

Jasper and Banff Trip
Maple Leaf School – TRU
May 31 – June 3, 2018
Trip Report



A total of 16 people left Kamloops, BC Thursday afternoon and headed towards Jasper National Park. The drive there was uneventful with a washroom stop in Little Fort and a stop for supper in Valemount. Two young Moose were seen along the North Thompson River between Blue River and Valemount.



Supper on the picnic tables at the Valemount Visitor's Centre



Two young Moose along the road

Shortly after leaving Valemount a Mule Deer ran across the road in front of our vehicles. After turning east on Highway 16 we soon came in view of Mt. Robson, the highest peak in the Canadian Rockies at just under 4000m. We stopped for the sign photo and a chance to stretch our legs. Soon after we encountered another Moose at the east side of Moose Lake. Clearly the Moose were out!



On the previous year's trip, we had encountered no less than 7 bears (3 Black and 4 Grizzly) along this stretch of highway on the way to Jasper but this year was said to be drier and the bears weren't out eating vegetation along the roads in as high of numbers. We didn't see any bears on that drive, but we did round a corner and find our first of many Elk eating roadside.



By the time we arrived in Jasper, it was dark and we had moved ahead a time zone so it was 11:00 pm or so by the time we checked in. We stayed at the Athabasca Hotel which is centrally located in Jasper and one of the cheapest options at \$250 (!). We met in the lobby the next morning at 5:30 for a mandatory wildlife drive. Acting on a tip from a friend in Jasper who was photographing wildlife, we headed south on the Icefields Parkway to a place where both Grizzly and Black Bears had been eating vegetation along the roadside. A Black Bear was found here in almost the exact location we were told to look, and we enjoyed great views from the windows of our vehicles as it munched on greenery.



Two nervous Elk were keeping a good eye on that particular bear as it ambled along. After this we stopped at Athabasca Falls and had a walk around before anyone else showed up later in the day.



Arriving back at our hotel around 9:00 am, we had some free time to get breakfast, shop, or catch up on sleep. We met again with lunch behind us at 12:30 in the lobby for our drive to Maligne Lake. This beautiful lake is at the end of Maligne Lake Road. The drive is close to an hour inclusive of a few stops and passes some amazing Rocky Mountain scenery. We stopped several times including one place where we took a short walk through the forest to a river.



A short walk through the forest to a beautiful river

We arrived at Maligne Lake 30 minutes before our tour was to leave so I went for a short birding walk around the main building complex there. Yellow-rumped Warblers were abundant, and a single Magnolia Warbler caught my attention as well. Gray Jays and Western Tanagers were also seen.



