

COLORADO GROUSE II 2012

Apr 14, 2012 to Apr 24, 2012
Dan Lane & Eric Hynes



One of the highlights of the trip was the final morning's performance at the Greater Sage-Grouse lek near Walden. And to think it only took 500 frames to get this shot of a fully inflated bird! (Photo by guide Eric Hynes)

Colorado in April is a magical place, especially if you are a birder. We were treated to a diversity of raptors, hordes of finches, nearly a full spectrum of waterfowl, killer corvids, striking sparrows - and those weren't even our targets! For lek behavior in North America, it's tough to argue with the displays of grouse and Colorado is king.

Our quest covered 2,130 miles in a lop-sided figure eight through some of North America's most picturesque landscapes. While chasing "chickens," we covered parts of the state many native Coloradoans have never seen. From the blustery eastern plains to the snowy peaks of the Rockies, there was no shortage of scenery. Looking at the snow pack at elevation and the waterlines on the reservoirs made it clear they are hurting for precipitation this year.

Thankfully all those predawn departures paid off with a clean sweep of the targeted native grouse. Our hosts on the prairie, Fred Dorenkamp followed by Bob Bledsoe, were two of the most noteworthy characters I have met in my travels. Each provided a unique experience with the respective prairie-chicken species. The less-than-obliging Gunnison Sage-Grouse were quickly forgotten when the Dusky Grouse was so unfazed by our presence that I worried somebody might try to pick it up. The stomping and spinning of the Sharp-tailed Grouse were comical. Clearly the best was saved for last: our intimate experience with the dramatic Greater Sage-Grouse was punctuated by the strafing flight of a Prairie Falcon and our persistence at Loveland Pass was finally rewarded with scope views of White-tailed Ptarmigan.

Noteworthy experiences along the way included a pair of Red-tailed Hawks harassing a Golden Eagle almost directly over the second van, a bonanza of ducks and shorebirds being stirred up by a hungry Peregrine on our way to Lamar, surviving a picnic lunch in hurricane force winds, a feeder frenzy in Silverthorne, being buzzed by White-throated Swifts and Violet-green Swallows at the Painted Wall, and running the gauntlet of Mule Deer and Elk leaving Gunnison.

Dan and I had a blast and sincerely hope you had as much fun as we did. The camaraderie and respect you shared with one

another was inspiring and a delight. We thank you and will be looking forward to future adventures with all of you. Cheers,

--Eric

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/cgr12bLIST.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)

SNOW GOOSE (*Chen caerulescens caerulescens*) – Normally not seen on this tour because they are typically farther north already; several dozen were mixed in with Ross's Geese at the little Verhoeff Reservoir along Route 50 west of Lamar.

ROSS'S GOOSE (*Chen rossii*) – Another unlikely species for this tour, several dozen of these tardy migrants were with the Snow Geese at Verhoeff Reservoir west of Lamar.

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*)

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*)

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*)

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Anas discors*)

CINNAMON TEAL (*Anas cyanoptera*) – It was a real treat to see these handsome drakes at multiple locations, particularly Lower Latham Reservoir outside of Evans.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*)

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*)

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

CANVASBACK (*Aythya valisineria*) – Only encountered a couple times on the tour, Walden Reservoir proved to be our best views.

REDHEAD (*Aythya americana*) – Walden Reservoir, with its tremendous waterfowl gathering, provided the best sightings.

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*)

LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*)

BUFFLEHEAD (*Bucephala albeola*)

COMMON GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala clangula*) – Despite the dramatic draw down from the on-going drought, Blue Mesa Reservoir held a few of these diving ducks.

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala islandica*) – This species did not turn up until the eighth day in the impoundments along the Yampa River (Big Bottom section) southwest of Craig.

HOODED MERGANSER (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) – It took a good scope to pick out this species in the distance on Blue Mesa Reservoir.

COMMON MERGANSER (*Mergus merganser*)

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – This comical little duck was only spotted in a few locations.

Odontophoridae (New World Quail)

SCALED QUAIL (*Callipepla squamata*) – The "greasy" road east of Pueblo produced nicely on our first morning. Our second encounter had them running right at us.

GAMBEL'S QUAIL (*Callipepla gambelii*) – A male teed up on sagebrush and calling was a great way to start our outing through Colorado National Monument.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

RING-NECKED PHEASANT (*Phasianus colchicus*) [I]

GREATER SAGE-GROUSE (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) – It pays to save the best for last. These guys put on an

incredible show at dawn outside of Walden on our last morning.

