



Colorado 2023

Prairie Chickens, Grouse and More II

April 6-16, 2023

Join us for a grand spring birding adventure in Colorado and a bit of western Kansas. Native grouse and prairie-chickens will be the focus, as Colorado in April provides excellent opportunities to view multiple species, several of which will be gathered at favorite lekking sites to perform amazing (and yes, rather comical!) courtship displays. Lekking species we should enjoy include Sharp-tailed Grouse, Lesser and Greater Prairie-Chicken and Gunnison and Greater Sage-Grouse. And while they do not gather in display leks, we hope to add Dusky Grouse and White-tailed Ptarmigan to our list of native grouse as well.



Our tour will take us from the prairies of eastern Colorado (and western Kansas) into the high Rocky Mountains, covering over 1500 miles as we travel to the lekking sites of our target species. Our travels and the variety of habitats we will visit also provide opportunities to view many other bird species. A sampling of additional species we hope to find includes Western and Clark's Grebe; Mountain Plover, Lewis's and Three-toed Woodpecker; Williamson's Sapsucker, Pinyon Jay, Black, Brown-capped, and Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch; McCown's and Chestnut-Collared Longspur, and many others.

Tour Itinerary

Day 1 – Thursday, April 6: Arrival in Colorado Springs: The tour begins at 2 p.m. at the Colorado Springs Airport and we'll head direct to Garden of the Gods Park to enjoy the red rocks scenery and birds such as Prairie Falcon, White-throated Swift, Black-billed Magpie, Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay and Spotted Towhee. Later we'll enjoy a get acquainted dinner, possibly followed by a search for Western Screech Owl. Night: Manitou Springs



2023 Colorado Grouse II

Day 2 – Friday, April 7: Birding our way to Gunnison: Our first full day will be a relaxed one of birding from Colorado Springs to Gunnison. We may start with a return to Garden of the Gods (before the crowds of the day arrive), before heading west towards Buena Vista, where we hope to find Lewis’s Woodpecker, Mountain Chickadee, Pinyon Jay, Townsend’s Solitaire and others. From here we’ll head up and over Monarch Pass en route to Gunnison, with stops to search for species such as American Three-toed Woodpecker and Clark’s Nutcracker. Time permitting, we’ll wrap up the day exploring the ski town of Mt. Crested Butte where all three Rosy-Finch species can sometimes be seen, along with Cassin’s Finch, Evening Grosbeak and other montane species. Night: Gunnison

Day 3 – Saturday, April 8: Gunnison Sage-Grouse viewing, travel to Cañon City: We’ll depart early in order to be in the Gunnison Sage-Grouse viewing blind before dawn. The birds here are further away than species at the other lek sites we’ll visit, but diagnostic views of this very rare and local species are quite possible, especially with the use of a spotting scope. Other species we could see from the blind include Ferruginous Hawk, Golden Eagle, Northern Harrier and Mountain Bluebird. Once the birds depart the lek, we’ll return to our hotel for breakfast and to pack up before heading east towards Cañon City. Our route will take us back up over and Monarch Pass, so we’ll have another chance to explore for montane species. Later the drive will parallel the scenic Arkansas River with multiple locations to stop, look for birds and enjoy the views. Night: Cañon City

Day 4 – Sunday, April 9: Birding our way to Oakley, Kansas: Our day will begin with a search for more arid-loving species such as Scaled Quail, Curve-billed Thrasher, Juniper Titmouse and Rufous-crowned Sparrow. Then we’ll start working east to the Kansas state line with stops to look for Mountain Plover (if there have been recent reports) and to scan small lakes and drying reservoirs for Western and Clark’s Grebes and a variety of waterfowl and shorebirds, possibly including Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet and Snowy Plover. Night: Oakley, Kansas



2023 Colorado Grouse II

Day 5 – Monday, April 10: Lesser Prairie-Chicken viewing, travel to Wray:

