



## **BIRDING TEXAS & BEYOND**

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ITINERARY, 2027

### **Colorado Grouse & Mountain Specialties April 7-17, 2027**



Greater Prairie-Chicken © Greg Lasley

Embark on an unforgettable spring adventure across Colorado's breathtaking landscapes, in pursuit of the state's five iconic grouse species—Greater Sage-Grouse, Gunnison Sage-Grouse, Dusky Grouse, Sharp-tailed Grouse, and the elusive White-tailed Ptarmigan. Timed to coincide with peak lekking season, this expertly guided tour offers intimate views of spectacular courtship displays in remote sagebrush basins and alpine tundra. From the windswept grasslands of Pawnee to the snow-capped passes of the Rockies, you'll explore diverse habitats and encounter a dazzling array of mountain specialties, including Rosy Finches, American Three-toed Woodpecker, Mountain Plover, Pinyon Jay, and many more.

Prepare for a journey filled with dramatic scenery, rare bird sightings, and the thrill of spring migration in Colorado's wildest places. This expedition is designed for avid birders and nature enthusiasts seeking an immersive experience in the heart of the Rockies.

The tour starts and ends in Denver, providing access to Colorado's diverse bird habitats. Highlights include Loveland Pass for alpine species like White-tailed Ptarmigan and Rosy-Finches; Silverthorne for spring mountain birding; Waunita Hot Springs lek for Gunnison Sage-Grouse; and Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park for Dusky Grouse and scenic views. Grand Junction offers canyonlands and woodlands with Pinyon Jay and Chukar, while Craig features Sharp-tailed Grouse during lekking. The route passes through rich spruce forests before reaching Walden for Greater Sage-Grouse and duck watching. Fort Collins's foothills and Pawnee National Grasslands provide prairie birds such as Mountain Plover. Wray is known for Greater Prairie-Chicken leks, and the journey ends in Scott City, Kansas, where participants search for Lesser Prairie-Chicken and other regional birds.

Our journey through Colorado's sweeping sagebrush basins, high-elevation forests, and rugged canyon country brings together the full breadth of the state's birdlife and natural history. Over these days, we explore habitats shaped by wind, altitude, and deep geologic time—each offering its own cast of specialty species and unforgettable moments in the field. From dawn lek displays to quiet forest trails and wide-open raptor country, this itinerary is designed to balance immersive birding with thoughtful pacing, local context, and opportunities for discovery. As always, flexibility remains part of the adventure. Weather, road conditions, and bird movements can shift quickly in the Rockies, and your guide will adjust plans as needed to ensure the best possible experience. Whether you're joining for target species, photography, or simply the joy of exploring new landscapes, we look forward to sharing this remarkable region with you.

## **TOUR HIGHLIGHTS**

- Enjoy Colorado's stunning scenery – lots of traveling between sites and lots of birds to see!
- Bask at the possibility of seeing five iconic grouse species, three species of Rosy-Finch and many sparrows, woodpeckers, ducks, and raptors.
- Experience the thrill of watching male grouse perform elaborate dances on leks at dawn, an essential part of their breeding ritual.
- Take on high-elevation hikes in search of White-tailed Ptarmigan and Rosy-Finches
- Explore expansive grassland habitats for Mountain Plover, Long-billed Curlew, and Burrowing Owl.
- Observe montane specialties including American Dipper, Clark's Nutcracker, and Williamson's Sapsucker.

**TOUR LEADER:** Troy Hibbitts



Troy grew up birding on family vacations across the mountain west. After earning his master's degree in evolutionary biology from the University of Texas at Arlington, Troy began a career as a High School Science teacher while filling his weekends and vacation time with birding and general wildlife observation and photography. In addition to birding, he is a leading expert on Reptiles and Amphibians in the southwest, having co-authored three field guides for the state of Texas. He also has somewhat of an eclectic expertise in areas such as dragonflies & damselflies, butterflies, scorpions, and mammals. Troy serves as an eBird reviewer for 5 counties in southwest Texas. He has birded in all of Texas's 254 counties and has many years of birding experience specifically in south and west Texas, as well as in southeastern Arizona.

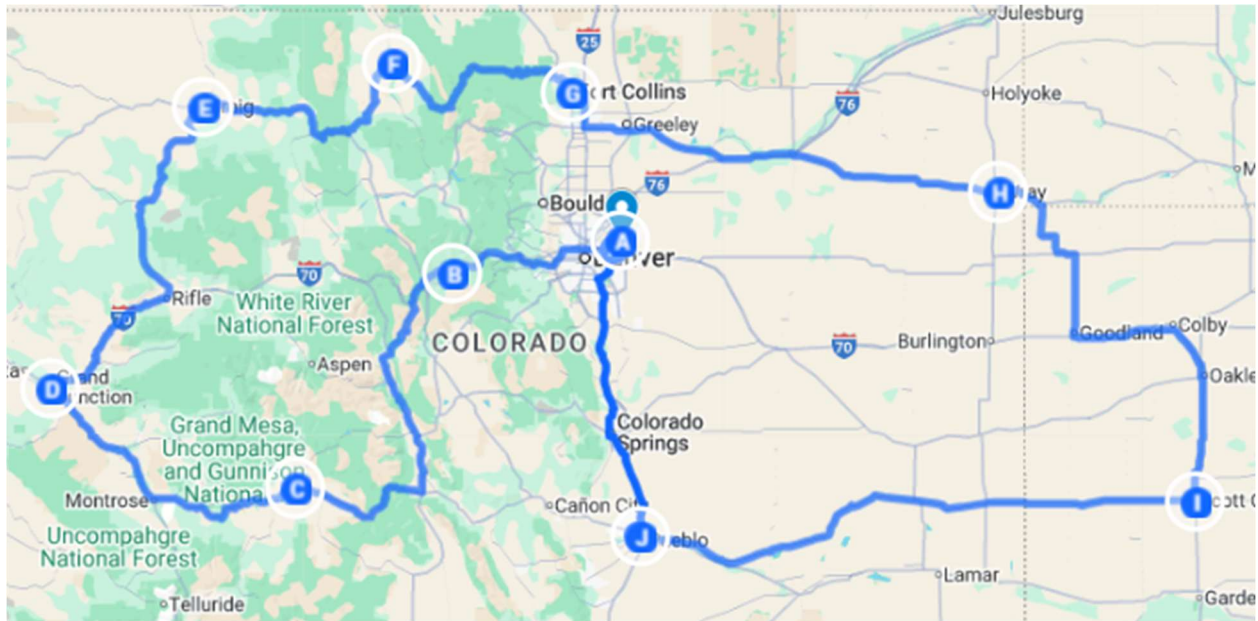
**TOUR SIZE:** This tour is limited to 8 participants

