

## Colorado, USA – July 30 to August 6, 2025

*Bennett Gardner*

### Background:

After leaving the University of Queensland in Australia and reconsidering my future, I spent a week exploring Colorado's diverse habitats and touring CU Boulder as a potential transfer option. Accompanied by my mom, who did most of the driving, I sought out iconic North American mammals amid spectacular scenery.

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### Rocky Mountain National Park (July 31- August 1)



We spent two days and one night in this jewel of the Colorado Rockies.

We didn't see any Moose, Elk or Bighorn Sheep at the Sheep Lakes, though there were several **Mule Deer** bucks and plenty of **Wyoming & Golden-mantled Ground Squirrels** (*Urocitellus elegans* & *Callospermophilus lateralis*) around.

Driving up **Old Fall River Road**, a narrow, winding dirt track through subalpine spruce-fir forest, I did a bit of mammalwatching. Mammals included **Least Chipmunks**

(*Neotamias minimus*) and **American Red Squirrels** (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*). A young cow **Moose** (*Alces alces*) resting quietly in a thicket near the road was a great find.

The **Tundra Communities Trail**, situated in the alpine tundra above the treeline, was one of my favorite places we stopped at during the entire trip. **American Pikas** (*Ochotona princeps*) and **Yellow-bellied Marmots** (*Marmota flaviventris*) were abundant here and fun to watch and photograph.

Before leaving the park, we encountered a herd of about twenty **Rocky Mountain Elk** (*Cervus canadensis nelsoni*), mostly cows and calves, grazing in the pines and shrubs near the Grand Lake entrance. Though I had hoped to see antlered bulls, I was still very happy to see these majestic deer in the wild for the first time.

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### **Pronghorns and Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge** (August 3)



Driving across the sagebrush steppe of the North Park basin, I was thrilled to see one of my lifelong North American target species—the **Pronghorn** (*Antilocapra americana*). My mom and I watched a herd of eight to ten grazing in the rangeland along Route 125 before their characteristic flighty escape.

Intrigued by the pronghorns, my mom and I detoured into **Arapaho National Wildlife**

**Refuge**, a 24,804-acre sanctuary that turned out to be a hidden gem. The refuge features vast sagebrush steppe, man-made lakes, and riparian areas supporting a diverse mammal and bird assemblage. Badgers & Sharp-tailed Grouse are apparently common there, though I didn't see any

We began at the visitor center, where a friendly volunteer recommended local hikes and drives. Nearby, lively colonies of **White-tailed Prairie Dogs** (*Cynomys leucurus*) were present.

The **Moose-Goose Nature Trail**, a willow-lined boardwalk, produced little wildlife midday except some **Vesper Sparrows** (*Pooecetes gramineus*), but the six-mile Wildlife Drive was far more rewarding. There, we spotted over ten **Pronghorns** (males and females), numerous White-tailed Prairie Dogs, **Wyoming Ground Squirrels** (*Urocitellus elegans*), a fleeting **Long-tailed Weasel** (*Mustela frenata*), and a lone **Coyote** (*Canis latrans*) pacing across a distant field.

Waterfowl and waders were plentiful around the refuge's lakes, including **American White Pelicans** (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*), **American Avocets** (*Recurvirostra americana*), **White-faced Ibis** (*Plegadis chihi*), **Long-billed Dowitchers** (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*), **Mallards**, **Gadwalls**, **Greater Yellowlegs**, and a **Swainson's Hawk** (*Buteo swainsoni*).

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## State Forest State Park (August 3)



On our way to Fort Collins, we stopped at **State Forest State Park**, a hotspot for Colorado's introduced **Moose** population, which now exceeds 3,000 animals. Though we didn't see moose that afternoon, watching **Broad-tailed** (*Selasphorus platycercus*) and **Rufous Hummingbirds** (*Selasphorus rufus*) battle over the hummingbird feeders at Moose Visitor Center was a treat. There were also many Western Chipmunks (*Neotamias* sp.) of debatable specific species at the feeders.



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### Colorado Trip Itinerary:

- **Day 1 (July 30th):** Arrival in Denver & Drive Through [Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge](#)/Overnight in Boulder
- **Day 2 (July 31st):** CU Boulder Campus Tour in Morning, Then Drive Through [Rocky Mountain National Park](#) in Evening/Overnight in Estes Park
- **Day 3 (August 1st):** All day in [Rocky Mountain National Park](#), Afternoon Drive to Winter Park/Overnight in Winter Park
- **Day 4 (August 2nd):** Hiking Mount Flora in [Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forest](#)/Overnight in Winter Park
- **Day 5 (August 3rd):** [Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge](#) in the Morning, Afternoon Drive Through [State Forest State Park](#) and Cache la Poudre Canyon/Overnight in Fort Collins
- **Day 6 (August 4th):** Drive to Boulder and Flatirons Hike in Afternoon/ Overnight in Boulder
- **Day 7 (August 5th):** Depart Boulder/ Morning Flight Back to Singapore

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**Colorado Mammals: (Lifers bolded)**

<u>Common Name:</u>	<u>Scientific Name:</u>	<u>Seen on July 30th:</u>	<u>Seen on July 31st:</u>	<u>Seen on August 1st:</u>	<u>Seen on August 2nd:</u>	<u>Seen on August 3rd:</u>	<u>Seen on August 4th:</u>
1. Pronghorn	<i>Antilocapra americana</i>						
2. American Pika	<i>Ochotona princeps</i>						
3. Long-tailed Weasel	<i>Mustela frenata</i>						
4. Rocky Mountain Elk	<i>Cervus canadensis nelsoni</i>						
5. Black-tailed Prairie Dog	<i>Cynomys ludovicianus</i>						
6. White-tailed Prairie Dog	<i>Cynomys leucurus</i>						
7. Wyoming Ground Squirrel	<i>Urocitellus elegans</i>						
8. Least Chipmunk	<i>Neotamias minimus</i>						
9. <b>Plains Bison*</b>	<i>Bison bison bison</i>						

