

## Highlights from June 19 Bird Walk to Beaver Meadows

Chuck Aid. June 20, 2021 :

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Warbling Vireo (c) Bill Schmoker

Beaver Meadows is located in the Mount Evans State Wildlife Area at 9400 feet and has a nice mix of willows, wetlands, and meadows. The hike in is relatively easy with only about 400 feet of elevation gain, passing through a nice variety of forested habitats. Historically, the number of bird species I've recorded on walks here has been between 20 and 33, with an average of 25 species and 145 individual birds per outing. On Saturday we recorded 23 species, only slightly below my average, but we had only 100 individual birds, which is about thirty percent below my average. I'm mentioning all this because it felt on Saturday as though we were really having to work to find any birds at all, and fifty percent of our birds came from just four

species: Warbling Vireo, Mountain Chickadee, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and Dark-eyed Junco. I was particularly disappointed not to see a few more Lincoln's Sparrows and Wilson's Warblers. It's feeling as though we simply have less birds this year. I also noted that the hordes of killer mosquitoes of prior years were not in evidence. So, are we still feeling the repercussions of last year's freezes, fires, and drought that resulted in the starvation of tens of thousands of migrants across the Southwest? I'll be looking forward to input from other birders as the summer progresses.



American Three-toed Woodpecker (c) Bill Schmoker

One of the things we discussed during our walk was how to differentiate woodpeckers based on their drumming. Four of our regularly occurring species have evenly spaced blows creating the classic rapid roll. Two of these are more rapid, in the range of 26 beats/sec – Northern Flicker and Hairy Woodpecker, and they tend to drum for about a full second. The drumming of these two birds is so rapid you can't count the individual beats, and these are the two hardest to tell apart – frequency of drumming and substrate used may be additional helpful factors. Two other evenly spaced drummers are not quite as rapid with their rolls, and you can count the individual beats. Downy Woodpeckers drum at a rate of 17 beats/sec, but because

they tend to drum for only about three-quarters of a second there are only 13 beats/roll. American Three-toed Woodpeckers have a slow drum (14 beats/sec) and a slower drum (11 beats/sec). Both of these drumming episodes last roughly 1.3 seconds. An additional hint with the Three-toeds is that the initial 3-4 taps may be slightly slower and disconnected than the remaining beats (sort of like an old Model A starting up). A fifth woodpecker, the Williamson's Sapsucker, does not have the classic rapid roll. A single drum consists of a series of multiple rolls, with declining beats within each roll, and a steadily declining volume and number of beats within each roll. The closely related Red-naped Sapsucker has a comparable drum but it's a bit more irregular.

Northern Flicker (recordings courtesy of Xeno-Canto)

Hairy Woodpecker

Downy Woodpecker

American Three-toed Woodpecker

Williamson's Sapsucker

I hope our low number of birds was an aberration and that we'll find a few more on our next outing.

Chuck

Beaver Meadows, Jun 19, 2021, 12 participants

23 species

Mallard 1

Broad-tailed Hummingbird 7

Williamson's Sapsucker 2

American Three-toed Woodpecker 1

Cordilleran Flycatcher 5

Warbling Vireo (Western) 9

Canada Jay 2

Steller's Jay (Interior) 2

Common Raven 2

Mountain Chickadee 11

Violet-green Swallow 2

Golden-crowned Kinglet 3

Ruby-crowned Kinglet 22

Red-breasted Nuthatch 1

House Wren 2

American Robin 7

Chipping Sparrow 1

Dark-eyed Junco (Gray-headed) 11

Song Sparrow 2  
Lincoln's Sparrow 2  
Yellow-rumped Warbler (Audubon's) 3  
Wilson's Warbler 1  
Western Tanager 1