

Trip Report — Colorado Grouse 2026

April 9-20, 2026 with Micah Riegner & Chris Benesh



Celebrating our White-tailed Ptarmigan success! Photo by Chris Benesh.

2026 gave me an opportunity to return to Colorado for the first time in several years and an opportunity to experience the much-improved Colorado Grouse tour that Micah Riegner has orchestrated. We managed to connect with all of the gallinaceous birds that we were targeting as well as a great assortment of other goodies found in the intermountain West.

We experienced a broad swathe of what weather Colorado could throw at us, ranging from toasty temperatures in southeastern Colorado to blizzard and snow flurry conditions during some of our time in western Colorado. Perhaps most impressive was the snowy morning we experienced while dipping into Utah for sagebrush species. Seeing Long-billed Curlews standing in the snow, the lone Franklin's Gull patrolling along the roadway,

the only landmark visible during the whiteout, and small groups of Pronghorn browsing on bits of sagebrush poking out above the snow. The impressive numbers of Horned Larks forced to the road edge was also memorable.



A male Lesser Prairie-Chicken displaying in central Kansas early on in the tour. Photo by Chris Benesh.

Conditions at Loveland Pass were also less than ideal, so much so that 9News weatherman Jaden Knowles was there with a film crew doing a piece on the big snowfall. We were after White-tailed Ptarmigan and facing the prospect of finding a white bird against a white background. But the impossible was made possible with the help of a thermal scope. The ptarmigan could not hide their heat signatures. After a big celebration we headed to the Wildernest community where several private feeders provided sustenance for a pile of Brown-capped Rosy-Finches, along with juncos, nuthatches, and a few woodpeckers. All were viewed with the backdrop of falling snow.



One of the fabulous Sharp-tailed Grouse that provided an unforgettable experience. Photo by Chris Benesh.

This is a story of experiencing the variety of grouse that are actively courting during the early Spring in Colorado and adjacent states. Kicking things off with a cooperative Dusky Grouse near Boulder, our travels then took us to Kansas to experience the antics of Lesser Prairie-Chicken at the Nature Conservancy's Smoky Valley Ranch. Quite a spectacle watching their booming displays. The following day we at another lek near Wray, Colorado experiencing the Greater Prairie-Chickens, offering a great opportunity to mentally compare the two including the rather different soundscape created by their differing morphologies.



It wasn't all grouse. We had an amazing study of this American Three-toed Woodpecker. Photo by Chris Benesh.

Along with two prairie-chickens, we had two species of sage grouse to enjoy. Seeing the Greater Sage-Grouse displaying in the snow drove home just how challenging it can be for birds living in such a harsh and varying climate. An appreciation of the spectacle of lekking grouse cannot be complete without mentioning the fabulous Sharp-tailed Grouse lek seen near Craig. We had nearly 35 birds displaying close by on a chilly morning.



We also saw some wonderful finches, including this Brown-capped Rosy-Finch. Photo by Chris Benesh.

There were so many highlights and you shared some of your favorites at the final dinner back in Denver. These included White-tailed Ptarmigan, Lesser Prairie-Chicken, Boreal Owl (all tied with the most votes), followed closely by Greater Prairie-Chicken, Pine Grosbeak, American Three-toed Woodpecker, Mountain Plover, Brown-capped Rosy-Finch, Thick-billed Longspur, Clark's Grebe, Clark's Nutcracker, Mountain Bluebird, Gunnison's Sage-Grouse, and Pinyon Jay. So many fabulous choices! Thanks to all of you for making the tour such a success! And thanks to Micah for organizing things so smoothly!



And many of us stayed up late to search for Boreal Owl one evening. Our persistence paid off with this bit of magic. Photo by Chris Benesh.

Mammals seen on the tour:

Mountain Cottontail (*Sylvilagus nuttalli*)
Desert Cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*)
Snowshoe Hare (*Lepus americanus*)
White-tailed Jackrabbit (*Lepus townsendi*)
Black-tailed Jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*)
Least Chipmunk (*Neotamias minimus*)
Yellow-bellied Marmot (*Marmota flaviventris*)
Wyoming Ground Squirrel (*Urocyonotus elegans*)
Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel (*Ictidomys tridecemlineatus*)
Common Rock Squirrel (*Otospermophilus variegatus*)
Common Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel (*Callospermophilus lateralis*)
Black-tailed Prairie Dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*)
White-tailed Prairie Dog (*Cynomys leucurus*)
Gunnison Prairie Dog (*Cynomys gunnisoni*)

Eastern Fox Squirrel (*Sciurus niger*)
North American Red Squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)
Ord's Kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys ordii*)
Coyote (*Canis latrans*)
Wapiti (*Cervus canadensis*)
Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*)
White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)
Moose (*Alces alces*)
Pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana*)

You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this
link: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/499582>

You can see my iNaturalist report of non-avian taxa at this
link: <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/field-guides-colorado-grouse-2026>

Chris

Field Guides Birding Tours -- COLORADO GROUSE TOUR, 2026 (with guides Micah Riegner & Chris Benesh)



10 – 19 Apr 2026 (10 days) Link-only



United States

Colorado | Kansas | Nebraska | Utah [Subregions](#)

 Chris Benesh, Micah Riegner, fgi Triplists



For a narrative summary of this tour, including a Field Guides photo gallery and additional...

DATA FOR: **Group (all people)** ▾

**169**
Species Observed

**80**
Checklists

**3**
Species with Photos

Species Observed

Show all details

45

Snow Goose

Anser caerulescens

▶  1

2

Ross's Goose

Anser rossii

▶  2

17

Cackling Goose

Branta hutchinsii

▶  1

128

Canada Goose

Branta canadensis

▶  11

4

Wood Duck

Aix sponsa

▶  1

25

Blue-winged Teal

Spatula discors

▶  3

24

Cinnamon Teal

Spatula cyanoptera

▶  6

206

Northern Shoveler

Spatula clypeata

▶  11

318

Gadwall

Mareca strepera

▶  7

216	American Wigeon	<i>Mareca americana</i>	▶  3
103	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	▶  11
2	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	▶  1
93	Green-winged Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	▶  7
3	Canvasback	<i>Aythya valisineria</i>	▶  2
89	Redhead	<i>Aythya americana</i>	▶  3
60	Ring-necked Duck	<i>Aythya collaris</i>	▶  5
85	Lesser Scaup	<i>Aythya affinis</i>	▶  4
12	Bufflehead	<i>Bucephala albeola</i>	▶  4
8	Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	▶  4
3	Barrow's Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala islandica</i>	▶  1
1	Hooded Merganser	<i>Lophodytes cucullatus</i>	▶  1
19	Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	▶  4
1	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	▶  1
139	Ruddy Duck	<i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>	▶  6
14	Scaled Quail	<i>Callipepla squamata</i>	▶  1
9	Gambel's Quail	<i>Callipepla gambelii</i> *	▶  2
11	Wild Turkey	<i>Meleagris gallopavo</i>	▶  4
2	Dusky Grouse	<i>Dendragapus obscurus</i>	▶  1  1
35	Sharp-tailed Grouse	<i>Tympanuchus phasianellus</i>	▶  1

33	Greater Prairie-Chicken	<i>Tympanuchus cupido</i>	▶  2
2	White-tailed Ptarmigan	<i>Lagopus leucura</i>	▶  1
5	Ring-necked Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i> *	▶  3
2	Chukar	<i>Alectoris chukar</i> *	▶  1
9	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i> *	▶  4
12	Eurasian Collared-Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> *	▶  4
3	White-winged Dove	<i>Zenaida asiatica</i>	▶  2
60	Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>	▶  13
11	White-throated Swift	<i>Aeronautes saxatalis</i>	▶  4
2	Black-chinned Hummingbird	<i>Archilochus alexandri</i>	▶  1
2	Broad-tailed Hummingbird	<i>Selasphorus platycercus</i>	▶  2
512	American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>	▶  5
8	Sandhill Crane	<i>Antigone canadensis</i>	▶  2
18	Black-necked Stilt	<i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>	▶  2
40	American Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra americana</i>	▶  3
17	Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>	▶  9
2	Mountain Plover	<i>Anarhynchus montanus</i>	▶  1  1
4	Snowy Plover	<i>Anarhynchus nivosus</i>	▶  1
5	Long-billed Curlew	<i>Numenius americanus</i>	▶  3
36	Marbled Godwit	<i>Limosa fedoa</i>	▶  2

9	Long-billed Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i>	▶  2
44	Wilson's Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus tricolor</i>	▶  2
11	Lesser Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>	▶  3
5	Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>	▶  3
10	Baird's Sandpiper	<i>Calidris bairdii</i>	▶  2
8	Least Sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>	▶  2
2	Pectoral Sandpiper	<i>Calidris melanotos</i>	▶  1
8	Western Sandpiper	<i>Calidris mauri</i>	▶  2
24	Bonaparte's Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus philadelphia</i>	▶  2
35	Franklin's Gull	<i>Leucophaeus pipixcan</i>	▶  3
190	Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>	▶  6
5	California Gull	<i>Larus californicus</i>	▶  2
5	Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>	▶  3
14	Horned Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	▶  2
31	Eared Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	▶  4
59	Western Grebe	<i>Aechmophorus occidentalis</i>	▶  4
2	Clark's Grebe	<i>Aechmophorus clarkii</i>	▶  1
4	Common Loon	<i>Gavia immer</i>	▶  2
43	Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Nannopterum auritum</i>	▶  2
48	White-faced Ibis	<i>Plegadis chihi</i>	▶  2

3	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	▶  1
1	Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>	▶  1
1	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	▶  1
10	Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>	▶  4
152	American White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i>	▶  3
16	Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>	▶  7
12	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	▶  4
9	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	▶  8
1	Sharp-shinned Hawk	<i>Accipiter striatus</i>	▶  1
2	Northern Harrier	<i>Circus hudsonius</i>	▶  2
9	Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	▶  9
11	Swainson's Hawk	<i>Buteo swainsoni</i>	▶  7
13	Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	▶  9
3	Great Horned Owl	<i>Bubo virginianus</i>	▶  2
6	Burrowing Owl	<i>Athene cunicularia</i>	▶  2
1	Boreal Owl	<i>Aegolius funereus</i>	▶  1  1
1	Belted Kingfisher	<i>Megasceryle alcyon</i>	▶  1
1	Williamson's Sapsucker	<i>Sphyrapicus thyroideus</i>	▶  1
3	Red-naped Sapsucker	<i>Sphyrapicus nuchalis</i>	▶  3
1	Lewis's Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes lewis</i>	▶  1

2	American Three-toed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides dorsalis</i>	▶  1
2	Downy Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates pubescens</i>	▶  1
5	Hairy Woodpecker	<i>Leuconotopicus villosus</i>	▶  3
16	Northern Flicker	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>	▶  9
13	American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>	▶  8
1	Prairie Falcon	<i>Falco mexicanus</i>	▶  1
2	Black Phoebe	<i>Sayornis nigricans</i>	▶  1
1	Eastern Phoebe	<i>Sayornis phoebe</i>	▶  1
8	Say's Phoebe	<i>Sayornis saya</i>	▶  6
2	Loggerhead Shrike	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	▶  2
3	Canada Jay	<i>Perisoreus canadensis</i>	▶  1
42	Pinyon Jay	<i>Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus</i>	▶  5
8	Steller's Jay	<i>Cyanocitta stelleri</i>	▶  2
1	Blue Jay	<i>Cyanocitta cristata</i>	▶  1
8	Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay	<i>Aphelocoma woodhouseii</i>	▶  4
5	Black-billed Magpie	<i>Pica hudsonia</i>	▶  3
2	Clark's Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga columbiana</i>	▶  1
51	American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	▶  7
39	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	▶  15
3	Black-capped Chickadee	<i>Poecile atricapillus</i>	▶  2

16	Mountain Chickadee	<i>Poecile gambeli</i>	▶  4
1	Juniper Titmouse	<i>Baeolophus ridgwayi</i>	▶  1
77	Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>	▶  10
588	Tree Swallow	<i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>	▶  6
25	Violet-green Swallow	<i>Tachycineta thalassina</i>	▶  1
7	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	<i>Stelgidopteryx serripennis</i>	▶  2
14	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	▶  4
2	Cliff Swallow	<i>Petrochelidon pyrrhonota</i>	▶  1
11	Bushtit	<i>Psaltiriparus minimus</i>	▶  4
3	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	<i>Corthylio calendula</i>	▶  3
4	White-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta carolinensis</i>	▶  2
12	Pygmy Nuthatch	<i>Sitta pygmaea</i>	▶  2
21	Red-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta canadensis</i>	▶  2
1	Brown Creeper	<i>Certhia americana</i>	▶  1
4	Rock Wren	<i>Salpinctes obsoletus</i>	▶  3
2	Bewick's Wren	<i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>	▶  1
1	American Dipper	<i>Cinclus mexicanus</i>	▶  1
93	European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> *	▶  7
3	Curve-billed Thrasher	<i>Toxostoma curvirostre</i>	▶  1
3	Sage Thrasher	<i>Oreoscoptes montanus</i>	▶  2

1	Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>	▶  1
1	Eastern Bluebird	<i>Sialia sialis</i>	▶  1
5	Western Bluebird	<i>Sialia mexicana</i>	▶  2
71	Mountain Bluebird	<i>Sialia currucoides</i>	▶  10
1	Townsend's Solitaire	<i>Myadestes townsendi</i>	▶  1
50	American Robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>	▶  16
38	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i> *	▶  4
16	American Pipit	<i>Anthus rubescens</i>	▶  2
20	Evening Grosbeak	<i>Hesperiphona vespertina</i>	▶  1
11	Pine Grosbeak	<i>Pinicola enucleator</i>	▶  2
1	Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch	<i>Leucosticte tephrocotis</i>	▶  1
80	Brown-capped Rosy-Finch	<i>Leucosticte australis</i>	▶  1
14	House Finch	<i>Haemorhous mexicanus</i>	▶  5
7	Cassin's Finch	<i>Haemorhous cassinii</i>	▶  2
5	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	▶  3
40	Pine Siskin	<i>Spinus pinus</i>	▶  4
6	Lesser Goldfinch	<i>Spinus psaltria</i>	▶  2
6	American Goldfinch	<i>Spinus tristis</i>	▶  1
21	Thick-billed Longspur	<i>Rhynchophanes mccownii</i>	▶  1
4	Chipping Sparrow	<i>Spizella passerina</i>	▶  2

1	Brewer's Sparrow <i>Spizella breweri</i>	▶  1
9	Lark Sparrow <i>Chondestes grammacus</i>	▶  2
1	Fox Sparrow <i>Passerella iliaca</i>	▶  1
49	Dark-eyed Junco <i>Junco hyemalis</i>	▶  8
44	White-crowned Sparrow <i>Zonotrichia leucophrys</i>	▶  5
3	Sagebrush Sparrow <i>Artemisiospiza nevadensis</i>	▶  1
20	Vesper Sparrow <i>Pooecetes gramineus</i>	▶  9
4	Savannah Sparrow <i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>	▶  2
4	Song Sparrow <i>Melospiza melodia</i>	▶  2
1	Canyon Towhee <i>Melospiza fusca</i>	▶  1
2	Green-tailed Towhee <i>Pipilo chlorurus</i>	▶  1
8	Spotted Towhee <i>Pipilo maculatus</i>	▶  4
7	Yellow-headed Blackbird <i>Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus</i>	▶  2
78	Western Meadowlark <i>Sturnella neglecta</i>	▶  14
247	Red-winged Blackbird <i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>	▶  13
8	Brown-headed Cowbird <i>Molothrus ater</i>	▶  1
8	Brewer's Blackbird <i>Euphagus cyanocephalus</i>	▶  4
45	Common Grackle <i>Quiscalus quiscula</i>	▶  5
6	Great-tailed Grackle <i>Quiscalus mexicanus</i>	▶  1
5	Yellow-rumped Warbler <i>Setophaga coronata</i>	▶  1

ADDITIONAL TAXA

60

Western/Clark's Grebe

Aechmophorus occidentalis/clarkii

 1