

## Highlights from July 18 Birding Trip to Wigwam Creek

Chuck Aid July 21, 2020 :

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Hayman Fire – 18 Years Later

Wigwam Creek flows east out of the Kenosha Mountains in the Lost Creek Wilderness Area and joins the South Platte River just upstream from Deckers. For almost all of its twenty-two mile length it flows through part of the huge area decimated by the Hayman Fire in 2002 – Colorado’s largest forest fire at 138,114 acres. There are islands of original montane forest habitat that the fire jumped, but much of the area is very much a moonscape of huge granite outcroppings and burned snags. Willows have returned along the creek and the hillsides have some healthy shrubs such as currant and gooseberry. However, regeneration of conifers has been very slow and there is an abundant proliferation of non-native weeds.



So, why did we choose to go to this apparently somewhat uninviting habitat? The fact is that the openness of the area can be appealing to a variety of swallows, bluebirds, and sparrows, and then, in combo with the large diameter snags, it can attract two woodpecker species that are uncommon in our part of Colorado. Lewis's Woodpecker tends to prefer ponderosa pine and piñon-juniper woodlands of the southern part of the state and is often associated with burn areas. Red-headed Woodpecker is an eastern species and Wigwam Creek is about as far west as it gets. It, too, prefers open habitat – primarily deciduous woodlands, but can also be found in burned wildland areas. Interestingly, both these species belong to the genus *Melanerpes* the members of which tend to have a characteristic “kwir” or “chur” call.



We were fortunate to see several Lewis's Woodpeckers, and even saw a pair repeatedly visiting a cavity in a snag and presumably feeding nestlings. A return to this area in another week would probably give us good views of fledglings being fed by mom and dad. We also got to see one of the Lewis's grab a large insect in flight, which is a common feeding behavior for them during breeding season. We also got to see a pair of Red-headed Woodpeckers though we did not see their nest (or at least I didn't).



One other quirky observation was that we were literally stalked by a couple of juvenile Brown-headed Cowbirds. It appeared as though once the parasitized parent felt as though their "baby-huey" adopted child could make it on its own, that the youngster was seeking companionship(?) and food in close proximity to other species, specifically us humans. These guys were fearless and had no compunction about being within a foot of someone – a rather bizarre experience for us.

Good birding!

Chuck Aid

Cheesman Canyon Trailhead and Wigwam Creek

Jul 18, 2020

36 species:

- Mourning Dove 4
- Broad-tailed Hummingbird 8
- Turkey Vulture 1
- Red-naped Sapsucker 6
- Lewis's Woodpecker 7
- Red-headed Woodpecker 2
- Hairy Woodpecker (Rocky Mts.) 2
- Northern Flicker (Red-shafted) 5
- Olive-sided Flycatcher 1
- Western Wood-Pewee 6
- Cordilleran Flycatcher 4
- Empidonax sp. 1
- Warbling Vireo 3
- Plumbeous Vireo 1
- Black-billed Magpie 4
- Mountain Chickadee 3
- Violet-green Swallow 16
- Barn Swallow 1
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet 2
- White-breasted Nuthatch 4
- Pygmy Nuthatch 10
- House Wren 1
- Rock Wren 3
- Gray Catbird 2
- Western Bluebird 6
- Hermit Thrush 1
- American Robin 7
- Cedar Waxwing 3
- Pine Siskin 1
- Lesser Goldfinch 5
- Chipping Sparrow 3
- Song Sparrow 2
- Brown-headed Cowbird 4
- MacGillivray's Warbler 1
- Yellow Warbler 2
- Western Tanager 5

- Lazuli Bunting 1