buena Vista. Vultures sunning on the rocks. Canyon Wren. Pair of cranes, apparently no successful nesting season. Ibis. Say's Phoebe with meal in its beak.

Thence to Krumbo Lane. Krumbo Swamp: two Sora walking about mudflats feeding. Two juvie Black-crowned Night-Herons. Eight Long-billed Dowitcher probing the mud. Uncounted cooterie. Krumbo Lake: Bufflehead, scaup, Redhead, Eared Grebes. Chukar in the boat ramp parking lot!!!! Rock Wren. A stop at the petroglyphs. Picnic at the boat ramp tables.

Benson Pond: many ducks and coots, two Trumpeters with their collars on, Virginia Rail working the marshy margin.

Along Hwy 205: more chukar, a shrike, Sage Thrashers. Frenchglen: cold drinks and an ice cream bar. It is now 92 degrees and a little after 1PM. No reasonable bird is about except floating vultures. Go up, my friend. So we did. Steens Loop north. There is road work so the whole loop cannot be done in one direction.

Mountain Bluebirds at low elevation where junipers dominate. At Fish Lake around 230PM a single Common Poorwill was flycatching overhead. Spotted Sandpiper there. Above the treeline, at least 120 Horned Larks in the tundra. Near the peak: Lark Sparrow, Rock Wren, Rufous Hummingbirds,



wind and cool air. 5000' drop off the East Rim down to the Alvord. Back down the slope a single pond for cattle to use: shovanders and then a swirl of larks arrives for a quick drink and depart.

Late afternoon at Page Springs: Gadwall, Cinnamon Teal, a complaining pheasant, Common Yellowthroat, our only solitaire of the day.

Omnipresent: ravens, red-tails, magpies, dragonflies. Mammals: least chipmunk, pronghorn, jackrabbit, Nuttall's cottontail, a single bat, deer. One reptile: a single lizard.



Why nighthawk images first? Buy a copy of *Edge of Awe* and read that essay in there about this bird.

Other photos:

Ferruginous along Sodhouse Road. Chukar male at Krumbo boat ramp. Feeding mob at NWtr HQ-House Sparrow, quail, YH Blackbirds. Lark atop Steens. Red-tail at P Ranch. Solitaire at Page Springs. Meadowlark and House Sparrow at HQ.



