

COLORADO GROUSE I

Apr 4, 2012 to Apr 14, 2012
Chris Benesh & Terry McEneaney



Dancing at dawn, a male Greater Prairie-Chicken wows our group with an incredible performance at the Bledsoe lek. If he impresses the other chickens as much as he impressed us, he has a great chance of mating! (Photo by guide Chris Benesh)

This year's first Colorado Grouse tour was a great success. We were really fortunate with the weather, being able to get to the places that we wanted to go and see most of what we wanted to see. It was clear to us that Colorado was experiencing a pretty significant drought this year; compared with last year, there was a great deal less snowpack, and reservoirs were well below capacity.

Colorado is quite a diverse destination. In order to see the grouse and grouse-like birds, we had to cover some ground. In fact, we covered just shy of 2400 miles - that's a lot of Colorado! In doing so, however, we got a fun appreciation of just how varied and beautiful things are there.

It's always hard to pick favorites, but ask we did, and you all came up with some deserving choices. The runaway winner this year was the Greater Sage-Grouse seen northeast of Walden. The scenery there is splendid, and we were situated right at the end of the lek, providing for a wonderful display experience. The pair of White-tailed Ptarmigan received the second highest vote count, and no doubt would have taken top honors were it not for the fact that some stayed back at the trailhead to avoid steep, icy conditions on the trail. Brown-capped Rosy-Finch was the next biggest vote getter, and it was one that kept us in suspense for most of the trip. The lack of snow meant that most were already back on their high, barren, alpine breeding habitat. Thankfully, the feeders in Silverthorne came through for us at the end.

Greater Prairie-Chicken got two votes as well, as it was indeed a wonderful show to witness. No doubt if we had allowed for more than a pick-3, this would have gotten more votes. And the plain and perky Juniper Titmouse snuck in with a couple of votes, in part for its novelty and part for its animated self. Barrow's Goldeneye was the last multi-vote getter. Again, heightened suspense over whether we would track this one down paid off in the end with nice studies at Windy Gap Reservoir. Two more grouse made it on to the favorites list, too: the female Dusky Grouse (number 600 for Jackie), and the Sharp-tailed Grouse. Two jays made the list, Steller's and Pinyon, the Pinyon Jay sightings were especially fantastic. Also in the blue vein was Mountain Bluebird, which is a wonderful shade of blue. Red was represented by Cinnamon Teal and Pine

Grosbeak. And rounding out the list were Black-throated Sparrow, Pygmy Nuthatch, and Burrowing Owl.

Thanks to all of you for joining Terry and me on our exploration of Colorado. It was a pleasure sharing the antics of grouse with you and hearing all of your stories. Until the next adventure, all the best!

--Chris

For more information about this tour, including future departures, visit our website at www.fieldguides.com. And to see this same triplist online, go to <http://www.fieldguides.com/triplists/cgr12aLIST.pdf> and you will find the list in its entirety.

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*)

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*)

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*)

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

CINNAMON TEAL (*Anas cyanoptera*) – Several beautiful birds seen near Gunnison.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*)

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*)

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN) (*Anas crecca carolinensis*)

REDHEAD (*Aythya americana*)

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*)

LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*)

BUFFLEHEAD (*Bucephala albeola*)

COMMON GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala clangula*)

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala islandica*) – Whew! After checking unsuccessfully at several reservoirs, we had nice scope views of several at Windy Gap Reservoir.

HOODED MERGANSER (*Lophodytes cucullatus*)

COMMON MERGANSER (*Mergus merganser*)

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

Odontophoridae (New World Quail)

SCALED QUAIL (*Callipepla squamata*) – A covey of a dozen or so near east of Pueblo was a treat.

GAMBEL'S QUAIL (*Callipepla gambelii*) – We saw a fair number of these in yards below the Colorado National Monument.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

RING-NECKED PHEASANT (*Phasianus colchicus*) – Mostly around Holly. [I]

GREATER SAGE-GROUSE (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) – This species was the runaway winner at trip favorite owing to the fantastic show we had northwest of Walden. At least 57 birds were seen - quite a sight!

GUNNISON SAGE-GROUSE (*Centrocercus minimus*) – It was wonderful to see this cryptic, recently described species near Gunnison. Sadly, the birds were quick to depart. It was nice to see a few relatively close, however.

WHITE-TAILED PTARMIGAN (*Lagopus leucura*) – Wow! This was the second most popular bird of the trip and may have taken top honors, except for the fact that a hike was involved to get to them that not everyone undertook. Amazing in their white plumage.



A lovely portrait of Jackie's 600th ABA area bird- a female Dusky Grouse at the Black Canyon. (Photo by guide Chris Benesh)

DUSKY GROUSE (*Dendragapus obscurus*) – Thanks to Jan and Jan, we had eventually great looks at a female at the Black Canyon of the Gunnison. Nice! This was also a milestone number 600 ABA bird for Jackie. Congrats!

SHARP-TAILED GROUSE (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*) – This one involved a bit of creativity, but by the end of the morning, we had had some real wonderful views!

