

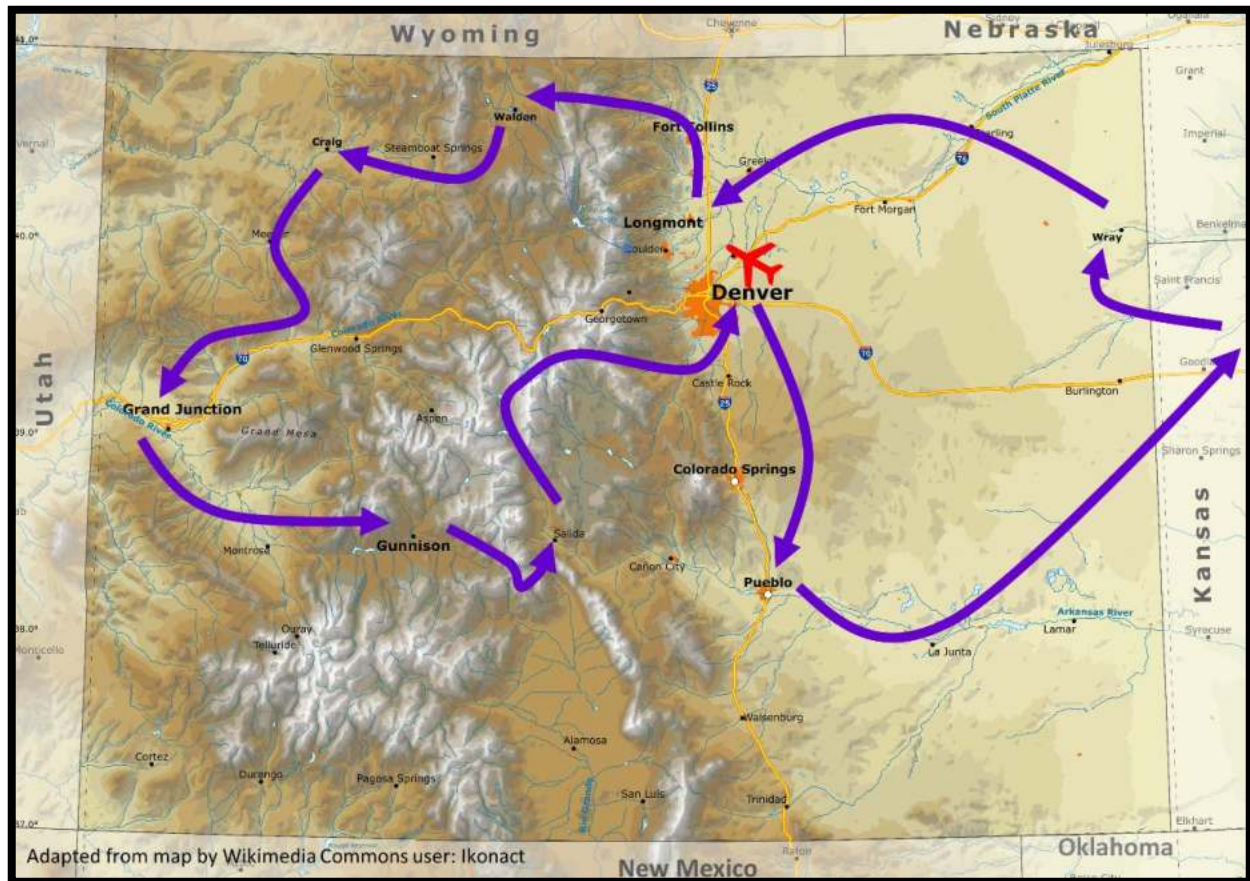
COLORADO SPRING CHICKENS

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

April 1-11, 2022

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

Trip Report and Sightings Notes



Let the Colorado Birding Adventures begin...