Magnolia Warbler

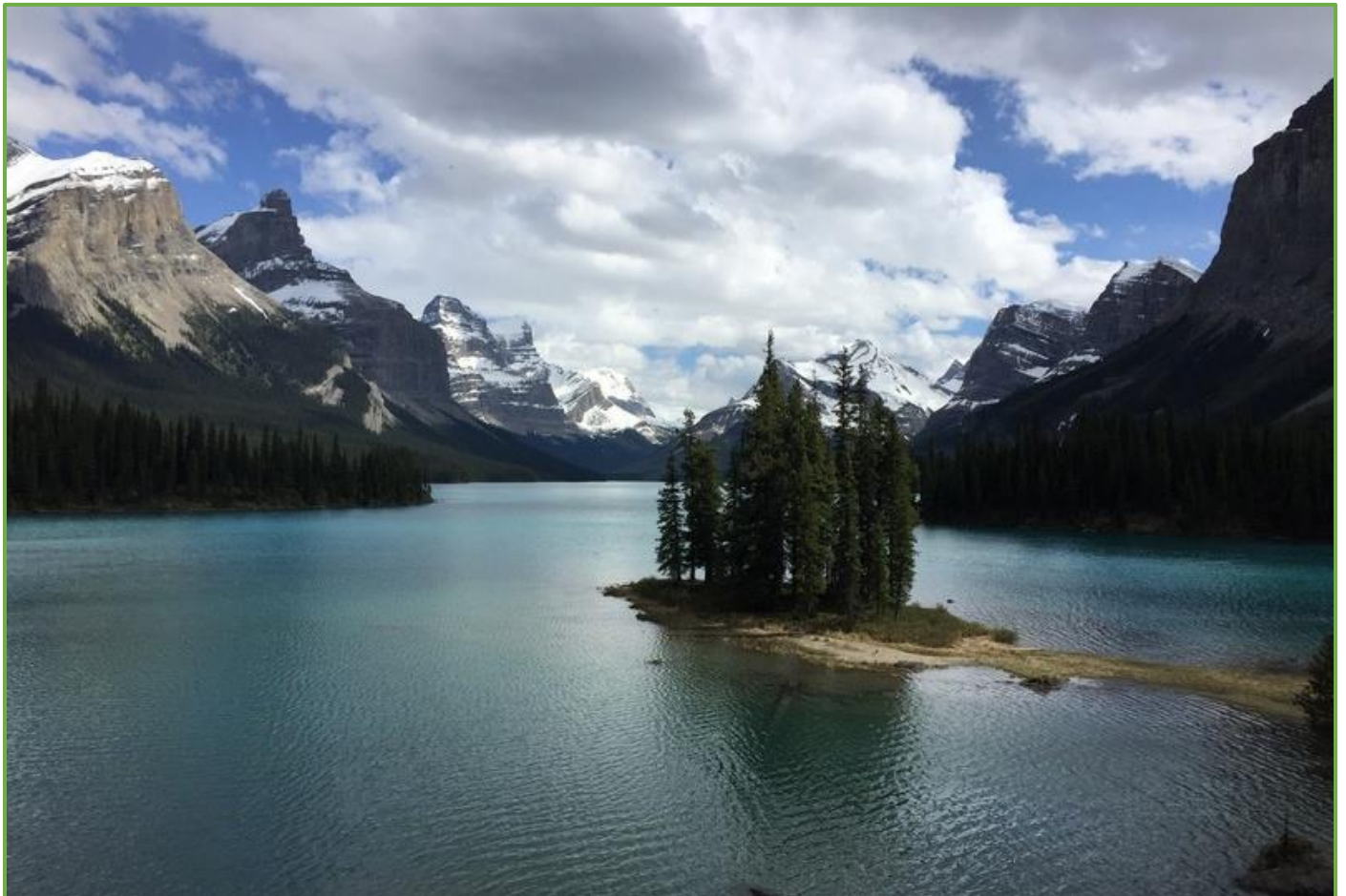
