



Field Guides Tour Report

Colorado Grouse I 2013

Apr 7, 2013 to Apr 17, 2013

Dan Lane & Pepe Rojas

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, [please VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE.](#)



Even the unseasonable snow and cold can't deter a couple of Greater Sage-Grouse from their performance. (Photo by guide Dan Lane)

After several years living in the United States and having traveled extensively up and down both coasts, I had always been curious about Colorado. Friends and acquaintances were always saying great things, and I was very interested in birding the area myself to see what all the hype was about. And really, who can resist the possibility of seeing seven out of twelve grouse species that occur in North America?!

In order to maximize our potential to see as many species as possible on this tour, we drove more than 2000 miles in 10 days around the state, following a sort of figure-8 loop. We began the first part of our trip on the plains at the east side of the state. We first headed to Pueblo where we had great views of Scaled Quail and Mountain Plovers, then continued our grouse quest through Lamar and Wray where we were rewarded with great displays by the Lesser and Greater prairie-chickens, both endemic to the Midwest plains.

After a quick stop in Denver, our tour moved on to explore the western side of the state, characterized by heavily mountainous terrain. In fact, we crossed the Continental Divide three times! This part of the tour gave us great views of Gunnison and Greater sage-grouse, Dusky Grouse, and White-tailed Ptarmigan.

In addition, we did very well with some other birds, including the five forms of Dark-eyed Junco that we saw in one spot. How about the Gray-crowned, Hepburn's (Gray-crowned), and Black rosy-finches? We don't always come across these taxa on this tour! Not to mention the great views of the less common longspurs we scored, Lapland and Chestnut-collared, in addition to McCown's. And how could I forget to mention some of the raptors we saw? The splendid Golden Eagles, the impressive Peregrine Falcons, and the Prairie Falcon that was enjoying a snack while a determined raven tried to get its share!

We also had great studies of Rough-legged Hawks, Ospreys, Bald Eagles, and the black morph of Swainson's Hawk, in addition to the countless encounters we had with American Kestrels.

Our final count of mammals was 19, ranging from very small -- including several ground squirrels and chipmunk species -- to some larger species including the Pronghorn, Bighorn Sheep, Mule Deer, and Elk we bumped into. The scenery on this tour certainly did not disappoint, we were exposed to everything from flat grasslands to the magnificent Rocky Mountains. Visiting Colorado National Monument was icing on the cake!

I know I also speak for my compadre Dan when I say I had such a great time on this tour. Thank you all for being such an amazing group to travel and spend time with. Despite the freezing temperatures and wintry conditions we encountered, you all managed to bring great moods and spirits. I hope to see each of you on a future adventure, perhaps somewhere tropical?

Love and Joy!

--Pepe

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*) – An individual of a species we don't encounter on this tour frequently (because by this time of the year, they are already farther north) was seen at the reservoir near the Arkansas river at Fowler. If I recall correctly, it was the first (of many!) times we crossed the same river during the trip.

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) – The most common waterfowl species of the tour was seen almost daily.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*)

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*) – Seen twice on this trip. First at Switzer lake and then at Walden lake.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – The second most common species of waterfowl of the trip, after the Canada Geese!

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Anas discors*) – We saw this species once during the tour and it was at Walden Lake.

CINNAMON TEAL (*Anas cyanoptera*)

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*) – They tied the Mallards as the second most common species of waterfowl of the trip.

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – Seen only at Walden Lake.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN) (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) – We saw this species at three different locations.

CANVASBACK (*Aythya valisineria*) – We saw this species first at the Blue Mesa reservoir. Later on the trip we found it again on Walden lake among some Redheads.

REDHEAD (*Aythya americana*) – Our first (and only) spotting of these ducks was at Walden lake. They were in a group with the Canvasback.

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*) – We encountered this duck at different locations .

LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*) – The only scaup species of the tour was seen at different bodies of water.

BUFFLEHEAD (*Bucephala albeola*) – Ditto to Lesser Scaup.

