

Trip Report Wallowa Valley January 2019

The Oregon Birding Association Wallowa Valley field trip with 9 birders was last weekend January 19 and 20, 2019. In addition, I scouted all day Friday and birded Enterprise on Monday morning with a small group before returning to Portland. I'll report on the entire time spent in the valley. The overall report is that Wallowa area winter specialties continue to be few and far between.

We found good numbers of GRAY PARTRIDGE along Golf Course Rd. and connecting grassland roads on Friday and some on Saturday. There was at least one shy AMERICAN TREE SPARROW in a flock sparrow flock on Elk Mountain Rd. The flock also included many WHITE-CROWNED SPARROWS (in my experience uncommon for wintering flocks here) and a single HARRIS'S SPARROW. We covered a lot of ground birding county roads, finding only scattered smallish flocks of HORNED LARKS which we picked through, finding no associated species. Missing in the grasslands were Lapland Longspurs, Snow Buntings, Grey-Crowned Rosy Finches, Redpolls, and except as mentioned above American Tree Sparrows. Perhaps there are some flocks or individuals in the valley but the minimal snow cover meant there were plenty of places for them that were not along roads.

Birding in the towns of Enterprise and Joseph yielded several large CEDAR WAXWING and AMERICAN ROBIN flocks, they were studied for Bohemians with no success. Fruit laden trees in town are just waiting for them. No Redpolls were found in town. MERLINS were keeping an eye on the Robin and Starling flocks.

Raptor numbers were good with many ROUGH-LEGGED HAWKS in all forms, scattered PRAIRIE FALCONS, a few GOLDEN EAGLES, lots of BALD EAGLES, abundant RED-TAILED HAWKS & NORTHERN HARRIERS. No "large falcons" for us.

Wallowa Lake was slow but BARROW'S GOLDENEYES and AMERICAN DIPPER were present. Wind and rain/snow/sleet made for slow birding on our walk up McCully Creek road past the ski area junction.

The trip was bracketed by some pleasant surprises. On Friday evening at dusk, John Allen and I were searching for Western Screech-owls by playing recordings at know sites. At one site a GREAT GRAY OWL responded by flying out of the woods. Wow, quite a surprise for both of us, all the more because it was right in the valley not far out of town. It perched up nicely and stuck around for a bit. A mad scramble for my camera yielded some out of focus photos (below), maybe John got some better shots. We followed up that early evening with a tooting (but yet again unseen!) pair of NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWLS up on Highway 3 north of Enterprise. Sadly, we tried for both species on Saturday but came up empty, rain and wind were not helpful.

Another surprise was at the Enterprise WMA / Fish Hatchery area on Monday morning. An enjoyable morning got pretty exciting when a SWAMP SPARROW popped up out of the fallen winter grass and cattails. After a bit of hide and seek it perched up nicely, Scott Deckelman was able to get some photos. Last year there was a SWSP in the general area, more evidence that it continues to be a good year for that species. We had three BEWICK'S WRENS in the area. Details

at <https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S51903971> all other checklists for the trip are also on eBird as well.

Thanks to all the attendees for great spotting and fun birding. I can't wait for my next chance to bird Wallowa county.

Good birding
Ken Chamberlain
OBA Field Trip Coordinator