DAY 1 (April 1) – Denver to Pueblo. After collecting everybody from the airport, we turned the van south to begin our chicken adventure. On the way to Pueblo, we stopped along Hanover Road to search for “desert” species among the cholla cacti in Colorado, and we found Sage Thrashers and Western Meadowlarks to kick off our birding. At the nearby Hanover Fire Station, we enjoyed views of Say’s Phoebe, Curve-billed Thrasher, and Western Meadowlark, and driving back toward the expressway we had a nice flyover Chihuahuan Raven. In the neighborhoods of Pueblo West, we found our first “chicken” of the tour – a covey of eighteen or more Scaled Quail, which entertained us with their antics for quite some time. In Pueblo we enjoyed dinner at Dee Tacko and then settled in for the night at the Comfort Inn. *Night in Pueblo, Colorado.*

DAY 2 (April 2) Pueblo to Scott City, Kansas. Today we headed east to Kansas, but not before first heading west to Cañon City for some morning birding. At Brush Hollow Reservoir we spotted Black-billed Magpie, Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay, numerous Townsend's Solitaires, and a heard-only Juniper Titmouse. Temple Canyon Park provided nice looks at the Juniper Titmice, and at the Tunnel Drive area we had a great uphill hike where we saw Rock Wren and Canyon Towhee among other birds. Turning back east, we made several stops along the way, adding numerous common birds to our growing trip list. At Lake Meredith we enjoyed watching a beautiful Clark's Grebe, and Holbrook Reservoir turned up eighteen species, including Cinnamon Teal, Blacked-neck Stilt, American Avocet, Long-billed Dowitcher, Wilson's Snipe, and Northern Harrier. We saw our only Great-tailed Grackles of the tour while driving through Brandon, Colorado, and entering Kansas we saw our first of several Ring-necked Pheasants as well as a Rough-legged Hawk. We had a late dinner at La Tia-Juana Taqueria and spent the night at the Scott City Inn Motel. *Night in Scott City, Kansas.*



DAY 3 (April 3) Scott City north through Nebraska to Wray, Colorado.

Today we had our first of many early morning wakeups, as we met rancher Stacey Hoeme at the motel parking lot and followed him to his ranch, about 30 minutes away. He placed most of us in a blind at one lek and took Doris and Rick to a nearby lek. Even before first light we could hear the prairie-chicken activity outside the blind, and as darkness faded, we could begin picking out the shadowy birds as they strutted near the blind. Just as we were getting decent light, we had a scare as a distant coyote began approaching the birds. Maybe it caught wind of us, but before it could flush the birds, the coyote changed direction

and trotted away. We spent the next hour or more reveling in the courtship antics of 25-30 of the rarest birds in North America. At the Carlisle lek, we had a fly-by Merlin as a bonus. After Stacey released us from the blind, we drove to a spot on his ranch where we watched several Burrowing Owls at close range.

After a hardy breakfast at the IHOP near Oakley, the day turned very windy as we drove north through Kansas, so our birding was minimal. We stopped at the Brewster Water Treatment Plant where we found a plethora of waterfowl along with a swirling flock of Chestnut-collared Longspurs, who would dip and hover over the water to take a sip. Entering the southwest corner of Nebraska, we stopped at Rock Creek State Recreation Area and took a drive around the lake, where we saw numerous waterfowl and our first





Western Grebe and Osprey of the trip. Back in Colorado, we came upon a flock of 45 Wild Turkeys (another chicken bird!) and eventually arrived in Wray, where we proceeded to the Bledsoe Cattle Ranch to meet with owner Bob Bledsoe, who shared information about the ranch operations. He then led us out to the blind where we would hope to see Greater Prairie-Chickens in the morning, and we actually saw several fly off as we approached the lek. On our way out we spotted a Great Horned Owl (but only the ear tufts) as it sat on its nest in a hollowed tree snag; a bit further down the road we saw its mate. We enjoyed our dinner at El Vaquero Mexican Cantina and settled into our rooms at the Butte Motel. *Night in Wray, Colorado.*

DAY 4 (April 4) Wray west to Longmont.