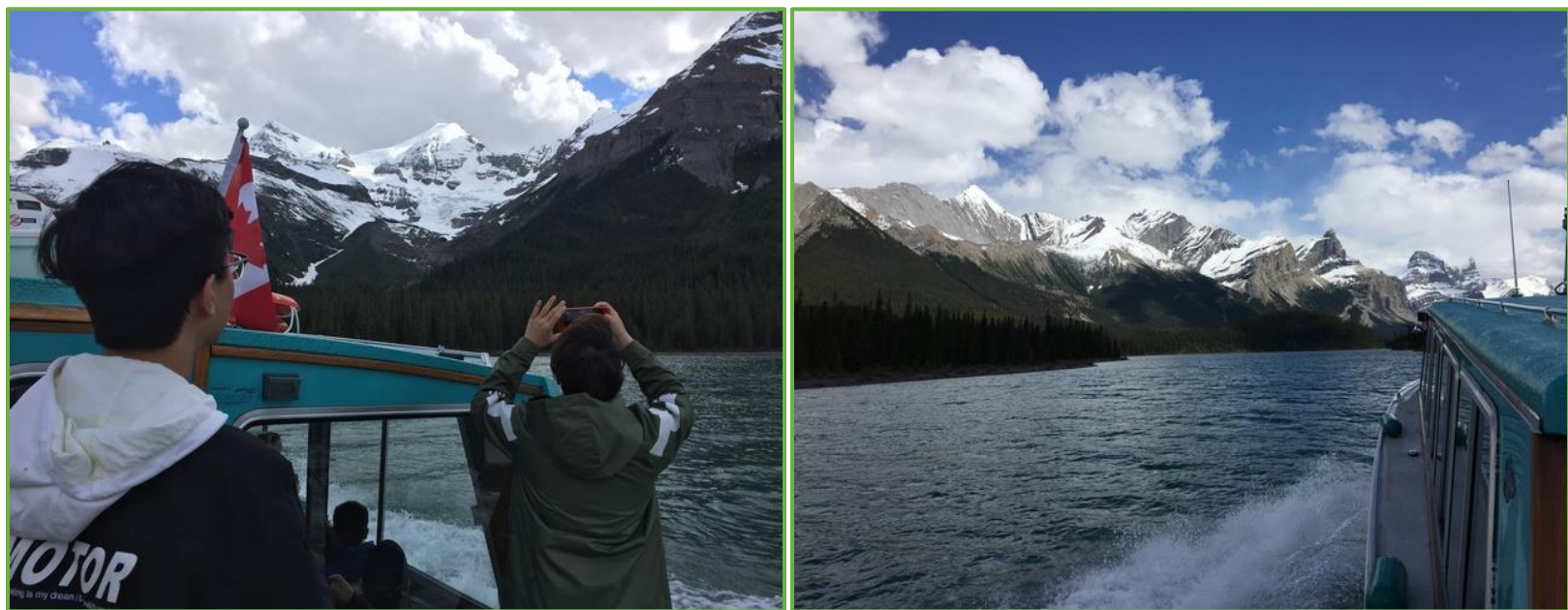


