

My Camp Colorado Experience

My experience at Camp Colorado was fantastic. From the alpine tundra on Trail Ridge Road, to the Pawnee National Grassland and prairie ecosystems, the birding excursions were really incredible. I enjoyed the activities I participated in, including birding of course, bird banding, and doing point counts throughout the camp.

My favorite birding excursion was by far Pawnee National Grassland (Camp Colorado Challenge), where we woke up at 4:00 am to begin the 2 hour drive to the grasslands. It was an entirely different biome from the one I am used to, and consequently, entirely different birds as well. We found 90 species that day, and seven of them were life birds for me. Some of my favorite birds that day, Thick-billed and Chestnut-collared Longspurs, we found in some spots on the side of the road where both species were performing their flight displays. The fresh breeding plumage of these birds, the displays, and the wide open spaces these birds inhabit were all stunning to me. We also found a pair of Baird's Sandpiper, seven Mountain Plovers, two colonies of burrowing owls, a few Grasshopper Sparrows, and a pair of Clark's Grebes.

The montane and alpine birding was great as well, although not as many unfamiliar birds were found. Nevertheless, I still enjoyed the stunning views of Clark's Nutcracker, Red Crossbill, Pygmy Nuthatch, and Calliope Hummingbird, these birds which I do not see where I live quite as frequently as we saw at camp. So, although the montane birds were somewhat familiar, many birds were found in higher or smaller numbers than what I regularly see on the other side of the Continental Divide.

Bird banding was very interesting. Scott Rashid, the bird bander at the YMCA, did a banding session for our camp one afternoon. I gained a lot of information about the work that he does and the research project he is doing right now with Northern Saw-whet Owls. I got to hold an immature male Broad-tailed Hummingbird, and see other birds up close. I also thought point counts were quite enjoyable, and may be a pretty accurate measure of the birds in that area. Another interesting part of the camp was the "evening programs" given by our instructors. These programs were hour-long presentations about their careers, field work, and research projects they are currently doing. Also, the food was very good! There was a wide selection of food in every meal and most of it was delicious!

In conclusion, Camp Colorado was a fabulous opportunity for me to meet other young birders, (eat great food), and live an entire week dedicated solely to finding birds! I would recommend this camp to any young birder. I am greatly appreciative of the American Birding Association for providing this camp, and especially grateful to Roaring Fork Audubon for giving me the scholarship allowing me to go to this camp.

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