

Highlights from June 24 Beginners' Bird Walk at Evergreen Lake

Chuck Aid. June 25, 2021 :



Double-crested Cormorant (c) Bill Schmoker

Evergreen Lake is a great birding destination in part because of the nice mix of habitats in the vicinity, and for beginning birders focusing on habitats is an important step in becoming better at identifying birds. Some of this is obvious; we know that none of the habitats at the lake are suitable for Laysan Albatross or Resplendent Quetzal. However, as we get more realistic and just focus on the birds of the Southern Rocky Mountains, we can begin to see how certain species are more likely to be found in some habitats than others, and in attempting to work out the identification of a bird we can start to make better educated guesses based on where we see it.

Some habitats are easy for us. We all know what a lake, or a marsh, or a shore looks like, and we can make a good guess as to what streamside habitat looks like (though it varies with elevation), but eventually it behooves us to start recognizing a few of the dominant trees – on the eastern plains (cottonwood), low foothills (juniper), high foothills (ponderosa), etc. Knowing the habitat you're in can significantly narrow the options as to a bird you're trying to identify.



Wilson's Snipe (c) Bill Schmoker

So, let's get specific about the habitats at Evergreen Lake and the different birds we saw and heard there on Saturday associated with those habitats. On the lake itself we saw Canada Geese, Mallards, and Double-crested Cormorants. While these guys will all spend a lot of time on open water, they each get their groceries in a different way. Canada Geese are grazers and will spend time on the golf course eating grass. Mallards are omnivorous dabblers, turning their butts upwards as they forage in shallow water for a variety of plant material, invertebrates, and small amphibians and fish. Double-crested Cormorants are piscivores (fish eaters), and we saw one wrestle with about an 8" fish before getting it down the hatch.

Immediately west of the lake where Bear Creek enters there is a nice cattail marsh, and it was here that we heard a Wilson's Snipe calling. They eat insect larvae and spend almost all their time in the marsh. There were also numerous Red-winged Blackbirds in the marsh. As with many birds, they are insectivorous in the

summer (more protein for raising young) and are primarily granivorous the rest of the year. Adjacent to the marsh and along the banks of Bear Creek another habitat is riparian shrubland comprising alder, river birch, and willows. It was here that we saw Song Sparrows singing. Then, a final habitat in this same vicinity is shoreline, and it was here we saw a few Spotted Sandpipers.



Chipping Sparrow (c) Bill Schmoker

To the north of the lake is a south-facing slope that is dominated by ponderosa forest. We heard a Dark-eyed Junco up there and saw a Hairy Woodpecker fly from there across the open valley to some other conifers. Along the south side of the lake, and adjacent to the golf course, the habitat is more of a ponderosa woodland, that is the trees are widely spaced and don't form a closed canopy. Here we heard a Chipping Sparrow, a Western Wood-Pewee, and a couple of Broad-tailed Hummingbirds. One other nearby habitat is on the north-facing slopes which tend to be dominated by a mix of lodgepole pine and Douglas-fir forest. We didn't have time to explore in that direction, but had we done so we might have picked up a few species specific to that habitat e.g. Steller's Jay or Hermit Thrush.

I will continue to emphasize habitat on future walks and hopefully we can all get better at identifying some of our dominant trees and the birds associated with them.

Chuck

Evergreen Lake, June 24, 2021- 3 participants

25 species

Canada Goose 32

Mallard 4

Broad-tailed Hummingbird 5

Wilson's Snipe 1

Spotted Sandpiper 3

Double-crested Cormorant 11

Hairy Woodpecker (Rocky Mts.) 1

Western Wood-Pewee 1

Cordilleran Flycatcher 1

American Crow 1

Mountain Chickadee 1

Tree Swallow 5

Violet-green Swallow 23

Barn Swallow 4

Cliff Swallow 2

American Robin 3

Cedar Waxwing 2

House Sparrow 1

House Finch 6

Lesser Goldfinch 1

Chipping Sparrow 1

Dark-eyed Junco (Gray-headed) 2

Song Sparrow 4

Red-winged Blackbird 19

Common Grackle 14