COMMON GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala clangula*) – Seen twice.

COMMON MERGANSER (*Mergus merganser*) – Really common on this tour!

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – One seen at the Blue Mesa reservoir.

Odontophoridae (New World Quail)

SCALED QUAIL (*Callipepla squamata*) – On our very first stop, Carol spotted a group feeding on the ground and moving along the fences. We enjoyed great scope views of such lovely quails!

GAMBEL'S QUAIL (*Callipepla gambelii*) – At the Entrance of Colorado National Monument we stopped to look for some of these birds. We heard them but were looking too far away from where the birds actually were! Carol and Walt spotted them closer than we thought!

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

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

GREATER SAGE-GROUSE (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) – The weather kept us on our toes (the leaders!) until the next morning in Walden when we woke up and saw that the snow was not actually as bad as predicted! I do not think we could have asked for a better show than what we witnessed: 76 birds showed up and stayed until after we left!

GUNNISON SAGE-GROUSE (*Centrocercus minimus*) – Due to its similarity with the Greater Sage-Grouse, and the fact that there are not many individuals around, this species remained overlooked to science for many years until 2000, when researchers associated to Western State Colorado University formally described it as a new species (which also constitutes the first species described in continental North America since the 19th century)...I am still amazed about this considering how extensively explored and travel (as well as populated) this area has been! In January 2013, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed to protect the Gunnison Sage-Grouse as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act. They also proposed to designate 1.7 million acres of critical habitat for the species.

WHITE-TAILED PTARMIGAN (*Lagopus leucura*) – This year's weather had considerable (and unusual) amounts of snow, frost, ice and other conditions, which caused a lot of road closures. Loveland Pass, the main area for this species, was no exception but we did have a very small window of opportunity our last day, while on our way to Denver. It was very surprising how fast conditions started to change (especially the winds!) but we had enough time for Dan to spot an individual and to share it with most of the folks that came to the mountain. A long awaited bird for Trish!

DUSKY GROUSE (*Dendragapus obscurus*) – One male at Black Canyon National Park was spotted walking along the road.

GREATER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN (*Tympanuchus cupido*) – Besides the cattle operation, Mr Bledsoe also had an amazing "chicken operation", for which we were very grateful since the birds were so tame!...I still smile remembering the males stomping their feet on the ground!

LESSER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*) – We woke up to a very cold and windy morning to meet Fred, in order to go to the lek. I was a little bit concerned about the conditions and got really worried when Fred told me "I've never seen these kind of conditions before, so I don't know if the birds are going to come". Well, luckily the lekking nature of the birds was stronger than any weather and we enjoyed an amazing show from approximately 16 birds. This is another of the species on the Phasianidae family facing serious conservation threats. A few weeks ago, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reopened the comment period to list the species as "Threatened" under the Endangered Species Act.

WILD TURKEY (*Meleagris gallopavo*)

Gaviidae (Loons)

COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*)

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

EARED GREBE (*Podiceps nigricollis*)

WESTERN GREBE (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*)

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*)

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*)

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – I was nicely surprised with how many we saw on this tour!

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*)

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*)

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*)

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

SWAINSON'S HAWK (*Buteo swainsoni*) – We came across several individuals during the trip, including a dark morph.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK (*Buteo lagopus*) – Nice looks of this species allowed us to study the field marks very well.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*)

Gruidae (Cranes)

SANDHILL CRANE (*Grus canadensis*)

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*)

MOUNTAIN PLOVER (*Charadrius montanus*) – On our first outing on the IL road, we encountered at least 3 individuals. At least one was vocalizing.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*)

AMERICAN AVOCET (*Recurvirostra americana*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – Our first stop for dippers actually yielded this bird, which came to a closer range after a tape with its call was played.

LONG-BILLED CURLEW (*Numenius americanus*) – We had some flybys until we had the chance to get some distant scope views at the Blue Mesa reservoir.