GREATER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN (*Tympanuchus cupido*) – Another fantastic show, we visited a Bledsoe lek just north of Wray. A wonderful show with at least 24 birds present.

LESSER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*) – It looked a little sketchy for a bit, but Fred got us to the spot and we were able to enjoy this wonderful chickens until they got spooked off by a hunting Northern Harrier. A nice show with some 18 birds present.

WILD TURKEY (*Meleagris gallopavo*)

Gaviidae (Loons)

COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*)

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

EARED GREBE (*Podiceps nigricollis*)

WESTERN GREBE (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*)

CLARK'S GREBE (*Aechmophorus clarkii*) – We did eventually track down and enjoy a Clark's Grebe.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*)

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*)

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*)

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

WHITE-FACED IBIS (*Plegadis chihi*)

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*)

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*)

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*)

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*)

SWAINSON'S HAWK (*Buteo swainsoni*)

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

FERRUGINOUS HAWK (*Buteo regalis*) – Nice looks at two different birds.

ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK (*Buteo lagopus*) – We had one early on in the trip and at least four more around the Walden area.

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – Hard to believe the number of Goldens seen on this trip on multiple days. Wow!

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*)

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – Fun to see a pair of these birds using the cliffs at the Colorado National Monument.

PRAIRIE FALCON (*Falco mexicanus*) – A total of three seen in all. Always a treat!



A pair of immaculate White-tailed Ptarmigan was the reward for a hike up the steep and icy trails at Loveland Pass. (Photo by guide Chris Benesh)

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)



Big skies and beautiful scenery in the grasslands near Walden. (Photo by guide Chris Benesh)

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*)

Gruidae (Cranes)

SANDHILL CRANE (*Grus canadensis*)

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*)

MOUNTAIN PLOVER (*Charadrius montanus*) – Thanks to Bill for spotting the only one of the trip for us near the Pawnee National Grasslands.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

AMERICAN AVOCET (*Recurvirostra americana*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*)

LONG-BILLED CURLEW (*Numenius americanus*)

WILSON'S SNIPE (*Gallinago delicata*) [*****]

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BONAPARTE'S GULL (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*)

FRANKLIN'S GULL (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*)

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*)

CALIFORNIA GULL (*Larus californicus*)

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [**I**]

BAND-TAILED PIGEON (*Patagioenas fasciata*) – One came in to the feeders in Silverthorne.

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) [**I**]

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*)

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

GREATER ROADRUNNER (*Geococcyx californianus*) – A couple were seen on our drive through Cottonwood Canyon in the extreme southeast part of the state.

Strigidae (Owls)

EASTERN SCREECH-OWL (*Megascops asio*) – Thanks to a tip from local birders, we had nice scope views of one at a day roost.

GREAT HORNED OWL (*Bubo virginianus*)

BURROWING OWL (*Athene cunicularia*) – Nice scope views of birds in Denver and again east of Pueblo.

Apodidae (Swifts)

WHITE-THROATED SWIFT (*Aeronautes saxatalis*) – One of the highlights of a visit to the canyonlands, we had some great views, sometimes breathtakingly close.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon*)

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

WILLIAMSON'S SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*)

RED-NAPED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*)

LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER (*Picoides scalaris*)

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*)

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*)

NORTHERN FLICKER (*Colaptes auratus*)

NORTHERN FLICKER (RED-SHAFTED) (*Colaptes auratus cafer*)

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

EASTERN PHOEBE (*Sayornis phoebe*)

SAY'S PHOEBE (*Sayornis saya*)

Laniidae (Shrikes)

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (*Lanius ludovicianus*)

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

GRAY JAY (*Perisoreus canadensis*) – Nice studies of a pale bird (as is the case in the Rockies) visiting the feeders in Silverthorne.

PINYON JAY (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*) – Great to see these so well at the Colorado National Monument.

STELLER'S JAY (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) – Great colors!

BLUE JAY (*Cyanocitta cristata*)

WESTERN SCRUB-JAY (WOODHOUSE'S) (*Apelocoma californica woodhouseii*)

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE (*Pica hudsonia*)

CLARK'S NUTCRACKER (*Nucifraga columbiana*) – One seen briefly at Black Canyon of the Gunnison.

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*)

Alaudidae (Larks)

HORNED LARK (*Eremophila alpestris*)

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW (*Tachycineta thalassina*)

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*)

Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)



The social and gregarious Pinyon Jay was a highlight of our visit to the Colorado National Monument. (Photo by guide Chris Benesh)

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE (*Poecile atricapillus*)

MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE (*Poecile gambeli*)

JUNIPER TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus ridgwayi*) – Plenty of these were singing around the Colorado National Monument.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*)

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta carolinensis*)

PYGMY NUTHATCH (*Sitta pygmaea*)

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

ROCK WREN (*Salpinctes obsoletus*)

CANYON WREN (*Catherpes mexicanus*)

BEWICK'S WREN (*Thryomanes bewickii*)

Cinclidae (Dippers)

AMERICAN DIPPER (*Cinclus mexicanus*) – Great looks at two foraging in the Slate River.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*)

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EASTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia sialis*)

WESTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia mexicana*) – We finally caught up with these on the last day of the trip.

