

The Site Guide

Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado

Location Boulder, Grand, Larimer Counties, north-central Colorado.

Description A roughly rectangular segment of the high Colorado Rockies, 410 square miles in area; characterized by conifer forests, aspen groves, alpine tundra, rugged peaks, and tumbling streams. Nearly half of the park lies above 10,000 ft. Below are lodgepole and ponderosa pine and aspen forests, interspersed with open meadows and riparian alder, birch and willow. From 10,000-11,000 ft. are dense forests of Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir. Above 11,000 ft. are twisted and stunted limber pine, spruce, and

fir. Above timberline, at 11,500 ft., is the treeless tundra of the alpine zone. Open bodies of water include Estes, Marys, Granby and Shadow Mt. reservoirs and Grand L.

Access Nearest major airport Denver. By car 75 mi. from Denver: US 36 to Boulder, Lyons, and Estes Park. RMNP headquarters 3 mi. w. From east: Loveland w. via US 34 to Estes Park, 30 mi. From west: Granby n.e. via US 34 to Grand Lake, 12 mi. Roads to Estes Park from s. and e., to Grand Lake from s.w., are open year-round. Paved roads, 300 mi. of trails, provide access to most of RMNP in summer and fall. In winter and spring roads to Bear L., and to Hidden Valley Winter Sports Area, are kept open to auto traffic. Trail Ridge road over the Continental Divide (Estes Park to Grand Lake) is open from late May to Sept. or Oct. In winter and spring trails are negotiable only on skis or snowshoes.



Tundra, Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado. Above timberline, Rocky Mountain National Park provides an excellent place to find such birds as the White-tailed Ptarmigan, Water Pipit, and Brown-capped Rosy Finch. Photo/National Park Service.

Accommodations All-year motels, rental cottages, restaurants, food markets, at Estes Park and Grand Lake. Advance reservations advised through summer season. Campgrounds in and near Park; in mid-summer arrive early to find space. Write in advance for map (free) checklist (25c) annotated list (\$) with data on distribution and status of birds, to RMNP, Estes Park, Colo. 80517.

Birdwatching We can suggest here only a few likely birding areas, and urge the visitor to study his map and annotated checklist, and to explore for himself the many roads and trails. The birds are not restricted to any one life zone, but move about freely. Post-breeding altitudinal wanderings are common.

Estes Park, in the Transition Zone, may yield W. Flycatcher often nesting on porches, Violet-green Swallow at bird houses, Cliff Swallow nesting on walls of high school, W. Bluebirds n.e. of town. Look for Cañon Wren on Needles Ridge, reached via Gem L. trail, Rock Wren in dry rocky situations at all elevations. Broad-tailed Hummingbird will be seen and heard everywhere, especially near streams.

From Estes Park drive w. to the Fall R. entrance; continue w. through Horseshoe Park to Endovalley Campground. Enroute look for such hole-nesting birds as Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (aspens). Williamson's Sapsucker and Pygmy Nuthatch (ponderosas), also Tree Swallow, Mt. Chickadee, Mt. Bluebird, in winter Golden-crowned Kinglet, Pine Grosbeak, Red (and rarely,) White-winged Crossbill. The Park's Beaver Meadow entrance gives access to Moraine Park. Townsend's Solitaire nests on the ridges as well as at higher elevations. Look for Virginia's Warbler on brushy slopes, Yellow, MacGillivray's, Wilson's among the willows. From upper Moraine Park Club L. and Fern L. trails lead through productive habitat yielding W. Wood Pewee, Olive-sided Flycatcher, W. Tanager, Green-tailed Towhee, Gray-headed Junco, and more. As the trail ascends through spruce-fir forests of the Canadian Zone listen for Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Audubon's Warbler. From lower Moraine Park continue on main road toward Bear L. taking a moment to check under Thompson R. bridge for nesting Dipper, but avoid-

ing slippery rocks and swift current. At Glacier Basin picnic area look for Swainson's Thrush, Cassin's Finch, Lincoln's and Song Sparrows near lakeside trails. At Glacier Gorge Junction follow Loch Vale trail, watching overhead for rare Black Swift in flight.