<b>10. Eastern Fox Squirrel**</b>	<i>Sciurus niger</i>						
<b>11. Yellow-bellied Marmot</b>	<i>Marmota flaviventris</i>						
<b>12. Coyote</b>	<i>Canis latrans</i>						
<b>13. Rocky Mountain Mule Deer</b>	<i>Odocoileus hemionus hemionus</i>						
<b>14. Uinta Chipmunk</b>	<i>Neotamias umbrinus</i>						
<b>15. Desert Cottontail</b>	<i>Sylvilagus audubonii</i>						
<b>16. American Red Squirrel</b>	<i>Tamiasciurus hudsonicus</i>						
<b>17. Moose</b>	<i>Alces alces</i>						
<b>18. Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel</b>	<i>Callospermophilus lateralis</i>						

*\*New species for me, and native to Colorado, however bison are considered only semi-wild there (fenced-in conservation herds), and I only add fully wild species to my life list*

*\*\*New species for me, found in wild populations across eastern Colorado, however these populations are non-native, and I don't include introduced species in my life list*



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**Colorado Mammals: 18 total, 8 lifers, 2 semi-lifers**

**1. Pronghorn**





Many were seen in and around Arapaho NWR in the sagebrush steppe uplands. At least 5 males and 12 females. Unique and interesting ruminants and definitely a trip highlight.

## **2. American Pika**





Common in the alpine tundra zone (above 11,500ft or 3,500m) of Rocky Mountain National Park & and mountains near Winter Park. Very vocal and active little mammals; fun to watch as they forage for plant material that they store for winter. One of my main targets of the trip.

### **3. Long-tailed Weasel**

One seen very briefly in Arapaho NWR dashing into an abandoned prairie dog burrow. Was too fast for a record shot. This species is widespread around the US but this was my first sighting of one in the wild.

### **4. Rocky Mountain Elk**









One medium-sized (20+ individuals) herd of cows and their young in Rocky Mountain National Park. They are common throughout western Colorado, especially around the alpine tundra zone of the national park in summer, but this was the only elk encounter I had on this trip. No bull elk were seen.

## **5. Black-tailed Prairie Dog**





Very common in Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR & unused fields along the Front Range. Extremely social ground squirrels that are fun to observe.

## **6. White-tailed Prairie Dog**





Occurs at a higher altitude than Black-tailed Prairie Dogs, often in drier, colder, and harsher environments. Was very common in and around Arapaho NWR and the nearby sagebrush steppe uplands.

## **7. Wyoming Ground Squirrel**



Cute, medium-sized ground squirrel found at middle elevations in Colorado. Common in Estes Park, around the Sheep Lakes in Rocky Mountain NP, and among prairie dog towns in Arapaho NWR.

## **8. Least Chipmunk**





Very common in most places I visited in Colorado, but especially middle-to-high elevation spruce forests. Rocky Mountain NP and State Forest State Park are two strongholds for this species. It is very difficult to distinguish between Least, Uinta, and Colorado Chipmunks, but Least are generally the commonest species in Colorado.

## **9. Plains Bison**





As mentioned before, I consider the Plains Bison only a 'semi-lifer' for me, as the individuals seen in Colorado were part of a conservation herd within Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR. The refuge is a great place for bison sightings in a natural setting—however, the animals there are not truly wild or free-roaming.

#### **10. Eastern Fox Squirrel**







Common urban rodents in Fort Collins and Boulder, but like I mentioned earlier I consider this species only a 'semi-lifer' for me as they are non-native in Colorado. I do not include invasive species on my life list.

### **11. Yellow-bellied Marmot**



I saw many marmots in the alpine tundra zone of Rocky Mountain NP and the mountains outside Winter Park, Colorado. They are a bit shy, but I got great views of these chunky rodents by simply standing still and letting them forage close to me.

### **12. Coyote**



Clear but distant views of one Coyote in broad daylight in Arapaho NWR. These canids are common throughout Colorado, with another very reliable spot for them being Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR.

### **13. Rocky Mountain Mule Deer**









Very common in Rocky Mountain NP, where I saw at least three bucks in velvet, two of which were grazing just below the treeline at 11,000ft (3,350m). Also common in Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR and elsewhere in Colorado.

#### **14. Uinta Chipmunk**



Two lively individuals seen at Forest Canyon Overlook at 12,000ft (3,657m) in Rocky Mountain NP. Uinta Chipmunks are among the highest-altitude chipmunk species in Colorado.

### **15. Desert Cottontail**





One was seen grazing on a lawn at the CU Boulder Campus.

## **16. American Red Squirrel**





I'm frankly uncertain on how to distinguish between American Red Squirrels and their close relative, the Fremont's Squirrel which are both found in Colorado. I believe most or all of the 5+ Pine Squirrels (*Tamiasciurus sp.*) I saw in the spruce forests of Rocky Mountain NP and other areas of Colorado were likely American Red Squirrels, but I'm not entirely sure.

## **17. Moose**





Invasive in Colorado, introduced to the state in 1978 by hunters. Colorado now has the fastest-growing population of Moose in the entire US. Very reliable sightings in State Forest State Park & Rocky Mountain National Park. I saw only one Moose on my trip— a young cow sitting in some thick vegetation along Old Fall River Road in the national park.

### **18. Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel**





Common to abundant in nearly all middle-to-high elevation habitats in Colorado. In Rocky Mountain NP, they are very habituated and will approach visitors at the roadside overlooks for food handouts.