Another early wake-up had us on the lek well before sunrise. The prairie-chickens did not disappoint, with more than two dozen birds putting on a show all around the van, which served as our viewing blind. It was interesting to note the subtle differences in the display of the Greater Prairie-Chicken vs. yesterday's Lesser Prairie-Chickens, and the pronounced difference in their respective vocalizations. After leaving the lek, we stopped by a nearby location to search for Northern Bobwhite, and although we didn't find any, we did spot a Loggerhead Shrike

– the only one of our trip. We knew we were a bit early for most species at Pawnee National Grassland, but still hoped to find Mountain Plover as well as Chestnut-collared and Thick-billed longspurs, but we were unable to locate any. Arriving in Longmont, we headed straight for Old Saint Vrain Road, where Carl had a staked-out pair of Northern Pygmy-Owls. After a bit of searching, we found one of the pint-sized birds of prey perched on a tree limb, providing wonderful looks. Dinner tonight was at the home of Carl and Linda Bendorf, who graciously hosted the group and treated us to a splendid meal, complete with wine and dessert. The group spent the night at the Comfort Suites. *Night in Longmont, Colorado.*



DAY 5 (April 5) Colorado's Front Range foothills, then up and over Cameron Pass to North Park. We took advantage of sleeping in a bit this morning, with an 8:00 AM departure greatly appreciated after three mornings of rising well before dawn. At Watson Lake we enjoyed watching a Golden Eagle working the wind along the cliff face, landing a couple times before rising and soaring out of sight. Heading up the foothills toward Cameron Pass, we followed the highway along the Cache la Poudre River. While driving along the river, we managed to find two American Dippers, which provided great views for the group. Our plans had included a couple stops up near Cameron

Pass, but the weather and road conditions deteriorated quickly as we approached the pass in a blizzard, and we were happy simply to make it up, over, and down the other side into North Park, as birding would have been hopeless in the white-out conditions. Despite the cold and wind and a fair amount of ice, the Walden Reservoir had enough open water to host numerous duck species, and we also spotted a lone American Pipit on the wind-swept shoreline. Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge didn't have a lot of bird action, but eventually we did find a Prairie Falcon, a couple Greater Sage-Grouse near the lek we would be visiting in the morning, and a herd of nearly 40 Pronghorn. We enjoyed our dinner at the River Rock Café & Antlers Inn in downtown Walden and then settled into our cozy rooms at the historic Chedsey Motel. *Night in Walden, Colorado.*



DAY 6 (April 6) Walden then west to Craig. We were parked alongside the lek by 5:30 AM along with several other vehicles, and by the time there was enough viewing light, we were treated to at least 40 Greater Sage-Grouse as the males displayed in hopes of winning the favor of one or more of the females present. It was a great show, but eventually we pulled away to pursue other birds. En route to Craig we encountered dancing Sandhill Cranes, our first of many Mountain Bluebirds, and multiple Golden Eagles. Fortunately, our drive over Rabbit Ears Pass was snow-free and uneventful. Eventually we arrived in Craig, enjoyed dinner at Carelli's Pizzeria and then settled into our rooms at the Quality Inn. *Night in Craig, Colorado.*

DAY 7 (April 7) Craig to Grand Junction. This morning we backtracked nearly 40 miles to what was reported to be the best Sharp-tailed Grouse lek in the region. After some searching, we managed to see seven fairly distant grouse, including males strutting and displaying. We left the lek to continue our birding, heading back west to Craig and then south toward Grand Junction, with a stop along the way to search for the next chicken on our target list: Chukar. At Cameo and Coal Canyon, we searched extensively but were unable to locate the elusive Chukar on the rocky slopes. We did spot several Say's Phoebes, Rock Wrens, Mountain Bluebirds, and our first and only Black-throated Sparrow, who provided a nice consolation by setting up and singing repeatedly. We passed by Grand Junction and crossed the state line, entering Utah by a matter of a few dozen feet to look



for Sagebrush Sparrow. We found one or two birds singing, and eventually settled on distant scope views of this handsome sparrow. Back in Grand Junction, we drove up and through the magnificent Colorado National Monument, stopping to take in the vast geologic scenery and numerous White-throated Swifts, which zipped and zoomed just overhead and even between us as they hunted insects over the canyon. Dropping out of the park, we cruised a nearby neighborhood where we found numerous Gambel's Quail, along with an accommodating pair of Bushtits foraging at close range. Dinner at the Rockslide Brew Pub was outstanding, and our rooms at the Comfort Inn were a welcome respite after a long, fun day. *Night in Grand Junction, Colorado.*