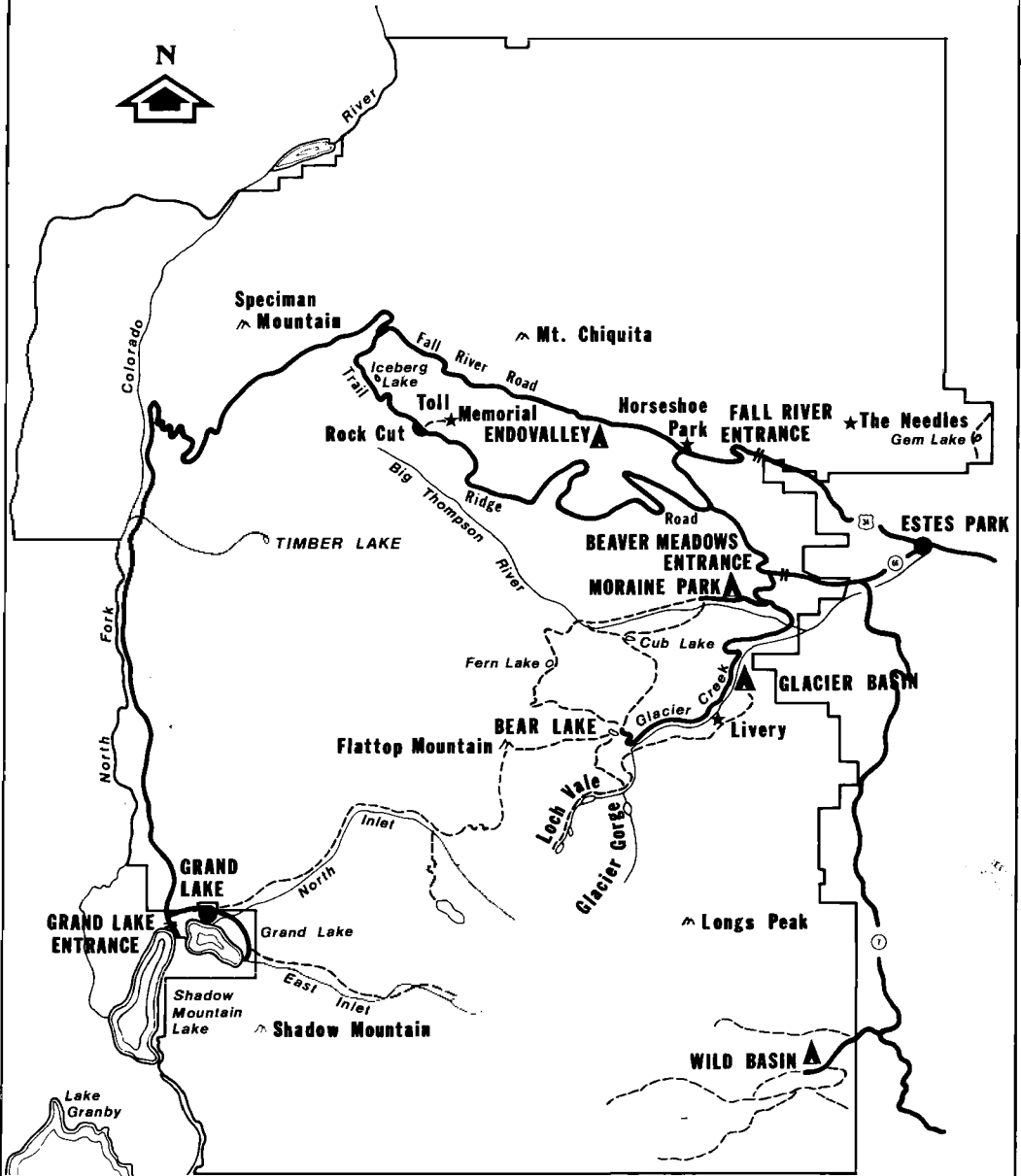
Bear L. area is gathering place for jays: Gray, Steller's, Clark's Nutcracker. Trails here lead through spruce-fir forests to Flat-top Mt., Dream L., L. Haiyaha, with chance of seeing N. Three-toed Woodpecker (found also in Fern L. region), possibly nesting Pine Grosbeak.

Trail Ridge road crosses the tundra at elevations up to 12,183 ft. and traverses White-tailed Ptarmigan country. Stop at Rock Cut, follow the trail to Toll Memorial, looking carefully among the rocks for this protectively colored bird. August is probably the best season, when flocks of chicks accompany the adults. Another likely spot is Medicine Bow Curve area. Horned Lark, Water Pipit will be seen on tundra, Brown-capped Rosy Finch nests commonly at Iceberg L. and on other rocky cliffs. Flocks of Gray-crowned (a few Black) are here in winter, may be forced down to Estes Park feeding stations in stormy weather. Raptors are found in small numbers at all elevations; Golden Eagle is resident in RMNP and Shadow Mt. Area, Bald Eagle fairly common all year along the Colorado R. Most common raptor on the tundra is Prairie Falcon. West side trails (E. and N. Inlet, Specimen Mtn; Timber Creek, etc.) and Wild Basin trails in extreme s.e. corner of RMNP yield similar bird lists. Lakes provide additional records: grebes, migrant ducks, winter resident Com. and Barrow's Goldeneyes (especially L. Estes), and Com. Merganser, small numbers of waders, several gull species including impressive flocks of Franklin's Gulls in fall migration. Of more than casual interest among winter passerines are occasional flocks of Piñon Jays, Bohemian Waxwings, Evening Grosbeaks, as well as the fairly common White-winged Junco, found with the usually abundant Oregon and Grayheaded Juncos.

Rating Numbers following rating are average species recorded in a day by one party. Spring **** 60, Summer *** 45, Fall ** 35, Winter * 30. These are "quality" birds — some difficult to find elsewhere.

— Allegra Collister

ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK



LEGEND

★	Interest Point		Park Entrance
▲	Campground	---	Trail
⋆	Mountains	==	Road



Scale in Miles

Map by K. Rofferty