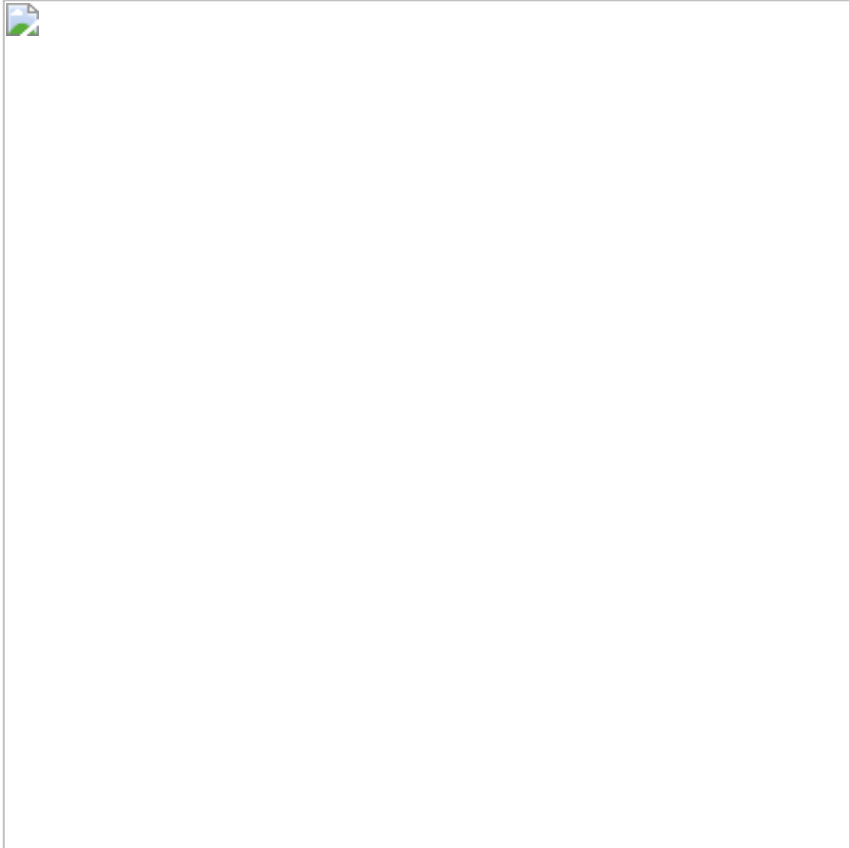


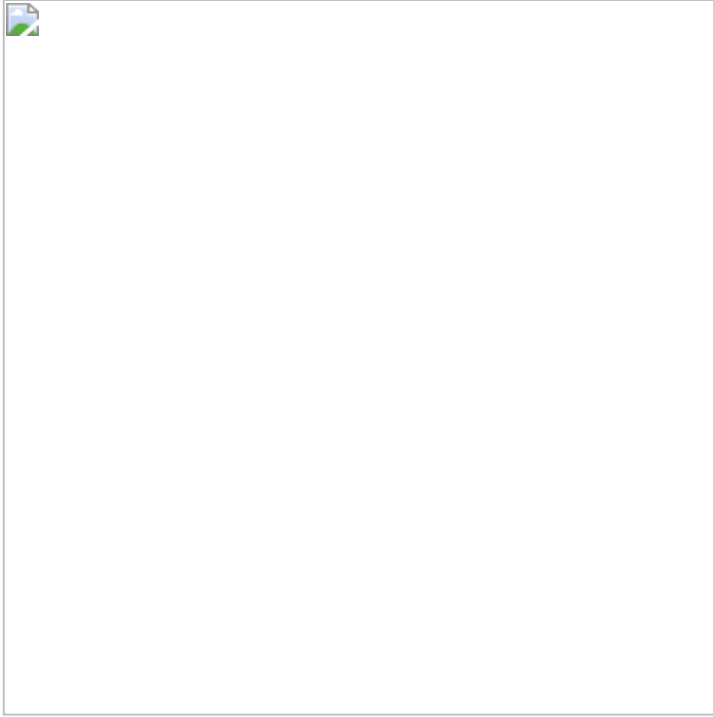
Highlights from November 20 Bird Walk to South Platte Park

Ed Furlong, November 27, 2021 :



Northern Shoveler female (c) Anne Craig

The riverine habitat at South Platte Park with its cottonwood gallery forest, numerous ponds, cattail marshes, and plains shrublands creates a mosaic that invites a wonderful mix of bird species. In particular, the ponds provide a much-needed refuge for waterfowl and shorebirds migrating southward in the fall, and a winter haven for those electing to go no farther. For the most part, ducks, at this time of year, have already acquired their breeding plumage for next spring. Just a few males were still exhibiting the last vestiges of eclipse plumage, the plumage present for a few weeks following the breeding season when they are as cryptically colored as their female counterparts. Other waterfowl, such as loons and grebes, maintain their nonbreeding plumage until late winter or early spring. A few other identification challenges persist with those duck species whose recently fledged juveniles are still in the process of obtaining full adult plumage, e.g. Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, Common Merganser, and Red-breasted Merganser.



Bald Eagle (c) Mick Thompson

In addition to all the waterfowl we saw, there were Black-capped Chickadees, a White-breasted Nuthatch, and a House Finch in the cottonwoods, and Song Sparrows and White-Crowned Sparrows in the abundant rabbitbrush.

Perhaps the most exciting moment occurred towards the end of our walk when one of our party noted a Bald Eagle overhead. Looking up our group was astounded to count 9 Bald Eagles, 3 adults and 6 immatures, all circling and riding the thermals to great height. The moment became even more exciting when two eagles locked talons and tumbled mid-air! The eagle pair did this several times, resulting in spontaneous “oohs” and “ahhs,” as if we were watching a fireworks display, which in both a dramatic and sublime way, indeed we were.



Pacific Loon – nonbreeding (c) Daniel Irons

As a final post-trip moment, several of the group went to Cooley Lake, a more northerly reservoir in the park. We had been alerted by a park naturalist to the presence of a large raft of Common Mergansers that had arrived the night before. Their appearance is apparently an annual phenomenon, and we were not disappointed. The mergansers were in the hundreds and the presence of one Pacific Loon among them was an additional bonus.

Be sure to visit South Platte Park and catch the last of fall migration.

South Platte Park – including South Platte Reservoir and Cooley Lake – Nov 20,2021 – 40 species (+2 other taxa)

Canada Goose 1600
Northern Shoveler 25
Gadwall 75
American Wigeon 42
Mallard 14
Green-winged Teal 6
Redhead 1
Ring-necked Duck 4
Lesser Scaup 5
Bufflehead 97
Common Goldeneye 22
Hooded Merganser 44

Common Merganser 515
Ruddy Duck 1
Pied-billed Grebe 3
Western Grebe 1
Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) 16
Eurasian Collared-Dove 2
American Coot 150
Killdeer 3
Ring-billed Gull 22
Pacific Loon 1
Double-crested Cormorant 3
Great Blue Heron 3
Bald Eagle 10
Red-tailed Hawk 3
Red-tailed Hawk (Harlan's) 1
Belted Kingfisher 1
Downy Woodpecker 2
Northern Flicker 4
Blue Jay 2
Black-billed Magpie 3
American Crow 15
Common Raven 3
Black-capped Chickadee 5
White-breasted Nuthatch 1
House Finch 1
European Starling 50
Dark-eyed Junco 1
White-crowned Sparrow 8
Song Sparrow 5
sparrow sp. 3