



**WOLVES, BEARS AND ROCKY MOUNTAIN BIRDS
IN AMERICA'S GREATEST NATIONAL PARKS:
YELLOWSTONE AND THE MAGNIFICENT
GRAND TETON**

19 September – 2 October 2020



One of the world's greatest national parks, Yellowstone, covers a vast area in sparsely populated Wyoming (a state where antelope outnumber people) and marginally into both Montana and Idaho. Arguably the most impressive-looking mountains in all of America lie just to the south of Yellowstone and are protected in another national park adjacent to Yellowstone, Grand Teton National Park. **Gray Wolves**, along with two bear species (**Grizzly Bear** being quite easy to find here), huge herds of **American Bison**, water-loving **Moose**, **Wapiti** (Elk), and a plethora of other large and small mammals make this national park almost comparable to an African park with its big herds and predators. We'll be on the constant lookout for some much more difficult mammals as well, including **Wolverine**, **Puma** (Mountain Lion) and **American Lynx**. **Yellow-bellied Marmot**, **American Pika**, and the amazingly cute, attractive little **Least Chipmunk** are three of the more common small mammals we are likely to encounter.

The Rocky Mountains also boast a lot of special birds, including **Black Rosy Finch**, **American Three-toed Woodpecker** along with a good number of other woodpecker species (**Lewis's** and **Black-backed Woodpeckers** need luck, whereas **Williamson's Sapsucker** and various others are relatively easy), **Broad-tailed Hummingbird** (plus two other hummers during migration), a couple of the northern owls that make it far south of their normal "Boreal" range along the Rockies (the two-foot-high **Great Grey Owl** and the tiny **Boreal Owl**), and lots more. The beautiful **Steller's Jay** and charismatic **Grey Jay** are usually easy to find. **Clark's Nutcracker**, **Townsend's Solitaire**, **Mountain Bluebird**, **American Dipper**, and other classic birds of America's western mountains are also usually much in evidence. **Pine Grosbeak** and a lot of other special birds will also be sought.

We run this trip in the fall, when the colors (mainly yellow in this part of the world, unlike the more varied colors of the east), are unbelievably stunning against the backdrop of America's most beautiful mountains that rise straight from the surrounding plain. Incidentally to our mammal and bird viewing during this tour, we also stop to photograph some of this incredible scenery that Yellowstone and the Tetons offer. Yellowstone Caldera, which dominates the national park, is often called a "supervolcano", the largest volcano in North America. Not wanting to scare people off, but this volcano is due for an eruption, and the park also experiences thousands of small earthquakes a year (most of them undetectable by humans). We'll stay a couple of nights right next to the most famous geyser in the world, Old Faithful, but we'll also be sure to look at some of the more spectacular of the 10,000 geothermal oddities in this park while searching for wildlife.

On this trip we'll look for a great many mammals and birds. Extra time will be spent trying to find tougher species that are in reality only very rarely seen (e.g. Mountain Lion). In general, we try to keep the pace of this trip slower than on our other tours to allow more time for scenery and wildlife photography. Having said that, there's no guarantee we'll have "down time", as there is a humungous amount to see in a vast area spanning three states.

Itinerary (14 days/13 nights)

Day 1, Arrival in Jackson, Wyoming

Arrival at Jackson Hole Airport (JAC) and transfer to your hotel, where a room will be reserved in your name. We will gather at the hotel lobby (at tentatively at 6:30 p.m. but we'll confirm this

after we've "closed" the tour to new bookings) and go out for an orientation dinner and to discuss the upcoming days' events.

Jackson is home to three world-renowned ski areas, and "The Town Square" features four large arches made of shed antlers from the nearby National Elk Refuge. Jackson features fine dining restaurants and many art galleries including works by Andy Warhol and Georgia O'Keefe, as well as several bars and souvenir shops.

The town of Jackson is like stepping back into the Old West, and, in fact, many of the storefronts and buildings have been lovingly restored to appear as they would have back in the 1800s when it was first established.

Overnight: Elk Country Inn or similar, Jackson, Wyoming

Day 2, Antelope Flats Road, Kelly, and Mormon Row

After breakfast we enter Grand Teton National Park, where we will stay for four days. Antelope Flats Road here is a prime area for **American Bison**, **Pronghorn** antelope and **Moose** along the river. The bull Moose are out of velvet at this time of year and quite determined to find a cow. American Bison are commonly found along the roadways for some good up-close photo opportunities against the dramatic backdrop of the Tetons. **Sage Grouse**, **Sharp-tailed Grouse**, **Bald Eagle**, and various hawks and swallows are common here.

We continue on the road to Kelly, stopping at Mormon Row, where the remnants of original settler cabins and homesteads remain part of the ecosystem. They make great nesting sites during the summer for various swallows and other birds.

