Eagle-Eye Tours

Colorado Grouse Itinerary

Link: Colorado Grouse

Tour Overview

Join us on our Colorado Grouse tour to experience an amazing wildlife spectacle – the foot-stomping, cooing and cackling of lekking grouse!

Colorado is filled with snow-capped peaks straddling the Continental Divide, immense prairies and plains, wildlife-rich riparian corridors, beautiful montane spruce-fir forests and magnificent canyons. We visit here in April when Greater and Gunnison Sage-Grouse, Sharp-tailed Grouse and Lesser and Greater Prairie-Chickens are dancing on leks trying to impress mates and dominate rivals.

Target species include the 5 grouse, as well as Mountain Plover, three rosy-finches, Dusky Grouse, Pinyon Jay, Thick-billed Longspur, and a host of mammals: Bighorn Sheep, Pronghorn, Elk, Mule Deer, Coyote and Red Fox.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Denver, CO

Our Colorado Grouse tour starts in Denver, where we gather for a welcome dinner. Night in Denver.

Day 2: Drive to Scott City, Kansas

Our first target grouse is Lesser Prairie-Chicken, which is sadly in steep decline across its breeding range. There are no reliable sites to find the Lesser Prairie-Chicken in Colorado, so we will head east towards Kansas to find this species. Along the way we will be looking for a variety of birds including White-crowned Sparrows, Horned Larks, Ferruginous Hawks, Thick-billed and Chestnut-collared Longspurs. Night at Scott City or Oakley.

Day 3: Lesser Prairie-Chicken lek

We will be up very early to visit the Lesser Prairie-Chicken lek. This will be a magical experience watching the males shuffling and darting back and forth, while the females watch on. Afterwards we enjoy a well-deserved breakfast, and check out of our hotel. We may visit Scott State Park for Eastern and Western Bluebirds, Hawks and an array of waterfowl. We will then drive northwards towards Wray. En route we may find Swainson's Hawk, Long-billed Curlew, Burrowing Owl and Great-tailed Grackle. If we have time, we may make a late afternoon visit to the lek site, but will plan to visit there early the next morning. Night in Wray.

Day 4: Greater Prairie-Chicken lek, Pawnee Grasslands

We will wake up early and visit the Greater Prairie-Chicken lek site, located on a private ranch. Greater Prairie-Chickens have done well recently and we should be treated to lengthy and very close views of males dancing on the lek. There should be great photo opportunities. Afterwards we will refuel and then head west towards the Pawnee Grasslands. The famed short-grass prairie holds Ferruginous Hawk, Golden Eagle, Mountain Plover, Long-billed Curlew, Prairie Falcon and Thick-billed Longspur and we will spend much of the afternoon covering the area. If we have time we will visit wetland areas for waterfowl. Night in Fort Collins.

Day 5: Soapstone Prairie Natural Area

Today we will explore the Soapstone Prairie Natural Area where we will look for Thick-billed Longspurs and other rare short grass prairie species. Its also a great place to look for other prairie wildlife such as bison, pronghorn, and elk. Night in Fort Collins.

Day 6: Drive to Craig

Today's route takes us west to Craig, through a variety of habitats, from stream valleys to high mountain passes. Along the rivers we will look for American Dipper, while Bighorn Sheep may be spotted on the slopes above us. At Cameron Pass we are in the high country, and Northern Goshawk, American Three-toed Woodpecker, Pine Grosbeak and rosy-finches are possible. On our way to Craig we may also encounter Golden Eagle and we should see Pronghorns. Overnight at Craig.

Day 7: Greater Sage-Grouse lek

Before dawn we visit the nearby Greater Sage-Grouse lek, where we will watch the antics of both males and females. The males put on a great display; one male will usually attract most of the females. In the afternoon, we will bird around Craig. Night in Craig.

Day 8: Sharp-tailed Grouse and Colorado National Monument

We will begin early this morning at a Sharp-tailed Grouse lek on private property just outside of Craig. This will be another wonderful experience watching males and their golden combs and purple air sacs dancing in the openings. Afterwards, we head to Grand Junction, where we will visit the amazing Colorado National Monument this afternoon. The Colorado National Monument not only provides stunning scenery, but should deliver Golden Eagle, Gambel's Quail, Western Scrub-Jay, Juniper Titmouse and Black-throated Sparrow. Night at Grand Junction.

Day 9: Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park

Today we leave Grand Junction and drive to Gunnison. We will explore the spectacular Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park on the way. The main attraction for birders here is Dusky Grouse, but we can also expect White-throated Swift, Western Scrub-Jay, Juniper Titmouse and more. Night in Gunnison.

Day 10: Gunnison Sage-Grouse lek

We have our last very early morning at the Gunnison Sage-Grouse lek. We will be viewing from a trailer, with the birds quite far off, so photography opportunities are not great. Afterwards, we may visit Crested Butte and Mount Crested Butte in search of rosy-finches. There will be some time to relax in the afternoon. Night at Gunnison.

Day 11: Gunnison to Denver

We will depart Gunnison and head back to Denver. On the way we will visit the Silverthorne area to look for Rosy-finches and Loveland Pass to look for Ptarmigan. Night in Denver.

Day 12: Departure

Our Colorado Grouse tour ends today. You can depart anytime for home.

What to Expect

Overview

The Colorado Grouse tour is a moderately paced tour. You can expect very early morning starts (we are at the lek before daylight) on five days, the other days we will aim to be on the road by 8am.

Food
On the lek days, we will be birding very early and we will have breakfast after visiting the leks. On other days, we will have breakfast at the hotel before we head out for the day. We often take a picnic lunch in the field, but will occasionally stop at a restaurant for lunch. Dinner is usually at the hotel or a nearby restaurant. Each evening after dinner we compile the day's checklist, review the day's activities, birds, mammals and other observations, and plan the next day's activities.

Accommodation
We stay in accommodations close to the best birding locations. This means we are often staying in rural locations and hotels, which may be basic. Because we are visiting many sites on this tour, there will be many 1-night stays.

Walking
Walking on this tour is easy. Walking will usually be on well-maintained trails or along roads. Our

longest hike (near Wildernest) is about a mile.

Driving
This tour involves a significant amount of driving, with many days spent covering long distances as we travel between key birding hotspots. While the drives can be lengthy, we make rest stops along the way to stretch and enjoy the scenery. We will be viewing the leks from vehicles or from a viewing trailer, which will be positioned in a way for all to see and appreciate the grouse.

Climate
Weather conditions during the trip will range from mild to cool. We may experience windy conditions and rain or even snow. Higher altitudes and nights may be cold. Sometimes weather impacts our itinerary, and we have to modify our daily plan. Clothing should be appropriate for the cold, including winter boots and jackets, gloves, scarves and warm hat, and we recommend dressing in layers. High altitude can pose problems from altitude sickness; those with heart or respiratory conditions should consult their physicians.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes
• All accommodations
• All Meals and soft drinks
• Ground transportation
• One guide and vehicle with 4 - 7 participants, 2 guides and vehicles with 8 - 12
• All park, conservation and entrance fees

Tour Price Does Not Include
• Flights to and from start / end location
• Travel Insurance
• Items of a personal nature
• Alcoholic beverages