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia currucoides*) – Lots of these beauties around.

TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE (*Myadestes townsendi*)

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*)

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

SAGE THRASHER (*Oreoscoptes montanus*)

CURVE-BILLED THRASHER (EASTERN) (*Toxostoma curvirostre oberholseri*)

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [I]

Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings)

MCCOWN'S LONGSPUR (*Rhynchophanes mccownii*) – We watched as some came in to drink at a small waterhole on the Pawnee Grasslands.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (AUDUBON'S) (*Setophaga coronata auduboni*) [*]

Emberizidae (Buntings, Sparrows and Allies)

SPOTTED TOWHEE (*Pipilo maculatus*)

CANYON TOWHEE (*Melospiza fusca*)

VESPER SPARROW (*Pooecetes gramineus*)

BLACK-THROATED SPARROW (*Amphispiza bilineata*)

LARK BUNTING (*Calamospiza melanocorys*) – A single bird perched briefly nearby on its way north while we were headed north to Lamar in the Comanche Grasslands.

FOX SPARROW (SLATE-COLORED) (*Passerella iliaca schistacea*) – A single bird was feeding beneath feeders at Moose Visitors Center.

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*)



The fantastic displays of Greater Sage-Grouse on the lek at Walden made this the overall favorite bird of the trip. (Photo by guide Chris Benesh)

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (GAMBEL'S) (*Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*)

DARK-EYED JUNCO (GRAY-HEADED) (*Junco hyemalis caniceps*)

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

WESTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella neglecta*)

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) – One was keeping well hidden in a big mixed flock of blackbirds.

BREWER'S BLACKBIRD (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)

COMMON GRACKLE (BRONZED) (*Quiscalus quiscula versicolor*)

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*)

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*)

Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)

BROWN-CAPPED ROSY-FINCH (*Leucosticte australis*) – Yay! The Silverthorne feeders provided us with our only rosy-finches of the trip. Whew!

PINE GROSBEAK (*Pinicola enucleator*) – It was a great trip for these with birds in Dillon, Silverthorne, and Moose Visitors Center. Rocky Mountain birds have gray bellies.

CASSIN'S FINCH (*Carpodacus cassinii*) – Best views were at the Moose Visitors Center where we saw a yellow-colored Cassin's.

HOUSE FINCH (*Carpodacus mexicanus*)

RED CROSSBILL (*Loxia curvirostra*)

PINE SISKIN (*Spinus pinus*)

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*Spinus tristis*)

EVENING GROSBEAK (*Coccothraustes vespertinus brooksi*) – It was a great year for this species in Colorado, appropriate since it was selected as ABA bird of the year for 2012.



*The early spring and lack of snow meant that rosy-finches were back up high on their breeding grounds and scarce at the lower elevations. Luckily, the feeders at Silverthorne still had a couple of Brown-capped Rosy-Finches dropping by and we had super looks.
(Photo by guide Chris Benesh)*

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) **[I]**

MAMMALS

PIKA (*Ochotona princeps*) – One perched on a rock at Loveland Pass.

NUTTALL'S (MOUNTAIN) COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus nuttalli*)

DESERT COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus audubonii*)

WHITE-TAILED JACKRABBIT (*Lepus townsendi*)

BLACK-TAILED JACKRABBIT (*Lepus californicus*)

LEAST CHIPMUNK (*Tamias minimus*)

COLORADO CHIPMUNK (*Tamias quadrivittatus*)

YELLOW-BELLIED MARMOT (*Marmota flaviventris*)

WHITE-TAILED ANTELOPE SQUIRREL (*Ammospermophilus leucurus*)

WYOMING GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus elegans*)

THIRTEEN-LINED GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus tridecemlineatus*)

ROCK SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus variegatus*)

GOLDEN-MANTLED GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus lateralis*)

BLACK-TAILED PRAIRIE DOG (*Cynomys ludovicianus*)

WHITE-TAILED PRAIRIE DOG (*Cynomys leucurus*)

GUNNISON PRAIRIE DOG (*Cynomys gunnisoni*)

FOX SQUIRREL (*Sciurus niger*)

RED SQUIRREL (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)

ORD'S KANGAROO RAT (*Dipodomys ordii*)

MUSKRAT (*Ondatra zibethica*)

RED FOX (*Vulpes vulpes*)

SHORT-TAILED WEASEL (STOAT) (*Mustela erminea*) – A gorgeous white one seen by a few at Loveland Pass.

AMERICAN BADGER (*Taxidea taxus*) – One ran across the road in front of us near Walden.

STRIPED SKUNK (*Mephitis mephitis*)

ELK (*Cervus canadensis*)

MULE DEER (*Odocoileus hemionus*)

WHITE-TAILED DEER (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

PRONGHORN (*Antilocapra americana*)

BIGHORN SHEEP (*Ovis canadensis*) – Great looks at this species at the Colorado National Monument.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 143 bird taxa and 29 mammal taxa