Fauna of the San Luis Valley

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is a brief resume of the animals commonly found in the San Luis Valley of Colorado. For the convenience of both the writer and reader the animals are listed under three major groups: (1) the herpetofauna, (2) the birds, and (3) the mammals. The reader should understand that this is not a complete list. It does not include many species which might be considered as only occasional visitors.

HERPETOFAUNA

The herpetofauna of the San Luis Valley is rather limited. This is due for the most part to the comparatively severe environmental conditions in the Valley. Therefore, only a few of the more hardy anura, sauria, caudata, and serpentes are to be found. There are no testudines in the Valley.

ANURA
Bufo cognatus Say (Great Plains Toad)
Bufo woodhousei woodhousei Girard (Rocky Mountain Toad)
Pseudacris triseriata maculata (Agassiz) (Boreal Chorus Frog)
Rana catesbiana Shaw (Bullfrog)
Rana pipiens brachycephala Cope (Leopard Frog)
Spea bombifrons (Cope) (Plains Spadefoot Toad)

CAUDATA
Ambystoma tigrinum mavortium Baird (Barred Tiger Salamander)
Ambystoma tigrinum utahense Lowe

SAURIA
Eumeces multivirgatus gaigeae Taylor (Skink)
Phrynosoma douglassi ornatus Girty (Horned Lizard)
Sceloporus undulatus erythrocheilus Maslin (Fence Lizard)

SERPENTES
Crotalus viridis viridis (Rafinesque) (Prairie Rattlesnake)
Pituophis melanoleucus sayi (Schelegel) (Bullsnake)
Thamnophis elegans vagrans (Baird and Girard) (Mountain Garter Snake)
Thamnophis sirtalis ornatus (Baird) (Garter Snake)

MAMMALS

The mammals of the San Luis Valley appear to show overlapping into the valley of some species normally found to the north and to the south of the valley. Examples of this include the wolverine which has been reported at least twice near Mt. Blanca by reliable observers, and the ringtail cat from the southern limits of the valley. There are several small mammals which are very numerous. These include the Least Chipmunk (Eutamias minimus caryi), the Grizzly Bear (Ursus arctos), and Lepus sp. along with Sylvilagus auduboni (Desert Cottontail).
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make this area a home for many diverse species. Marsh species are quite abundant and include such species as ducks, rails, wrens, blackbirds, yellowthroat, snowy egrets, black-crowned night herons, black terns, avocets, marsh hawks, and short-eared owls.

There are two large national wildlife refuges in the valley (at Monte Vista and Alamosa), which provide high-quality nesting and feeding habitat for mallard and other waterfowl. The Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge bird list contains 172 species ranging from abundant to rare. Some of the abundant species include the mallard, teal, and ring-necked pheasant. The rare species include

the white-fronted, snow, and blue geese; also the peregrine falcon, caspian tern, belted kingfisher, and poor-will to name a few.

The following list includes those species which an observer might normally expect to find during the late spring and summer months.

American Avocet  Common Grackle
American Bittern  Common Nighthawk
American Coot  Common Raven
American Goldfinch  Cooper’s Hawk
Bald Eagle  Crow
Band-tailed Pigeon  Downy Woodpecker
Bank Swallow  Eastern Kingbird
Barn Owl  Evening Grosbeak
Barn Swallow  Gadwall
Black-billed Magpie  Golden Eagle
Black-crowned Night Heron  Gray-headed Junco
Black-headed Grosbeak  Great Blue Heron
Black Tern  Great Horned Owl
Blue Grosbeak  Green-tailed Towhee
Blue Grouse  Green-winged Teal
Blue-winged Teal  Gray Jay
Brewer’s Blackbird  Hairy Woodpecker
Broad-tailed Hummingbird  Horned Lark
Brown-headed Cowbird  House Finch
Brown Towhee  House Sparrow
Burrowing Owl  House Wren
Canada Goose  Hummingbird
Canyonback  Killdeer
Cassin’s Finch  Lark Bunting
Cassin’s Sparrow  Lesser Yellowlegs
Cinnamon Teal  Lewis’ Woodpecker
Clark’s Nutcracker  Loggerhead Shrike
Cliff Swallows  Long-billed Curlew

Elk

BIRDS

The San Luis Valley affords some of the best bird-study areas to be found in the Rocky Mountain region. The chico and rabbitbrush of the valley floor, the rushes and cattails, the cottonwoods and willows along stream banks, the conifers at higher elevations, and the water all combine to

Mule Deer

Beaver and Beaver Dam
Long-billed Dowitcher
Long-billed Marsh Wren
Mallard
Mountain Bluebird
Mourning Dove
Pied-billed Grebe
Pine Grosbeak
Pine Siskin
Pinon Jay
Pintail Duck
Redhead Duck
Red-shafted Flicker
Red-tailed Hawk
Red-winged Blackbird
Ring-necked Pheasant
Robin
Rock Dove
Ruddy Duck
Rufus Hummingbird
Sage Thrasher
Sandhill Crane
Say's Phoebe
Short-eared Owl
Shoveler Duck
Snowy Egret
Sparrow Hawk
Spotted Sandpiper
Starling
Steller's Jay
Swainson's Hawk
Townsend's Solitaire
Turkey Vulture
Vesper Sparrow
Western Grebe
Western Kingbird
Western Meadowlark
Western Tanager
White-crowned Sparrow
White-faced Ibis
Williamson's Sapsucker
Wilson's Phalarope
Wilson's Warbler
Yellow-headed Blackbird
Yellow Warbler

REFERENCES