DAY 8 (April 8) Grand Junction

to Gunnison. We arrived at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park shortly after 7:00 AM to search for Dusky Grouse. Despite great effort, we were unable to locate any grouse and finally gave up after more than three hours. All was not lost, however, and the group took in the majestic splendor of the narrow, deep canyon and enjoyed several "good" birds, including White-throated Swift, Say's Phoebe, Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay, Steller's Jay, Townsend's Solitaire, Mountain Bluebird, Spotted Towhee, and our first Cassin's Finches of the tour. We also had



close-up looks at the Slate-colored subspecies of Fox Sparrow. After arriving in the town of Gunnison, we proceeded to Mt. Crested Butte, and small mountain community several miles outside of town. There we found, among other birds, two of our rosy-finch targets: Brown-capped and Gray-crowned. Although we were unable to pick out a Black Rosy-Finch, it was great fun to watch these active finches at the feeders around the neighborhood. At one feeder, we were able to observe three different subspecies of Dark-eyed Junco: Gray-headed, Pink-sided, and Slate-colored. We had an early dinner at the Ol' Miner Steakhouse in downtown Gunnison before heading to bed at the Comfort Inn. The morning would bring our earliest wake-up of the tour. *Night in Gunnison, Colorado.*



DAY 9 (April 9) Gunnison then east over Monarch Pass to Salida. We met Amanda, our personal lek/blind guide, outside the hotel at 4:20 AM(!), and followed her to the blind 20 miles east of town. As we settled into the cold, dark blind, we knew we had a 60 to 90-minute wait before it would be light enough to see the highly threatened Gunnison Sage-Grouse. As expected, the birds were very distant. Some have called this the most dissatisfying viewing experience for one of the most highly desired birds in North America, but it's the best lek-viewing birders can get at this time. We were grateful to have the experience, with more than 40 grouse out on the lek. After Amanda released us

from the blind, we headed back to Gunnison for breakfast at the Back Country Café before continuing back east again. As we headed up toward Monarch Pass, we made several stops along the way to search for birds. At one stop we found a beautiful male Williamson's Sapsucker, who entertained us with several close fly-bys and nearby perches. At the Monarch Mountain Ski Area, we were unable to locate an American Three-toed Woodpecker, but we did manage our first Clark's Nutcracker of the tour. Down the road a bit further we found a small battalion of Mountain Chickadees – always a treat! Stopping for a quick picnic lunch along the Arkansas River in Salida, we were enchanted by the antics of an American Dipper as it dunked, dipped, dived, and



skidded across the water just a few feet from us. Near Salida we searched a couple neighborhoods (Piñon Hills and Mesa Antero) extensively trying to track down a flock of Pinyon Jays, but it looked like our attempts would be unsuccessful. Then Colleen spotted the movement of some distant birds, and after quickly checking a map of the neighborhood, we found the flock of 60+ jays, raucous in their behavior. Gavin, who had been searching for Pinyon Jays for years, could not contain his smile! Our success called for a celebration, and we did so at the Boathouse Cantina, with ice cream following at the nearby Chill Salida Ice Cream Shop. We then settled into our rooms at the quaint Browns Canyon Inn for some well-earned sleep. *Night in Salida, Colorado.*

DAY 10 (April 10) Salida and Buena Vista, then onward to Denver. Our final day started a bit later than usual with a 6:30 AM breakfast at the hotel. After breakfast we hit a couple local water stops, including Sands Lake State Wildlife Area and Frantz Lake State Wildlife Area, turning up numerous ducks as well as our first Evening Grosbeak of the tour, a pair of Snow Geese, and the Rocky Mountain subspecies of both Hairy and Downy woodpecker. We checked Piñon Hills again, this time finding a large flock of Pinyon Jays almost immediately, along with our first Western Bluebirds. Moving on to Buena Vista, we tracked down a gorgeous Lewis's Woodpecker working the cottonwoods of the Cotton Creek neighborhood. On Elk Thistle Drive above the town of Silverthorne we found more rosy-finches, including the Black Rosy-Finch we missed a few days earlier in Crested Butte. We also enjoyed our first Pygmy Nuthatch of the tour, among many other birds. At Angler Mountain Ranch Ponds we were able to pick out a female Barrow's Goldeneye among the plethora of ducks. After checking weather conditions, we opted to skip Loveland Pass, our slight chance at White-tailed Ptarmigan reduced to near zero with the high winds and blowing snow up at the pass. After enduring the Sunday afternoon ski traffic headed east out of the mountains, we arrived in Denver and made a circuit of the wildlife drive at Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge, enjoying the bison herd along with 20 species of birds, wrapping up our birding for the tour. We had dinner at DiCicci's Italian Restaurant before checking into our rooms at the Quality Inn, with heartfelt hugs and fond farewells all around. *Night in Denver, Colorado.*