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*) **[H]**

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*)

Apodidae (Swifts)

WHITE-THROATED SWIFT (*Aeronautes saxatalis*) – We saw some around the Carrizo Canyon area.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

RED-NAPED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*) – Carol spotted a well-hidden male inside a juniper during a stop on our drive around Rim Rock drive, on National Monument.

LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER (*Picoides scalaris*)

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*)

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*)

NORTHERN FLICKER (*Colaptes auratus*)

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

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

AMERICAN KESTREL (Falco sparverius)

PEREGRINE FALCON (Falco peregrinus) – An individual was spotted during our first stop in Colorado National Monument.

PRAIRIE FALCON (Falco mexicanus) – Debra spotted this bird perched near the ground while we were looking for birds at Blue Mesa reservoir near Gunnison. I am still thinking how much it reminded me of the Aplomado Falcons, but with a paler plumage.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

EASTERN PHOEBE (Sayornis phoebe)

SAY'S PHOEBE (Sayornis saya)

Laniidae (Shrikes)

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (Lanius ludovicianus)

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

PINYON JAY (Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus) – We only saw this bird at 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) – A long awaited bird for Kathy Drake that we saw very well, and quite a few times!

CLARK'S NUTCRACKER (Nucifraga columbiana) – We saw at least two individuals at one of the overlooks below the ranger station at Black Canyon, near Gunnison.

AMERICAN CROW (Corvus brachyrhynchos)

COMMON RAVEN (Corvus corax)

Alaudidae (Larks)

HORNED LARK (Eremophila alpestris) – How could you not see them!!!

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

TREE SWALLOW (Tachycineta bicolor)

Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE (Poecile atricapillus)

MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE (Poecile gambeli)

JUNIPER TITMOUSE (Baeolophus ridgwayi) – We had 2 males and a female (if I recall correctly) that responded very well to playback/owl calls.

Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)

BUSHTIT (INTERIOR) (Psaltriparus minimus plumbeus)

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (Sitta canadensis)

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (Sitta carolinensis)

PYGMY NUTHATCH (Sitta pygmaea)

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

ROCK WREN (Salpinctes obsoletus) – One responded very well to the tape and allowed us great views!

CANYON WREN (Catherpes mexicanus) – During our outing in Carrizo Canyon we came across one individual, and another one later at Colorado National Monument.

WINTER WREN (Troglodytes hiemalis hiemalis) – The Eastern Winter Wren was seen at the Carrizo Canyon.

BEWICK'S WREN (Thryomanes bewickii) – Ditto to Winter Wren. Actually, it was only heard at Colorado National Monument.

Cinclidae (Dippers)

AMERICAN DIPPER (Cinclus mexicanus) – We had great looks of two individuals foraging at the Gunnison river during one of our trips between Crested Butte and Gunnison.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

WESTERN BLUEBIRD (Sialia mexicana)

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD (Sialia currucoides)

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]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

AMERICAN PIPIT (Anthus rubescens)

Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

CEDAR WAXWING (*Bombycilla cedrorum*)

Calcariidae (Longspurs and Snow Buntings)

LAPLAND LONGSPUR (*Calcarius lapponicus*) – Thanks to a tip from some fellow birders, we found some flocks of these birds that normally are not recorded on this tour.

CHESTNUT-COLLARED LONGSPUR (*Calcarius ornatus*) – Ditto to Lapland Longspur.

MCCOWN'S LONGSPUR (*Rhynchophanes mccownii*) – This is one species we normally expect to see, and this tour did not disappoint!

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE (*Pipilo chlorurus*) – Seen at Carrizo Canyon.

SPOTTED TOWHEE (*Pipilo maculatus*)

RUFIOUS-CROWNED SPARROW (*Aimophila ruficeps*) – We saw this bird at Carrizo Canyon, during the only warm day of the tour.

VESPER SPARROW (*Poocetes gramineus*)

BLACK-THROATED SPARROW (*Amphispiza bilineata*) – One responded VERY well to playback and rewarded us with great views!