We proceed to Kelly and stop along the Aspen trees on our way to the Teton Science Schools. **Williamson's Sapsucker**, **Pine Grosbeak**, **American Three-toed Woodpecker**, **Northern Pygmy Owl**, **Short-eared Owl**, and perhaps even **Great Grey Owl** are all possible.

Finally but importantly, there is now an established pack of **Grey Wolves** called the Gros Ventre Pack, which often roams this area.

Overnight: Elk Country Inn or similar, Jackson, Wyoming

Day 3, Moose Wilson Road

After breakfast we head to Moose Wilson Road – here there is a good possibility of seeing **American Black Bear**, often with cubs, as they feed heavily on the ripened berries along the roadside of this thick forest, fattening up for the upcoming winter.

Many waterfowl share these wetlands with the moose, including **American Wigeon**, teals, and the occasional **Barrow's Goldeneye**. Both **Williamson's** and **Red-naped Sapsuckers** are common in these woods. **American Dipper** is also often seen here in the running streams.

Once we reach Teton Village we can ride the ski lift to the top of Jackson Hole Mountain Resort and look for **Grey-crowned** and **Black Rosy Finches**. Small flocks are often found here. **Ruby-crowned** and **Golden-crowned Kinglets** along with **Pine Grosbeak**, **Pine Siskin**, and **Dark-eyed Junco** will also be targets. This is also a good place to look for **Clark's Nutcracker** if we haven't seen any yet.

We continue to Oak Creek Canyon toward Star Valley – one of the few places in the Teton Wilderness area, where we will see the bright red and orange colors of fall due to the higher number of maple and oak trees growing here.

We will stop at the South Park Wildlife Management Area – a good place for waterfowl and shorebirds. These include **Trumpeter Swan**, **Cinnamon Teal**, **Redhead**, **Barrow's Goldeneye** (with luck), and **American Wigeon**. **Sandhill Crane** is often found here as well.

We should of course mention here that none of these activities and plans we mention are set in stone. We have to be flexible, and these suggested plans can certainly be changed depending on reports about where the wildlife is hanging out, how quickly we find the target species, and many other variables. Nature can't be predicted!

Overnight: Elk Country Inn or similar, Jackson, Wyoming

Day 4, Red Hills Campground and Lower Slide Lake

After breakfast we drive to Kelly, Wyoming, and from there to Lower Slide Lake. This is a rich area that was created when a natural landslide dammed the Gros Ventre River on June 23, 1925. The Lake was much bigger, but the natural rock dam gave way two years later, causing deadly flooding to nearby Kelly, which was wiped out, killing six people.

Red-naped Sapsucker, Red Crossbill, Black-headed Grosbeak, Black-necked (Eared) Grebe, and Northern Shoveler might be seen here. **American Dipper** is often found along the streams.

After spending some time in the Slide Lake area we plan to continue to the Red Hills Campground – an area few tourists ever see. The beautiful hills appear to be painted by hand with watercolors. They make for stunning photography with streaks and patches of green, red, white, and ochre. They are also part of a canyon, where oftentimes one can spot **Mountain Goat, Bighorn Sheep,** and various bird species.

We continue to the northern section of Grand Teton National Park, overnighing at the southernmost boundary of Yellowstone National Park.

Overnight: Colter Bay Village, southern boundary of Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming

Day 5, Oxbow Bend

We usually make a very early departure (sometimes leaving at 5:30 a.m.) for sunrise. Providing an excellent wildlife habitat for both birds and mammals, Oxbow Bend, with Mount Moran reflected in the mirror-like - stillness of Jackson Lake, is one of the most photographed scenes in Grand Teton National Park. **Moose, Grizzly Bear, American White Pelican,** and mergansers are commonly seen here in the early morning.

We are always sure to stop at Snake River Overlook to see the iconic vista made famous in the photo by Ansel Adams in 1942.

Before dusk we return to Jackson Lake to listen at 'Elk Island' for bugling **Elk** and hopefully photograph them rutting.

Overnight: Colter Bay Village, southern boundary of Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming

Day 6, Yellowstone National Park: Yellowstone Lake and Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone

After breakfast we drive into Yellowstone National Park, making our first stop here at Lewis Falls along the way and take in the sights of the Snake and Lewis Rivers. Soon we will arrive at Yellowstone Lake – with an average depth of 139ft and its greatest depth of at least 390ft this is the largest body of water in Yellowstone and the largest freshwater lake in North America above 7,000ft.

Common Loon, Black-necked (Eared) and Pied-billed Grebes, Trumpeter Swan, Caspian Tern, and the beautiful **American Avocet** are commonly found here, sometimes along with many other shorebirds.