LEADER & GUIDE

- **Daryl Bernard** – Executive Director - Seven Ponds Nature Center
- **Carl Bendorf** – Professional Birding Guide - Colorado Birding Adventures

PARTICIPANTS

- **Anita Spencer** – Lapeer, Michigan
- **Colleen Vogler** – Saline, Michigan
- **Gavin Awerbuch** – Hypoluxo, Florida
- **Nancy Kautz** – Rochester, Michigan
- **Doris Ganzhorn** – Jacksonville, Florida
- **Richard Ganzhorn** – Jacksonville, Florida



LODGING

Comfort Inn – *Pueblo CO* – April 1

Scott City Inn Motel – *Scott City KS* – April 2

Butte Motel – *Wray CO* – April 3

Comfort Suites – *Longmont CO* – April 4

Chedsey Motel – *Walden CO* – April 5

Quality Inn – *Craig CO* – April 6

Comfort Inn – *Grand Junction CO* – April 7

Comfort Inn – *Gunnison CO* – April 8

Browns Canyon Inn – *Salida CO* – April 9

Quality Inn Airport – *Denver CO* – April 10

RESTAURANTS

Dee Tacko – *Pueblo CO* – April 1

La Tia-Juana Taqueria – *Scott City KS* – April 2

IHOP – *Oakley KS* – April 3 (breakfast)

El Vaquero – *Wary CO* – April 3

Bendorf's Colorado Cuisine – *Longmont CO* – April 4

River Rock Café & Antlers Inn – *Walden CO* – April 5

Carelli's Pizzeria – *Craig CO* – April 6

Rockslide Brew Pub – *Grand Junction* – April 7

Ol' Miner Steakhouse – *Gunnison CO* – April 8

Back Country Cafe – *Gunnison CO* – April 9 (breakfast)

Boathouse Cantina – *Salida CO* – April 9

DiCicco's Italian Restaurant – *Denver CO* – April 10



BIRDING LOCATIONS (Colorado unless otherwise noted)

Friday, April 1

- Hanover Road
- Hanover Fire Station
- Seymour Road—West Pueblo

Saturday, April 2

- Brush Hollow Reservoir
- Temple Canyon Park
- Tunnel Drive & Wastewater Treatment Pond
- Pueblo Co. Road 601 aka IL Ranch Road
- Lake Meredith
- Holbrook Reservoir

Sunday, April 3

- Hoeme Ranch—Carlisle Lek (Kansas)
- Brewster Water Treatment Pond (Kansas)
- Goodland Cemetery (Kansas)
- Rock Creek State Recreation Area (Nebraska)
- Bledsoe Cattle Ranch

Monday, April 4

- Bledsoe Cattle Ranch lek
- Pawnee National Grasslands
- Old Saint Vrain Road
- Lagerman Reservoir

Tuesday, April 5

- Union Reservoir
- Watson Lake
- Picnic Rock Natural Area
- Smith Bridge—Poudre River
- Walden Reservoir
- Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge
- 18 Island Reservoir—Arapaho NWR
- Coalmont area

Wednesday, April 6

- Coalmont area—Greater Sage-Grouse lek
- Routt CR-42 Elk River bridge & beyond
- Juniper Mountain gravel road
- Craig SH-394 ponds
- Loudy-Simpson Nature Trail

Thursday, April 7

- County Road 46B Sharp-tailed Grouse lek
- Cameo & Coal Canyon
- Bar X Gas Field (Utah)
- Colorado National Monument
- Monument Valley neighborhood