Yellow-rumped Warbler

The boat tour lasted 1.5 hours and was amazing. We powered down the middle of Maligne Lake and entered some areas where the lake narrows, and the scenery gets even better. The boat stopped at a small dock near Spirit Island where there is a place that many people take the classic Rocky Mountain picture. What an amazing place for scenery! Boat tour photos below.



More boat tour photos on Maligne Lake



The classic Rocky Mountain photo of Spirit Island in Maligne Lake

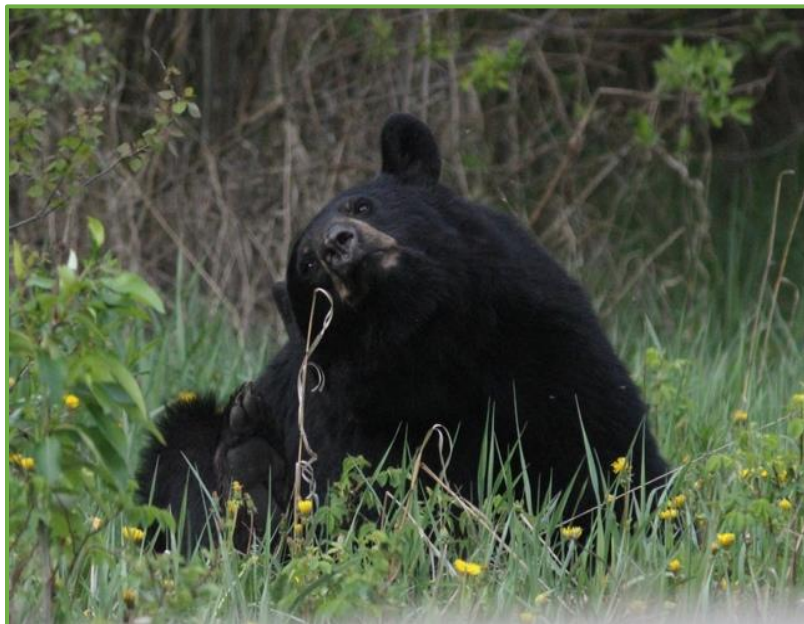


A Columbian Ground Squirrel near the parking lot



A Yellow-pine Chipmunk capitalizing on a tourist's apple core

After the boat tour we drove the hour back to our hotel and had dinner. We then left our hotel at 7:30 for another wildlife drive. My friend had informed us about some Grizzly Bears that were frequenting an area along the highway between Moose Lake and Jasper so we headed in that direction. After driving for a while we rounded a corner and found this Black Bear with an itch. Bears often eat Dandelions and this one was laying in a field of them. Imagine a field of French Fries. A little further down the road and we saw two Grizzlies (a mother and a second year cub) also eating the greening vegetation along the road. Everyone had a good view as these two bears gorged right beside the highway.