GUNNISON SAGE-GROUSE (*Centrocercus minimus*) – Our early rise was rewarded but they did not stick around to be savored in sunlight.

WHITE-TAILED PTARMIGAN (*Lagopus leucura*) – Our most challenging chicken did not get away. It took two trips and hours of scanning by the whole group to finally get distant views of two all-white beauties across the valley at Loveland Pass.

DUSKY GROUSE (*Dendragapus obscurus*) – Could you ask for a more cooperative bird? The male at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park was ridiculous.

SHARP-TAILED GROUSE (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*) – The second lek was even more entertaining on our penultimate morning.

GREATER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN (*Tympanuchus cupido*) – Thank you Bledsoe Cattle Company! Luckily Dan's special elbow trick failed (twice).

LESSER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*) – My all-time favorite school bus ride. Fred Dorenkamp was a real character and his wife puts out one heck of a breakfast spread.

WILD TURKEY (*Meleagris gallopavo intermedia*) – The Rio Grande subspecies of Wild Turkey put on quite a show for us along Route 385 near our lunch stop at Bonny Lake State Park.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

HARED GREBE (*Podiceps nigricollis*)

WESTERN GREBE (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*)

CLARK'S GREBE (*Aechmophorus clarkii*)

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*)

SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*) – A surprising flyover which only part of the group got to see during a bathroom break on our way to Lamar.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

WHITE-FACED IBIS (*Plegadis chihi*)

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*)

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) [N]

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – We enjoyed a bird on the nest at Walden Reservoir. [N]

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*)

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*)

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*)

SWAINSON'S HAWK (*Buteo swainsoni*) – Although many were enjoyed along the way, the birds at Walden Reservoir were most cooperative.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*) [N]

FERRUGINOUS HAWK (*Buteo regalis*) – We came upon a perched immature after the Lesser Prairie-Chicken lek and a soaring adult later the same day.



We're not sure if this male Greater Prairie-Chicken was the dominant one at his lek, but he sure impressed the heck out of us!
(Photo by guide Eric Hynes)

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – This species became more conspicuous during the second half of the journey but no sighting topped the dramatic and close first observation. A pair of Red-tailed Hawks were really giving an adult the business outside of Leadville.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*)

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – An individual making a beeline over the marsh at Lower Latham Reservoir was our only observation of the tour.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*)

PRAIRIE FALCON (*Falco mexicanus*) – Just when we thought the show couldn't get any better at the Greater Sage-Grouse lek, an adult buzzed the vans several times at dawn in pursuit of Horned Larks.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

VIRGINIA RAIL (*Rallus limicola*) – It took some coaxing but Dan got us a quick look at a furtive individual at Lower Latham Reservoir.

SORA (*Porzana carolina*) [*]

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*)

Gruidae (Cranes)

SANDHILL CRANE (*Grus canadensis*) – The Yampa River Valley east of Craig provided a number of good looks.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*)

MOUNTAIN PLOVER (*Charadrius montanus*) – Despite the high winds east of Pueblo on our first morning, we scored several good looks.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

AMERICAN AVOCET (*Recurvirostra americana*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

LONG-BILLED CURLEW (*Numenius americanus*) – One of the first species detected on the tour thanks to good spotting by Mark near the airport.

MARbled GODWIT (*Limosa fedoa*)

LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – One of several species we observed only once on the trip that was found at the little reservoir west of Lamar.

WILSON'S SNIPE (*Gallinago delicata*)

WILSON'S PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus tricolor*) – We almost drove away before this bird was spotted along the shore at Sweitzer Lake State Park after watching the Sage Thrashers.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BONAPARTE'S GULL (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*)

FRANKLIN'S GULL (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*)

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*)

CALIFORNIA GULL (*Larus californicus*)

FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*) – This write-in species was represented by a single bird among Bonaparte's Gulls on Sweitzer Lake.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [I]

BAND-TAILED PIGEON (*Patagioenas fasciata*) – A well-hidden individual was calling from high up in a conifer in that birdie neighborhood in Silverthorne.

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

WHITE-WINGED DOVE (*Zenaida asiatica*) – We twitched this unlikely bird on the sidewalk in a little downtown in the southeast.

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*)

Strigidae (Owls)

GREAT HORNED OWL (*Bubo virginianus*)

BURROWING OWL (*Athene cunicularia*) – This odd little ground-dweller was our first stop leaving the Denver airport.