Lesser Prairie-Chickens have undergone significant population declines in southeastern Colorado and many areas of their limited range, but fortunately seem to be doing reasonably well in some areas of western Kansas. This morning we will meet a local guide in the early morning and drive to a private ranch where we will experience the sights *and* sounds of multiple displaying Lesser Prairie-



Chickens from a viewing blind. After a return to the hotel for breakfast and packing, we'll visit Lake Scott State Park in search of eastern species such as Red-bellied Woodpecker, Eastern Bluebird and Northern Cardinal and then work north to Wray, Colorado. Here we'll meet in late afternoon with a local rancher who will provide some background on the ranch and show us the lek location we'll visit the next morning to view Greater Prairie-Chickens. A few prairie-chickens may be present around the lek, even in late afternoon, but we'll still want to return in the morning for the full experience! Night: Wray

Day 6 – Tuesday, April 11: Greater Prairie-Chicken viewing and Pawnee National

Grasslands: This morning, using our van as a blind on the edge of the lek, we'll enjoy exceptionally close views of multiple Greater Prairie-Chickens "dancing" and displaying, possibly while one or more curious Burrowing Owls looks on. Once the show is over, we'll make our way back to the hotel keeping a watch for other "chickens", such as Northern



Bobwhite and Ring-necked Pheasant.

The remainder of the day will be spent making the drive high into the Rocky Mountains, with a detour through the Pawnee Grasslands, where we could find Mountain Plover, Swainson's and Ferruginous Hawks, McCown's and Chestnut-collared Longspurs and other species of the plains and grasslands. Night: Silverthorne



2023 Colorado Grouse II

Day 7 – Wednesday, April 12: White-tailed Ptarmigan search and travel to Grand Junction: Weather conditions permitting, dawn will find us above tree line on Loveland Pass where we hope to find the elusive White-tailed Ptarmigan. After a hopefully successful search we'll return to the hotel to shed layers, have breakfast and pack for our departure. The remainder of the morning and afternoon will be spent birding our way to Grand Junction with stops to look for any montane species we're still missing, as well as Barrow's Goldeneye, American Dipper and others. Night: Grand Junction



Day 8 – Thursday, April 13: Grand Junction Area Birding. We'll spend the morning searching locations near Grand Junction for a variety of birds including Gambell's Quail, Chukar, Rock and Canyon Wrens, Juniper Titmouse, Sage Thrasher, and Black-throated and Sagebrush Sparrows. Later we'll work our way towards Steamboat Springs, likely with a stop to check the location we'll visit the next morning where both Dusky and Sharp-tailed grouse can be found, as well as other birds of interest such as Sandhill Crane, Golden Eagle and Mountain Bluebird. Night: Steamboat Springs

Day 9 – Friday, April 14: Sharp-tailed Grouse search and travel to Walden. This morning we'll search at first light for Sharp-tailed Grouse. They can be one of the more challenging of the grouse to find, but we've had good luck in the past and we'll hope to



enjoy their "wings wide, foot stomping" lekking behavior again. Dusky Grouse can also be found on hillsides in the same area, so we'll stay alert for the low hooting of displaying males and hopefully see one as well. Later, we'll work north to Walden where we could find White Pelicans and a variety of waterbirds on Walden Lake and possibly Rough-legged Hawk, Northern Shrike and Sage Thrasher in the sage flats of the nearby Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge. Night: Walden



2023 Colorado Grouse II



Day 10 – Saturday, April 15, Greater Sage-Grouse viewing and travel to Denver. Our final morning together will find us on the sage flats south of Walden where we hope to enjoy the display and “booming” antics of the impressive Greater Sage-Grouse, the largest of all North American grouse. A fine “grand finale” for the tour! Later we’ll work southeast to the Denver airport area, with a flexible route and stops to search for any species we are still hoping to find. After checking in at our hotel, we’ll enjoy

a final checklist session and dinner together. Night: Denver Airport region

Day 11 – Sunday, April 16, Departure for home. The tour concludes this morning with shuttle service to Denver International Airport available from our hotel.