Black Bear with an itch



Grizzly sow and her cub



A photo my daughter took of the Grizzly cub

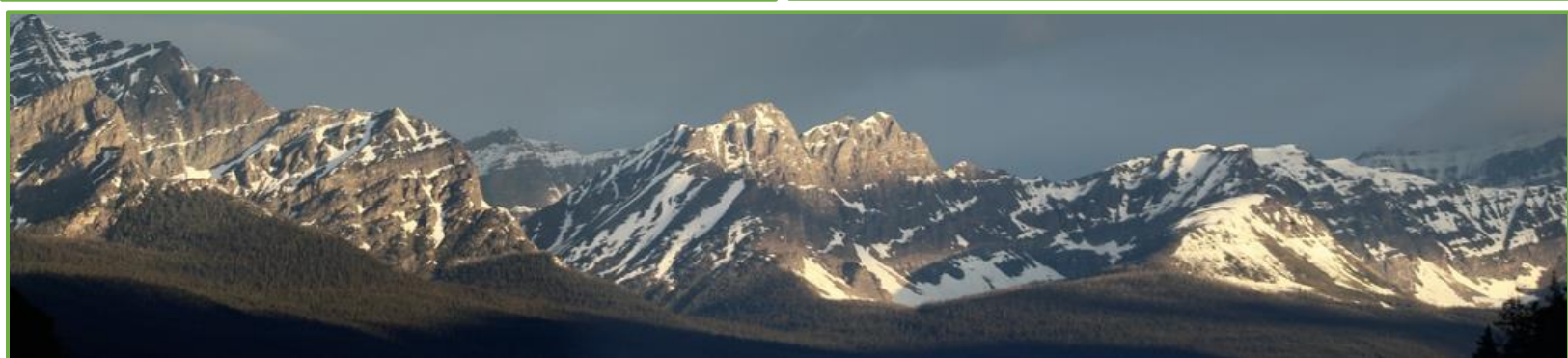
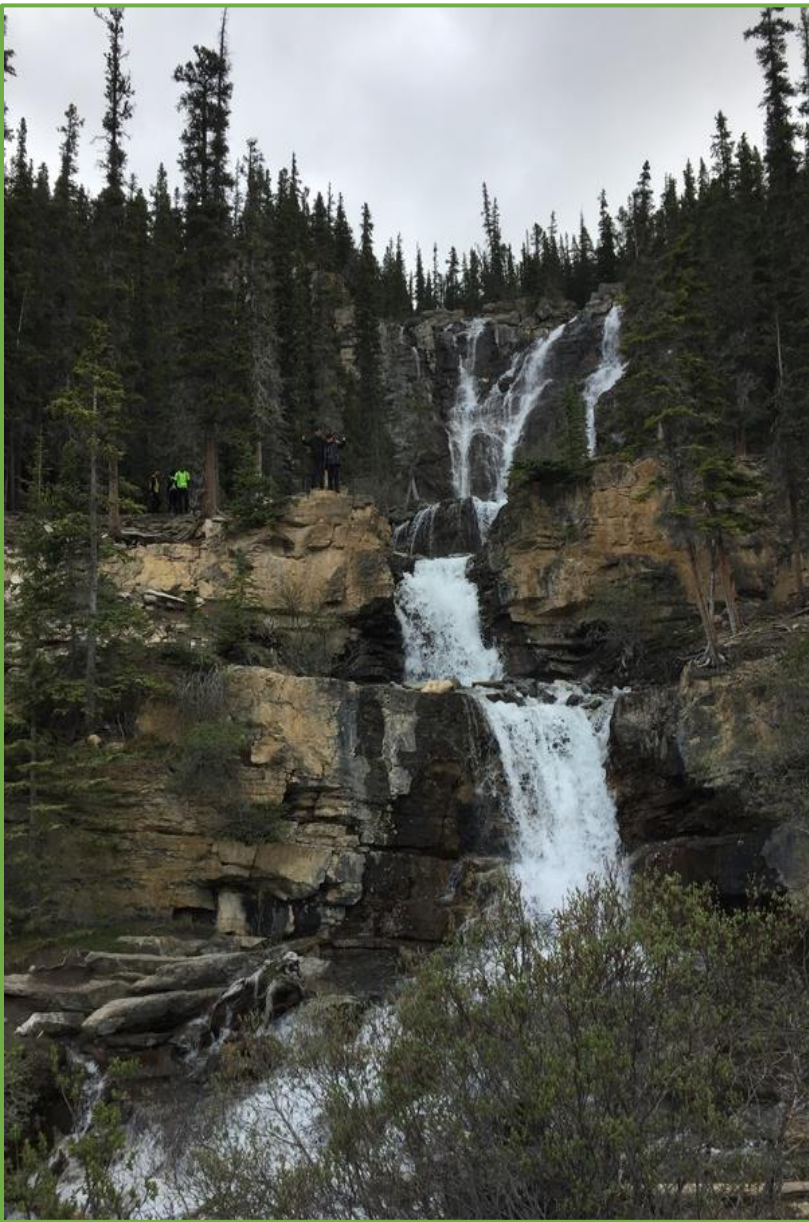
We arrived back to our hotel by 10:00 pm and were soon fast asleep after a day full of activity and in preparation for another tomorrow. Two students met me in the lobby at 5:30 the next morning and we drove quite a ways down Snaring Road, which I had heard was a good wildlife drive destination. We did ok with 6 species of mammals, 4 of them being new for our trip list. The 2 hour drive included 7 Bighorn Sheep, 2 Elk, 1 White-tailed Deer, 1 Mule Deer, 1 Red Squirrel, and 1 Coyote.