Friday, April 8

- Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park
- Mt. Crested Butte neighborhood

Saturday, April 9

- Wuanita Hot Springs lek
- Gunnison Cemetery
- Grand Mesa Uncompahgre & Gunnison Nat'l Forest
- Piñon Hills neighborhood
- Mesa Antero neighborhood

Saturday, April 10

- Sands Lake State Wildlife Area
- Frantz Lake State Wildlife Area
- Piñon Hills neighborhood
- Cotton Creek neighborhood—Buena Vista
- Elk Thistle Drive—Silverthorne
- Angler Mountain Ranch Ponds
- Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge



BIRDS

Snow Goose

Canada Goose

Wood Duck

Blue-winged Teal

Cinnamon Teal

Northern Shoveler

Gadwall

American Wigeon

Mallard

Northern Pintail

Green-winged Teal

Canvasback

Redhead

Ring-necked Duck

Lesser Scaup

Bufflehead

Common Goldeneye

Barrow's Goldeneye

Hooded Merganser

Common Merganser

Ruddy Duck

Scaled Quail

Gambel's Quail

Wild Turkey

Greater Sage-Grouse

Gunnison Sage-Grouse

Sharp-tailed Grouse

Greater Prairie-Chicken

Lesser Prairie-Chicken

Ring-necked Pheasant

Horned Grebe

Western Grebe

Clark's Grebe

Rock Pigeon

Eurasian Collared-Dove

White-winged Dove

Mourning Dove

White-throated Swift

American Coot

Sandhill Crane

Black-necked Stilt



American Avocet
Killdeer
Pectoral Sandpiper
Long-billed Dowitcher
Wilson's Snipe
Greater Yellowlegs
Lesser Yellowlegs
Ring-billed Gull
Double-crested Cormorant
American White Pelican
Great Blue Heron
Turkey Vulture
Osprey
Golden Eagle
Northern Harrier
Cooper's Hawk
Bald Eagle
Red-tailed Hawk
Rough-legged Hawk
Great Horned Owl
Northern Pygmy-Owl
Burrowing Owl
Williamson's Sapsucker
Lewis's Woodpecker
Downy Woodpecker
Hairy Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
American Kestrel
Merlin
Prairie Falcon
Eastern Phoebe
Say's Phoebe
Loggerhead Shrike
Pinyon Jay
Steller's Jay
Blue Jay
Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay
Black-billed Magpie
Clark's Nutcracker
American Crow
Chihuahuan Raven
Common Raven



Black-capped Chickadee

Mountain Chickadee

Juniper Titmouse

Horned Lark

Tree Swallow

Bushtit

Pygmy Nuthatch

Rock Wren

American Dipper

European Starling

Curve-billed Thrasher

Sage Thrasher

Western Bluebird

Mountain Bluebird

Townsend's Solitaire

American Robin

House Sparrow

American Pipit

Evening Grosbeak

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch

Black Rosy-Finch

Brown-capped Rosy-Finch

House Finch

Cassin's Finch

Pine Siskin

Chestnut-collared Longspur

Chipping Sparrow

Black-throated Sparrow

Fox Sparrow

Dark-eyed Junco

(Gray-headed, Pink-sided, Slate-colored subspecies)

White-crowned Sparrow

Sagebrush Sparrow

Song Sparrow

Canyon Towhee

Spotted Towhee

Western Meadowlark

Red-winged Blackbird

Brown-headed Cowbird

Common Grackle

Great-tailed Grackle



TOTAL BIRDS SEEN/HEARD BY OUR GROUP: 123 (your personal total may differ)

MAMMALS

Moose

Elk

Mule Deer

Pronghorn

Bison

Desert Bighorn Sheep

Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep

Coyote

Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel

Wyoming Ground Squirrel

Least Chipmunk

Black-tailed Prairie Dog

White-tailed Prairie Dog

Yellow-bellied Marmot

Black-tailed Jackrabbit

Desert Cottontail

Mountain Cottontail



Photo Credits

Carl Bendorf & Daryl Bernard

Doris Ganzhorn – Greater Sage-Grouse