[N]

Apodidae (Swifts)

WHITE-THROATED SWIFT (*Aeronautes saxatalis*)

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus alexandri*)

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megasceryle alcyon*)

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes carolinus*) – We caught up to one or two at the western edge of the species range in eastern Colorado after our picnic lunch in Bonny Lake State Park.

WILLIAMSON'S SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*) – One of a handful of species we picked up on our last day.

RED-NAPED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*)

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*)

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*)

AMERICAN THREE-TOED WOODPECKER (*Picoides dorsalis*)

– Clearly one of the highlights of the trip and a lifer for many; a very responsive individual flew in to investigate the playback at snowy Rabbit Ears Pass.

NORTHERN FLICKER (YELLOW-SHAFTED) (*Colaptes auratus luteus*) – Most of the flickers seen well on the tour were the red-shafted variety but at least one yellow-shafted was noted when we were in eastern Colorado on day three.

NORTHERN FLICKER (RED-SHAFTED) (*Colaptes auratus cafer*) [N]

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

GRAY FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax wrightii*) – We caught the first of the migrants arriving in Colorado National Monument.

SAY'S PHOEBE (*Sayornis saya*)

Laniidae (Shrikes)

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (*Lanius ludovicianus*) – It is always a treat to come across these striking little predators.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

PINYON JAY (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*) – Eric's nemesis was vanquished with ease in Colorado National Monument.

STELLER'S JAY (*Cyanocitta stelleri*)

BLUE JAY (*Cyanocitta cristata*)

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

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE (*Pica hudsonia*) [N]

CLARK'S NUTCRACKER (*Nucifraga columbiana*) – Dan's nemesis on the CO Grouse tour was put to rest by several cooperative individuals in Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*)

Alaudidae (Larks)



A little bit of drama was provided by this adult Golden Eagle and a pair of angry Red-tailed Hawks which objected to its presence and did their best to chase it off.
(Photo by guide Eric Hynes)

HORNED LARK (*Eremophila alpestris*) – We saw this species everywhere, from out on the eastern prairies to high elevation at Loveland Pass, possibly different subspecies.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*)
VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW (*Tachycineta thalassina*)
BANK SWALLOW (*Riparia riparia*)
BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*)
CLIFF SWALLOW (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*)

Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE (*Poecile atricapillus*)
MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE (*Poecile gambeli*)
JUNIPER TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus ridgwayi*) – This species was fairly easy to come by in Colorado National Monument.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*)
WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta carolinensis*) – One individual was calling as we studied Mountain Bluebirds along the entrance road to Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. [*]
PYGMY NUTHATCH (*Sitta pygmaea*)

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

ROCK WREN (*Salpinctes obsoletus*) – The wind-driven individual around the visitor center at John Martin Reservoir left us longing for a better look; thankfully Colorado National Monument came through with scope views.
CANYON WREN (*Catherpes mexicanus*) – Faintly heard singing from the bottom of Black Canyon. [*]
BEWICK'S WREN (*Thryomanes bewickii*) – Another species found only in Colorado National Monument during the tour.
MARSH WREN (INTERIOR WEST) (*Cistothorus palustris plesius*)

Poliophtilidae (Gnatcatchers)

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (*Poliophtila caerulea*) – In the Devils Kitchen area of Colorado National Monument where we had the Black-chinned Sparrow.

Cinclidae (Dippers)

AMERICAN DIPPER (*Cinclus mexicanus*) [N]

Regulidae (Kinglets)

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*)

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

WESTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia mexicana*)
MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia currucoides*) – One of the best blues in the bird world.
TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE (*Myadestes townsendi*)
AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*)

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*)
SAGE THRASHER (*Oreoscoptes montanus*)
BROWN THRASHER (*Toxostoma rufum*) – Some participants spotted this species in the Crow Valley campground at our picnic lunch en route to Evans.
CURVE-BILLED THRASHER (EASTERN) (*Toxostoma curvirostre oberholseri*) – An individual was spotted among meadowlarks on the ground our first morning east of Pueblo.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [I]

Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings)

MCCOWN'S LONGSPUR (*Rhynchophanes mccownii*) – Our only sightings were excellent scope views in the Pawnee

National Grassland.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (MYRTLE) (*Setophaga coronata coronata*)

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

BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER (*Setophaga nigrescens*) – A bold male sang at the edge of the road in Colorado National Monument.