SAGE SPARROW (INTERIOR) (*Artemisiospiza belli canescens*) – Another bird that we don't find on this tour. Carol spotted an individual on its way north. The way it hold its tail while it runs was a very helpful feature for identification.

FOX SPARROW (SLATE-COLORED) (*Passerella iliaca schistacea*) [*]

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*)

DARK-EYED JUNCO (SLATE-COLORED) (*Junco hyemalis hyemalis*) – We scored this bird at Crested Butte.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (OREGON) (*Junco hyemalis oreganus*) – And this one...

DARK-EYED JUNCO (PINK-SIDED) (*Junco hyemalis mearnsi*) – ...and this one too.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (WHITE-WINGED) (*Junco hyemalis aikeni*) – This one actually is a new record for the County! Some of the features caught Dan's attention and he later confirmed it as a White-winged.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (GRAY-HEADED) (*Junco hyemalis caniceps*) – And finally this one, which is the Junco that breeds in Colorado.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – Seen almost daily during the tour.

WESTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella neglecta*) – Ditto to Red-winged Blackbird.

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*)

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*) – The interior Gray-Crowned prefers to breed above the tree line throughout the Northern Rockies, as far north as Alaska, and to the south to Idaho. There are also records in the Sierra Nevada.

GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH (HEPBURN'S) (*Leucosticte tephrocotis littoralis*) – Gray-crowned (Hepburn's) breeds in the coastal mountains from Alaska to the southern areas of Washington, Oregon and northern California.

BLACK ROSY-FINCH (*Leucosticte atrata*) – Another species that we do not always score on this tour, it was spotted at the feeders among its other congeners.

BROWN-CAPPED ROSY-FINCH (*Leucosticte australis*) – At the same location, this species was the most common.

PINE GROSBEAK (*Pinicola enucleator*) – We had great views, (including scope views!) of this species on our way back to Walden. Despite the snow, the birds were very cooperative. One of the 5 ABA lifers for Walt!

CASSIN'S FINCH (*Haemorhous cassinii*)

HOUSE FINCH (*Haemorhous mexicanus*)

RED CROSSBILL (*Loxia curvirostra*) – At the feeders in Silverthorne briefly.

COMMON REDPOLL (*Acanthis flammea*) – Another unusual species for this tour that was seen at the feeders in Silverthorne.

PINE SISKIN (*Spinus pinus*)

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*Spinus tristis*)

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) [I]

MAMMALS

NUTTALL'S (MOUNTAIN) COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus nuttalli*) – Seen twice on the northwest part of the trip.

WHITE-TAILED JACKRABBIT (*Lepus townsendi*) – Ditto to Nuttall's Cottontail.

LEAST CHIPMUNK (*Tamias minimus*) – Seen around Gunnison.

YELLOW-BELLIED MARMOT (*Marmota flaviventris*)

WHITE-TAILED ANTELOPE SQUIRREL (*Ammospermophilus leucurus*)

WYOMING GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus elegans*)

ROCK SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus variegatus*)

GOLDEN-MANTLED GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus lateralis*)

BLACK-TAILED PRAIRIE DOG (*Cynomys ludovicianus*) – The prairie dog of eastern Colorado.

GUNNISON PRAIRIE DOG (*Cynomys gunnisoni*) – The prairie dog of the Gunnison area.

RED SQUIRREL (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)

COYOTE (*Canis latrans*) – We heard them while waiting for the Gunnison Sage-Grouse. Later on the trip, I believe Carol saw one.

STRIPED SKUNK (*Mephitis mephitis*) – I know they can be very smelly, but despite this, I couldn't help but feel sorry when we came across an individual struggling to walk through the snow!

ELK (*Cervus canadensis*)

MULE DEER (*Odocoileus hemionus*)

WHITE-TAILED DEER (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

PRONGHORN (*Antilocapra americana*) – After the Cheetah, the second fastest land mammal! Luckily for us, they were not too fast to see.

AMERICAN BISON (*Bison bison*)

BIGHORN SHEEP (*Ovis canadensis*)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 138 bird taxa and 19 mammal taxa