More photos from the morning wildlife drive



At 9:00 we all said our good-byes to Jasper and turned south down the Icefields Parkway. We had a 12:30 Columbia Icefields tour booked, and we needed to put kms behind us. The scenery along this road must be one of the highest rated in North America.



We arrived at the Columbia Icefields 30 minutes early so we decided to do the short hike to the snout of the Athabasca Glacier. A quick scramble up from the parking lot brings you right to the glacier's tip. We bundled up, took photos, and quickly assembled a small inukshuk as well.



Back at the Columbia Icefields Discovery Centre, we received our tickets and joined a tour where we were driven out onto the Athabasca Glacier in the large glacier buses. At the end, visitors are allowed off the buses for 20 minutes and we quickly had a look around and snapped some photos.



The entire tour took approximately 1.5 hours and was well worth the money. It was very interesting to see how fast this glacier is in retreat. The park has erected signs along the way in showing where the glacier's snout was in history and it was easy to see how rapidly it is disappearing. In 80 years it is predicted to not be a glacier anymore.

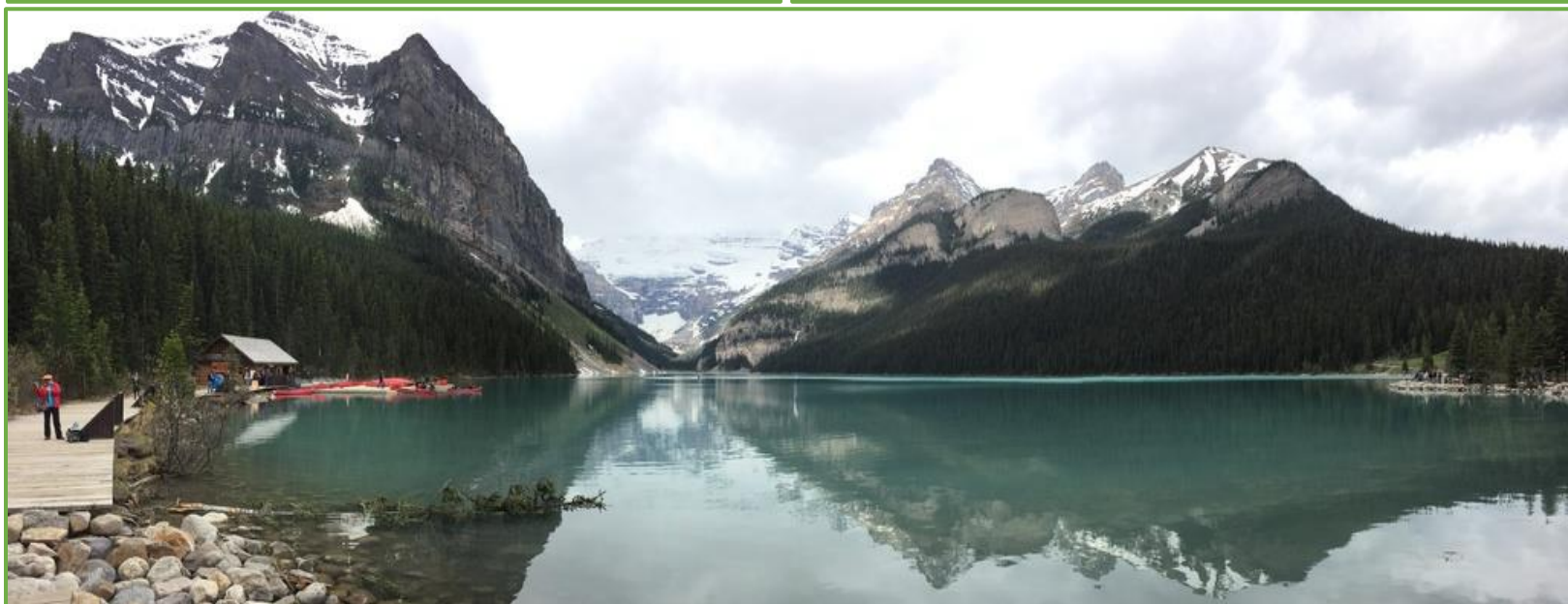


After this we boarded a bus for a short ride to our next tour, the skywalk that overhangs a large glacial U-shaped valley. This walk isn't for the faint of heart as the floor is made of clear glass. It's difficult to capture in a photo but it is an amazing feeling being that high on a glass floor.



After this activity we drove the 2 hours more to Banff and checked in at the Banff Park Lodge. On the way there we stopped to see 9 Mountain Goats high up on a ledge of grass and we also saw 3-4 more Black Bears beside the road. We arrived in Banff at 6:15 and went out into the town for supper and shopping. Banff is well set up for tourist shopping and eating 😊. We met back at the hotel at 9:30 and retired for the evening after another busy day.

3 students met me in the lobby at 5:30 the next morning for another wildlife drive. We planned to drive the Bow Valley Parkway but soon found out it doesn't open until 8:00 to protect the wildlife. We drove half way to Lake Louise on Highway 1 instead and drove the Bow Valley Parkway from here to the west (which is open all day). We then made our way back east to the gate on the other side of the closure and waiting there until 8:00. On the way to the other gate we did come across a nice Black Bear and another White-tailed Deer. The rest of the drive was beautiful, but we didn't see more wildlife. Back at the hotel we all checked out and headed west towards Kamloops. The last tourist stop we made was at Lake Louise. This is the signature lake in the Banff area for tourists and is just off the main highway. Between 10-15 workers are employed just to manage the traffic coming in and out, which gives some idea of the popularity of the site. Surely there are more beautiful lakes in the area, but none are as "famous" as Lake Louise. We parked and did the short walk down to the lakeshore. Already first this in the morning, the number of people was high, and canoes were being rented for \$105 for 30 minutes a short ways from where we were. Photos of Lake Louise and a Common Loon below.