Depending on time we may stop at the lake for a picnic lunch or, if early enough, we might continue driving to the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, passing through Hayden Valley. This is an excellent place to search for **Grey Wolves** and sometimes **Grizzly Bears,** which are often seen

hunting the large herds of ungulates, especially **American Bison**, which often share the roadway with cars. There are also plenty of spots to simply stop along the road or to have lunch while admiring the beauty of this area.

We'll continue to the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, our lodging for the night. After checking into the hotel we'll return to the canyon to view Upper and Lower Yellowstone Falls from Artist Point.

Townsend's Solitaire, Clark's Nutcracker, Grey and Steller's Jays, and, depending on timing, migrating warblers are commonly found among the thick forests of the canyon.

Overnight: Canyon Lodge and Cabins, Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming

Day 7, Mammoth Hot Springs – Lamar Valley – Cooke City-Silver Gate

After breakfast (about 7:30 a.m. departure) we drive to Mammoth Hot Springs, a collection of travertine terraces which were once popular with tourists. Sadly, they have largely dried up, and many of them have eroded due to the heavy human traffic, but they are still impressive. It is a long hike to the top, however; for those wishing to go there, we can drive to the top and walk down the well-maintained boardwalk/steps and be picked up at the parking lot next to the hotel. From this vantage point you can still enjoy and appreciate some of the remaining colorful terraced pools alive with blooming algae.

We will continue driving through Lamar Valley on our way to Cooke City, Montana – our stopping point for the next two nights. Cooke City is a quaint, small Western town at the northeast entrance of Yellowstone and our base for wolf-spotting for the next two days.

Overnight: High Country Motel and Cabins or similar, Cooke City-, Montana, near Lamar Valley

Days 8-9, Lamar Valley – Cooke City Silver Gate

It is said that if one wants to see **Grey Wolves** one should spend time in Lamar Valley, and we will do our best to find them. There are currently two packs that hunt and work the Lamar Valley area, and in recent years sightings have become much more frequent, often with good views just off the roadside if there has been a recent kill.

Lamar Valley has been called the “Serengeti of the Yellowstone” due to the open meadows and large herds of **American Bison, Pronghorn**, and other wildlife. And it isn't just wolves that follow the herds of grazers; **Grizzly** and **Black Bears** are common as well. Although not guaranteed, our chances are increased by devoting time to this area of the park.

Overnight: High Country Motel and Cabins or similar, Cooke City, Montana, near Lamar Valley

Day 10, Geyser Basins – Old Faithful

After breakfast we depart for Old Faithful, stopping at Lower, Midway, and Upper Geyser Basins on the way. This is geyser country in Yellowstone! With plenty to see we will concentrate on the main attractions, Grand Prismatic Springs, Castle Geyser, and the Firehole River before ending our day at Old Faithful – the most famous geyser in North America and perhaps in the world.

Overnight: Old Faithful Inn, Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming

Day 11, Old Faithful

Day of leisure * to enjoy the beauty and wonder of this area. You may choose to wander the boardwalk exploring all the various geysers (do not miss walking all the way to the end and seeing Morning Glory Pool) or take in the view from the comfort of the hotel balcony, while enjoying a hot cup of coffee or chocolate or a beer as Old Faithful erupts at regular intervals.

Frequently **American Bison** and **Elk** come down to the geyser area during the cool fall evenings to keep warm at night.

*Knowing our tour participants, we understand that some folks won't want a day of leisure! So, for those who want to search for tough mammals and birds we haven't yet seen, our guide will take you looking!

Overnight: Old Faithful Inn, Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming

Days 12-13, Victor, Idaho

Today we depart after breakfast for Victor, Idaho.

On the "flip side" of the Tetons we will have an opportunity to seek any target birds we may have missed in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks.

Because of its rich farmland and slightly different topography, quite often some species may linger here a bit longer before continuing on their southern migration.

We spend a whole day driving out to various sites in this part of Idaho, looking for special birds, mammals, etc.

Overnight: Teton Spring Lodge and Spa or similar, Victor, Idaho

Day 14, Transfer to Jackson Hole Airport and departure

After final birding, mammal viewing, etc., we take the 1-2-hour drive to Jackson Hole Airport in Wyoming for your flights home. For anyone who flies home on later flights from Jackson, there is stacks to see in and around this town, and we'll keep you entertained for as long as you need today.

Please note that the itinerary above cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors.

Duration: 14 days
Limit: 6 – 8
Date: 19 September – 2 October 2020
Start: Jackson Hole, Wyoming
End: Jackson Hole, Wyoming

Price: US\$6200 per person sharing
Single supplement: US\$1838

Price includes:

Meals
 Accommodation
 Guiding fees
 Entrance fees
 All transport while on tour
 Fuel/tolls

Price excludes:

Flights

Laundry

Optional tips to guides or cleaning staff

Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts