

COLORADO SPRING CHICKENS

Prairie-Chickens, Grouse, and Quail – Oh My!

April 1-11, 2022

A birding tour organized by *Seven Ponds Nature Center & Colorado Birding Adventures*



Lesser Prairie-Chicken photo via <https://www.flickr.com/photos/larry1732/>

A Colorado “chicken tour” is truly one of the rites of passage of the birding world. In a grueling, hard-driving, road trip of ten days, a birder hopes to see upwards of 10-12 birds in the Order Galliformes – the grouse, prairie-chickens, ptarmigan, quail, turkeys, and pheasants. Spring provides the rare opportunity to observe many of them on their breeding leks, where males perform elaborate, competitive displays in an attempt to wow and impress females. Join us on this adventure!

Our target birds include the following: Greater Prairie-Chicken, Lesser Prairie-Chicken, Greater Sage-Grouse, Gunnison Sage-Grouse, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Dusky Grouse, White-tailed Ptarmigan, Chukar, Scaled Quail, and Gambel’s Quail. Even though this is a “chicken” tour, we will certainly be birding all along the way. A short list of the many interesting birds we hope to encounter includes Lewis’s Woodpecker, Sage Thrasher, Mountain Plover, Chestnut-collared and Thick-billed longspurs, Sagebrush Sparrow, Pinyon Jay, Juniper Titmouse, Cassin’s Finch, all three rosy-finches (Black, Brown-capped, Gray-crowned)...and so many more! We will be covering an incredible diversity of habitats, from short-grass prairie to alpine tundra, pinyon-juniper foothills to high altitude conifer forests, sagebrush steppe to deep canyon gorges, wild mountain rivers to large reservoirs. This diversity ensures a vast array of bird species – with more than 200 birds possible for our trip list.

*****FAIR WARNING***** *This tour is not for the faint of heart! There is just no way around it – a chicken tour in Colorado (and Kansas) is a tough tour. Ten days filled with very early wake-ups, hours sitting quietly in cold blinds in the pre-dawn stillness, long mile-laden drives on the highways, byways, and mountain roads between target birds, diners, and small town restaurants for dinner, and a different lodging each night. We promise to take care of you, of course, with good food, fun conversation, incredible scenery, and some of the most highly sought-after birds in North America. This is a birding adventure, to be sure, and hitting the road with a like-minded crazy birders is the perfect way to experience these amazing birds.*

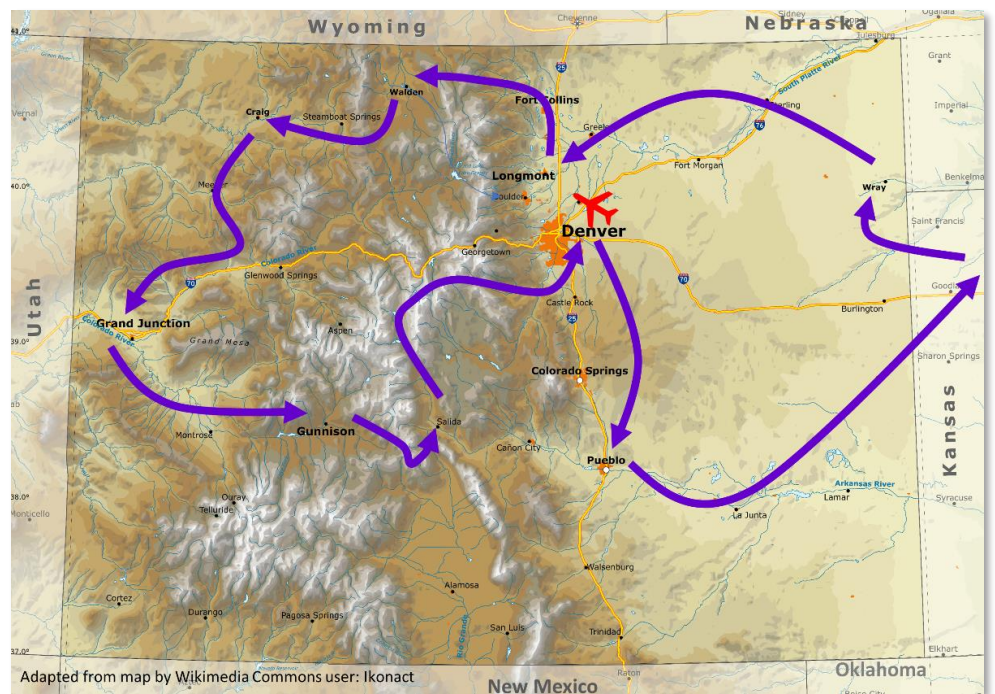
TOUR ITINERARY

Our daily activities will be flexible based on species we've seen to date and recent bird reports, but the following outline provides a preliminary plan of how we will spend our days. In some cases we are locked into our reservations at certain leks; we must be mindful of weather conditions which may result in road and/or park closures. Note: the birds mentioned are not intended to be an exhaustive list – just a sampling of what may be found at each location.

DAY 1 (April 1) – Arrival day; meet at the airport, head south to Pueblo

Plan your arrival by midday. We want to be on the road by 1:00 PM, so please plan your arrival at Denver Int'l Airport by noon. Once we have everybody, we'll head south along the Colorado Front Range toward Pueblo, with lunch in the van en route. Be sure to have your binoculars out, as good birds could pop up anywhere along our route. After passing by Pike's Peak, we'll venture off the interstate where the spiny

cholla tree cacti may make you think we've wandered into Arizona! Here we'll search for Chihuahuan Raven, Burrowing Owl, Curve-billed Thrasher, and Cassin's Sparrow. Closer to Pueblo we'll be on the hunt for our first "chicken" of the tour, **Scaled Quail**. Drive time from Denver to Pueblo: ~2 hours. Night #1 in Pueblo CO.



DAY 2 (April 2) Drive and bird east to Kansas Today we'll start out following the Arkansas River toward Kansas, stopping again in the cholla tree cacti habitat if necessary for a second chance at thrashers and Scaled Quail. A portion of our route will include the original Santa Fe trail and we'll also explore the excellent riparian habitat and check several reservoirs. Today's species may include Clark's Grebe, Cinnamon Teal, Franklin's Gull, Swainson's Hawk, Lewis's Woodpecker, and Say's Phoebe. Along the way, we'll pass from Mountain to Central Time Zone. Drive time from Pueblo to Scott City: ~3.5 hours. Night #2 in Scott City KS.

DAY 3 (April 3) Early morning Lesser Prairie-Chicken lek; then north to Wray, Colorado Today we'll have our first very early wake-up of the trip, arising well before dawn to check out of our motel and meet

our local escort, who will lead us to a private ranch north of Scott City. There we'll be set up inside a blind near an active lek, where we'll enjoy the mating ritual of the **Lesser Prairie-Chicken**. After leaving the lek, we'll head to breakfast, then drive into northeast Colorado (and back to the Mountain Time Zone). Along the way we may encounter Rock Wren, Great-tailed Grackle, and perhaps a roadside Greater Prairie-Chicken! *Drive time from Scott City to Wray: ~3 hours. Night #3 in Wray CO.*

DAY 4 (April 4) Early morning Greater Prairie-Chicken lek, then west to Pawnee National Grasslands Another early morning check out and our second lek of the tour, this time for **Greater Prairie-Chicken**. Following breakfast, we'll head west to the famed Pawnee National Grasslands, where we hope to find Mountain Plover and both Thick-billed and Chestnut-collared longspurs. Pawnee is also an excellent spot for Burrowing Owl and Lark Bunting. From Pawnee we'll explore some water areas where we'll look for both Western and Clark's grebes, American Avocet, Black-necked Stilt, and Wilson's Phalarope on our way to our hotel in Longmont. *Drive time from Wray to Longmont: ~3 hours. Night #4 in Longmont CO.*



Pawnee National Grasslands photo by Carl Bendorf

DAY 5 (April 5) Colorado's Front Range foothills, then up and over Cameron Pass to North Park A later start this morning will allow for a welcome sleep-in. Once on the road, we'll bird the Front Range foothills, then up and over scenic Cameron Pass (10,249 feet). En route we may encounter moose, as well as great birds such as Clark's Nutcracker, Red-naped Sapsucker, and our first shot at rosy-finches. After checking into the historic Chedsey Motel, we'll relax before dinner in downtown Walden. Join us for an optional drive back up near Cameron Pass in search of Boreal Owl or stay back at the Chedsey and turn in early. *Drive time from Longmont to Walden: ~3 hours. Night #5 in Walden CO.*



Greater Sage-Grouse at lek photo by Carl Bendorf

DAY 6 (April 6) Early morning Greater Sage-Grouse lek, then bird west to Craig, Colorado Today's early morning target bird is **Greater Sage-Grouse**, and we'll search for them on a known lek near Coalmont where we'll use the van as our blind. After breakfast in Walden, we'll have plenty of excellent birding opportunities nearby including Walden Reservoir (nesting American White Pelican and California Gull) and Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge (great for Golden Eagle, Mountain Bluebird, and more moose!) On our way west toward Craig, we'll drive

over Rabbit Ears Pass (9,426 feet) which gives us yet another chance for high mountain species like Mountain Chickadee, Pygmy Nuthatch, American Three-toed Woodpecker, and more. *Drive time from Walden to Craig: ~2 hours. Night #6 in Craig CO.*

DAY 7 (April 7) Early morning to visit Sharp-tailed Grouse and Dusky Grouse areas, then southwest to Grand Junction, Colorado We'll make an early morning visit to the **Sharp-tailed Grouse** and **Dusky Grouse** areas before breakfast, then make our way toward Grand Junction. Along the way we'll make a stop near Cameo to search for **Chukar** and Black-throated Sparrow before continuing west. Near the

Colorado/Utah border we'll look for Sagebrush Sparrow, then seek out Gambel's Quail near Grand Junction. We'll make an afternoon visit to spectacular Colorado National Monument. *Drive time from Craig to Grand Junction: ~2.5 hours. Night #7 in Grand Junction CO.*

DAY 8 (April 8) Early morning in Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park for Dusky Grouse then Crested Butte for rosy-finches With an early morning visit to the fantastic Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park we'll hope to find displaying Dusky Grouse. Following breakfast, we'll visit Crested Butte in search of all three rosy-finches (Black, Gray-crowned, Brown-capped). Time permitting we'll make a late afternoon inspection of the Gunnison Sage-Grouse lek. *Drive time from Grand Junction to Gunnison: ~2.5 hours. Night #8 in Gunnison CO.*



Brown-capped Rosy-Finch at Crested Butte
photo by Carl Bendorf

DAY 9 (April 9) Early morning Gunnison Sage-Grouse lek, the east over Monarch Pass to Salida, Colorado Another early morning lek visit – this time for the highly range-restricted **Gunnison Sage-Grouse**. This may be our most challenging chicken of the tour, as the lek is a long distance from the blind and does not provide high-quality viewing. NOTE: there is a remote possibility that we won't be able to see this bird as birds are not seen every day and the viewing blind is sometimes closed completely by game management officials to reduce stress on the birds. After breakfast, we may look again for rosy-finches if necessary and then bird our way east over Monarch Pass (11,312 feet) where we'll seek out Williamson's Sapsucker and American Three-toed Woodpecker. *Drive time from Gunnison to Salida: ~1.5 hours. Night #9 in Salida CO.*



White-tailed Ptarmigan at Loveland Pass
photo by Carl Bendorf

DAY 10 (April 10) Salida and Buena Vista areas, then to Loveland Pass for Ptarmigan Today we'll spend much of our morning birding the Salida and Buena Vista areas where we'll be targeting Pinyon Jay, Lewis's Woodpecker, and Juniper Titmouse in particular. We'll continue over Loveland Pass (11,991 feet) for attempts for **White-tailed Ptarmigan** and nearby feeders for rosy-finches. The White-tailed Ptarmigan will be challenging, as finding an all-white bird in the endless snowscape of the high-elevation Rockies will take persistence and good fortune, but our group will give it a solid effort. We'll work our way back to Denver, completing our amazing circuit of the Rocky Mountain state, from border to border (and beyond). We'll enjoy our final dinner together and celebrate all of the amazing birds and scenery we experienced during our Colorado chicken adventure. *Drive time from Salida to Denver: ~3 hours. Night #10 in Denver CO.*

DAY 11 (April 11) Departure Plan your departure for any time today. Hotel check-out is 11:00AM. Our hotel provides a complimentary shuttle to the Denver airport.

DRIVE TIMES are from city to city, and do not reflect actual time in the van, which will include many birding stops and other diversions along the way.

TOUR LEADERS

Carl Bendorf is a lifelong birder, Colorado resident, and expert birding guide who founded *Colorado Birding Adventures* in 2016. Carl is past-president of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union, founder of Iowa Young Birders, and former member of the American Birding Association Board of Directors. Carl especially enjoys sharing Colorado's scenery and bird life in a friendly, relaxed, knowledgeable manner with all who join him on the grasslands and slopes of the Rocky Mountain State. Carl guided the Seven Ponds Colorado birding field tour in June, 2017 and his style and personality was enjoyed by all tour participants.

Daryl Bernard is a long-time birder and nature enthusiast who loves being outdoors and embraces every opportunity to share nature with others. He enjoys organizing trips and tours, and strives to ensure that every participant has a thoroughly enjoyable experience. Daryl has organized and led Seven Ponds birding field tours throughout North America, many local birding trips in Michigan, and bird walks for Seven Ponds as well as birding festivals. Daryl is the Executive Director at Seven Ponds Nature Center in southeast Michigan, and regularly presents birding programs at Audubon clubs, libraries, and birding festivals.



ACCOMMODATIONS

Lodging for this tour will be in 10 different locations, including modern hotels and quaint, historic small-town motels. This tour requires single-occupancy lodging. Couples will get double-occupancy with a reduced tour fee.

LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

We will travel in a single 15-passenger van. Keeping the group together in one van allows everybody to get on the same birds while on the road, and helps develop group camaraderie. Since we will be packing up each day during the tour, we ask that you travel as lightly as is practical. This will help maximize space in the van.

MEALS

All meals are included in this tour, from lunch on Day 1 (arrival day) to breakfast on Day 11. Some breakfasts will be provided by our hotels, continental style, while others will be on the road or in a restaurant. We will keep the van stocked with various snacks to tide you over between meals. Lunches will be mostly in the field, picnic-style. For dinner each evening we will enjoy a different, unique restaurant, sampling the local cuisine along the way.

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

- The variation in altitude on this trip (3,000 feet in Kansas to over 11,000 feet on the mountain passes) creates a potential for varied and fast-changing weather conditions. Participants will receive advice on what to bring.
- Most of our birding will be roadside or short hikes but we may walk up to a mile at times. You should be able to endure long rides in the van (we will average over 200 miles a day) and also be able to climb in and out of the van frequently during the day. We will stop regularly for bathroom breaks (sometimes a vault toilet in a park). On the mornings we spend several hours in a viewing blind, we will not be able to use a restroom.
- Visitors to Colorado can also experience the effects of altitude. If you have health issues that may be impacted, you should consult with your physician for advice. Our highest altitude overnight will be at Walden which is 8,100 feet.

COVID-19

Please note that there may be ongoing COVID-19 measures in place. **It is expected that all participants on the tour will have received their vaccinations prior to departure.** At this time, it is difficult to say what airlines, restaurants, and other public facilities will be requiring. We will need to remain flexible in our planning to account for such requirements. Be sure to bring at least two face coverings for times when those are necessary.

FEE and REGISTRATION INFORMATION

- Tour Fee: \$3500 per person in single occupancy from Denver, Colorado
- Deposit: \$300 (due within three weeks of registration)
- Final Payment Due: March 1, 2022
- Group size is limited to **6 individuals** and early registration is encouraged

NOTE: Nearly every major tour company offers a chicken tour, usually ten days in length, which follow a similar itinerary and target the same birds. Prices for these tours range from \$3700 to \$3950 in double-occupancy, and they are always in high demand. Our tour is a full considerably less, is limited to just six participants (the big tours often have 12-14 participants), offer single-occupancy, and revenue generated from this tour benefits Seven Ponds Nature Center.

WHAT THE TOUR FEE INCLUDES:

- Guide service for ten days of birding – Carl will be with us every step of the way
- Lodging for ten nights in single occupancy - you will have your own room every night
- All meals from lunch on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 11
- An assortment of snacks that will be ever-available in the van
- Local ground transportation in a single, large-passenger van
- Lek fees in Scott City, Wray, and Gunnison
- All park entrance fees, parking fees, tolls, etc.
- Pre-trip information, including several fun and informative emails leading up to the trip
- Post-tour trip report including an annotated list of all birds observed by the group
- eBird checklist sharing (for participants who use eBird)

WHAT THE TOUR FEE DOES NOT INCLUDE:

- Your airfare to/from Denver, Colorado
- Personal snacks, additional drinks, and alcoholic beverages
- Laundry
- Other items of a personal nature
- Gratuity for local expert birding guide services (optional)

REGISTRATION WILL BE BY LOTTERY DRAWING

We will take applications online beginning December 14, 2021.

Drawing will take place on Tuesday, January 4th at 9:00 AM.

**If space remains after the drawing, we will accept registrations
on a first-come, first-served basis.**

For more information, contact Daryl Bernard at (810) 796-3200 or (989) 513-5195 (cell) or via e-mail at dbernard@sevenponds.org.

Here is a sampling of the birds we are hoping to see that aren't generally found Michigan:

Ross's Goose
Cackling Goose
Cinnamon Teal
Barrow's Goldeneye
Scaled Quail
Gambel's Quail
Chukar
Greater Sage-Grouse
Gunnison Sage-Grouse
White-tailed Ptarmigan
Dusky Grouse
Sharp-tailed Grouse
Greater Prairie-Chicken
Lesser Prairie-Chicken
Eared Grebe
Western Grebe
Clark's Grebe
Eurasian Collared-Dove
White-throated Swift
Broad-tailed Hummingbird
Black-necked Stilt
American Avocet

Mountain Plover
Long-billed Curlew
Marbled Godwit
Wilson's Phalarope
Franklin's Gull
California Gull
White-faced Ibis
Golden Eagle
Northern Goshawk
Swainson's Hawk
Ferruginous Hawk
Barn Owl
Northern Pygmy-Owl
Burrowing Owl
Williamson's Sapsucker
Red-naped Sapsucker
Lewis's Woodpecker
American Three-toed
Woodpecker
Ladder-backed Woodpecker
Prairie Falcon
Black Phoebe

Say's Phoebe
Western Kingbird
Canada Jay
Pinyon Jay
Steller's Jay
Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay
Black-billed Magpie
Clark's Nutcracker
Chihuahuan Raven
Mountain Chickadee
Juniper Titmouse
Violet-green Swallow
Bushtit
Pygmy Nuthatch
Rock Wren
Canyon Wren
American Dipper
Curve-billed Thrasher
Sage Thrasher
Western Bluebird
Mountain Bluebird
Townsend's Solitaire

Evening Grosbeak
Pine Grosbeak
Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch
Black Rosy-Finch
Brown-capped Rosy-Finch
Cassin's Finch
Red Crossbill
Lesser Goldfinch
Chestnut-collared Longspur
McCown's Longspur
Cassin's Sparrow
Brewer's Sparrow
Black-throated Sparrow
Lark Bunting
Harris's Sparrow
Sagebrush Sparrow
Canyon Towhee
Rufous-crowned Sparrow
Spotted Towhee
Yellow-headed Blackbird
Brewer's Blackbird
Great-tailed Grackle