Emberizidae (Buntings, Sparrows and Allies)

GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE (*Pipilo chlorurus*) – The Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park provided our only looks.

SPOTTED TOWHEE (*Pipilo maculatus*)

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*)

FIELD SPARROW (*Spizella pusilla arenacea*)

BLACK-CHINNED SPARROW (*Spizella atrogularis*) – One of the more unusual encounters we enjoyed on the trip due to the location. This is the second breeding season the species has been found at the Devils Kitchen section of Colorado National Monument. This is farther north than the species normal breeding range.

VESPER SPARROW (*Pooecetes gramineus*) – This wide-ranging species rivaled Horned Lark for the most common bird on the eastern prairies.

BLACK-THROATED SPARROW (*Amphispiza bilineata*) – Arguably the most striking sparrow.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

GRASSHOPPER SPARROW (*Ammodramus savannarum*) – Dan teased this aggressive, singing male right up to the vans at the Greater Prairie-Chicken lek.

FOX SPARROW (SLATE-COLORED) (*Passerella iliaca schistacea*) – You couldn't ask for a more intimate experience than the one we had at the campground in Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*)

HARRIS'S SPARROW (*Zonotrichia querula*) – Not one but two individuals around the Dorenkamp ranch and they were singing no less. This was the first time this large *Zonotrichia* has been found on the Colorado Grouse tour.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (GAMBEL'S) (*Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*) – The number of roadside birds on the way to Dorenkamp's for breakfast was almost frightening.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (GRAY-HEADED) (*Junco hyemalis caniceps*) – In my opinion, this subspecies is poorly named.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

WESTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella neglecta*) – Nearly a constant companion throughout the trip.

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) – My favorite encounter was the clustered ornaments decorating the willows at Walden Reservoir.

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)

GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH (*Leucosticte tephrocotis*) – Sharp-eyed Dan picked out a single bird among the very similar Brown-capped Rosy-Finches up at Silverthorne which some members of the tour were able to get on.

BROWN-CAPPED ROSY-FINCH (*Leucosticte australis*) – The show in Silverthorne was trumped by the big numbers up at Crested Butte.



Though the term 'fool hen' is usually reserved for the Spruce Grouse, it seemed just as fitting for this Dusky Grouse, which allowed us to get ridiculously close at Black Canyon. (Photo by guide Eric Hynes)

PINE GROSBEAK (*Pinicola enucleator*) – A couple of great looks at singing birds.

CASSIN'S FINCH (*Carpodacus cassinii*)

HOUSE FINCH (*Carpodacus mexicanus*)

PINE SISKIN (*Spinus pinus*)

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*Spinus tristis*)

EVENING GROSBEAK (*Coccothraustes vespertinus brooksi*) – We enjoyed great views of this massive-billed finch in Silverthorne and Crested Butte.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) [I]

MAMMALS

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

DESERT COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus audubonii*)

WHITE-TAILED JACKRABBIT (*Lepus townsendi*) – Some members of the group saw one on the last day.

BLACK-TAILED JACKRABBIT (*Lepus californicus*)

LEAST CHIPMUNK (*Tamias minimus*)

YELLOW-BELLIED MARMOT (*Marmota flaviventris*)

WHITE-TAILED ANTELOPE SQUIRREL (*Ammospermophilus leucurus*)

WYOMING GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus elegans*)

THIRTEEN-LINED GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus tridecemlineatus*)

SPOTTED GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus pilosoma*)

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*)

MUSKRAT (*Ondatra zibethica*)

RED FOX (*Vulpes vulpes*) – What a great experience we had watching the kits popping in and out of the den on our drive to Evans.

COYOTE (*Canis latrans*)

NORTHERN RACCOON (*Procyon lotor*)

AMERICAN MINK (*Mustela vison*) – Swimming in the little canal at Sweitzer Lake State Park.

ELK (*Cervus canadensis*) – By the hundreds, mostly during the second half of the tour

MULE DEER (*Odocoileus hemionus*) – More numerous than meadowlarks?!

WHITE-TAILED DEER (*Odocoileus virginianus*) – Just a couple sightings on the eastern prairie, in particular from the blind at John Martin Reservoir.

PRONGHORN (*Antilocapra americana*) – One of North America's most unique mammals.

AMERICAN BISON (*Bison bison*)

BIGHORN SHEEP (*Ovis canadensis*)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 164 bird taxa and 28 mammal taxa