More Black Bears and Columbian Ground Squirrels along the road in the Banff area.



After Lake Louise, we climbed back into our vehicles and drove the 5+ hours back to Kamloops. After stops in Golden for lunch and in Salmon Arm for the washroom, we arrived in Kamloops at 4:45.

Favourite Moment of the trip:

Krystal – Standing at the snout of the Athabasca Glacier.

Lisa – walking on the skywalk.

Gery – Walking on the Athabasca Glacier.

Terry – the Boat tour on Maligne Lake.

Davida – Eating the Elk meat in a Jasper restaurant.

Luke -- seeing the wildlife protection fences in Banff to stop animals being killed

Mark – Eating Elk in a Jasper restaurant.

Dylan – When we saw the Grizzly Bears.

Anderson – Seeing the two Grizzly Bears.

Summer – seeing the Grizzly Bears

Becca – seeing the wildlife overpasses for safe animal travel

Mason – seeing the Grizzly
Bears

One thing I learned on the trip:

Krystal – what a Moose looks like.

Lisa – all the different names and kinds of wild animals.

Gery – Glaciers move and have the power to shape rock.

Anderson – Climate change has caused glaciers to retreat faster and we need to protect our environment.

Terry – That there are different kinds of bears.

Davida – Antlers on an elk are a tree and branches and antlers on a Moose are like two big hands.

Mason – we have to drive slowly on a Canadian freeway because it's easy for animals to come out.

Luke – seeing global warming with my own eyes by seeing glaciers melting

Mark – there is a way that people and wild animals can live together well.

Becca – an economy can grow with the protection of wildlife

Dylan – dawn and dusk are the best times for viewing wildlife.

Summer – Don't sleep in the van!



Mammal List for the trip:

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Black Bear – 7 | 7. Mountain Goat – 9 |
| 2. Grizzly Bear – 2 | 8. Mountain Sheep – 11 |
| 3. Moose – 3 | 9. Columbian Ground Squirrel – 6 |
| 4. Elk – 12 | 10. Red Squirrel – 2 |
| 5. Mule Deer – 1 | 11. Coyote – 2 |
| 6. White-tailed Deer – 2 | 12. Yellow-pine Chipmunk – 1 |

Bird List of the trip: The following species were noted from Kamloops to Jasper, Jasper to Banff, and Banff back to Kamloops. While birding was not the primary purpose of the trip, the following species were noted along the road and at various sites where we stopped.

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|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Canada Goose | 23. American Crow |
| 2. Mallard | 24. Violet-green Swallow |
| 3. Blue-winged Teal | 25. Northern Rough-winged Swallow |
| 4. Ring-necked Duck | 26. Barn Swallow |
| 5. Lesser Scaup | 27. Swainson's Thrush |
| 6. Barrow's Goldeneye | 28. American Robin |
| 7. Common Merganser | 29. Varied Thrush |
| 8. Turkey Vulture | 30. Ruby-crowned Kinglet |
| 9. Osprey | 31. Common Yellowthroat |
| 10. Red-tailed Hawk | 32. Magnolia Warbler |
| 11. Bald Eagle | 33. Yellow-rumped Warbler |
| 12. Sora | 34. Townsend's Warbler |
| 13. Spotted Sandpiper | 35. Chipping Sparrow |
| 14. Rock Pigeon | 36. Dark-eyed Junco |
| 15. Eurasian-collared Dove | 37. Western Tanager |
| 16. Belted Kingfisher | 38. Brewer's Blackbird |
| 17. Lewis's Woodpecker | 39. Red-winged Blackbird |
| 18. Northern Flicker | 40. Yellow-headed Blackbird |
| 19. Steller's Jay | 41. American Goldfinch |
| 20. Gray Jay | 42. Pine Siskin |
| 21. Black-billed Magpie | 43. House Sparrow |
| 22. Common Raven | |