**DIFFICULTY LEVEL & PACE OF THE TOUR:** This tour is considered moderate. Guests should be comfortable walking up to 2–3 miles per day on uneven terrain, including sagebrush flats, forest trails, and high-elevation paths. Some birding locations sit between 8,000–10,000 feet, where thinner air can make even short walks feel more strenuous. Weather in the Rockies can shift quickly, and participants should be prepared for cold mornings, strong sun, and the possibility of wind or light precipitation. No technical hiking experience is required, but a reasonable level of fitness and balance will ensure a more enjoyable experience.

The pace is steady but flexible, designed to maximize birding opportunities while maintaining guest comfort. Expect early starts—especially on lek mornings and high-elevation days—along with a mix of roadside birding, short walks, and longer optional outings. We build in rest stops, warm-up breaks, and time for photography and interpretation. Your guide will adjust the pace as needed based on weather, road conditions, and bird activity, ensuring a balanced and rewarding experience for all participants.

**FINANCIAL INFORMATION:** The tour price is \$4,895 per person in double occupancy. The single supplement for this tour is \$850. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single room accommodations, or if you prefer to share a room but have no roommate and we cannot arrange one for you. The package includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 11, ground transportation during the tour, entrance fees to parks/preserves, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, and guided services provided by the tour leader(s). It does not include travel expenses including but not limited to airfare to and from the tour destination, travel insurance, extended stays (before and/or after the tour), alcoholic beverages, gratuities, and items/expenses of personal nature.

## TOUR ROUTE



**A – Start/End:** Denver International Airport (DEN)

Night 1: Hampton Inn and Suites Airport-Gateway Park, Denver

**B – Loveland Pass and Silverthorne to Gunnison**

Night 2: Holiday Inn Express, Gunnison

**C – Gunnison to Montrose**

Night 3: Hampton Inn, Montrose

**D – Montrose to Grand Junction: Gunnison Basin and Black Canyon**

Night 4: Holiday Inn Express, Grand Junction

**E – Grand Junction to Craig: Colorado National Monument, Grand Junction Wildlife Area and Colorado Riverfront. Night 5: Best Western Plus Deer Park Hotel & Suites, Craig**

**F – Craig to Walden: Yampa Valley, Steamboat Springs, North Park**

Night 6: North Park Inn and Suites, Walden

**G – Walden to Fort Collins: Walden Reservoir State Wildlife Area, Cameron Pass**

Night 7: Hilton Garden Inn, Fort Collins

**H – Fort Collins to Wray: Pineridge Natural Area, Fossil Creek Reservoir Natural Area, Arapahoe Bend Natural Area and Pawnee National Grasslands. Night 8: Cobblestone Inn and Suites, Wray**

**I – Wray to Scott City, Kansas: Lake Scott State Park**

Night 9: Best Western El Quartejejo Inn and Suites, Scott City

**J - Scott City, Kansas to Pueblo, Colorado**

Night 10: Holiday Inn Express & Suites, Pueblo North



## ITINERARY

**Day 1: Arrival in Denver.** Arrive at Denver International Airport (DEN), orientation and welcome dinner. Optional birding nearby. Overnight: Hampton Inn and Suites Airport-Gateway Park, Denver.

**Day 2: Loveland Pass and Silverthorne to Gunnison.**

We depart Denver and drive toward Gunnison, making several stops along the way. Loveland Pass, about one hour west of Denver, is primarily known for its sweeping views of the Continental Divide and mountain peaks - a popular destination for scenic drives. Loveland Pass offers rare access to alpine tundra habitat without a strenuous hike,



White-tailed Ptarmigan © Troy Hibbitts

making it a top spot for high-mountain species. In early April, snow may still blanket the landscape, concentrating birds in visible areas and offering a chance to see species that are otherwise elusive in the summer. This is a reliable place to find White-tailed Ptarmigan – the crown jewel of Loveland Pass birding. These cryptic, snow-white birds blend into the tundra but can often be spotted near the trail west of the summit parking lot or in the southeastern bowl. Silverthorne, also along I-70, is a great place for birding. April brings a mix of lingering winter species and the first wave of spring migrants, offering a dynamic birding experience. Notable species found in these areas include Rosy-Finches (Brown-capped, Gray-crowned, and Black), Horned Lark, Mountain Bluebird, Mountain Chickadee, Evening and Pine Grosbeaks, Pygmy Nuthatch, Dark-eyed Junco, Cassin's Finch, Canada Goose, and Osprey.

Overnight: Holiday Inn Express, Gunnison.



Black-billed Magpie © Greg Lasley

**Day 3: Gunnison to Montrose.** Our goal this morning is to look for the endemic Gunnison Sage-Grouse display on its lek. This bird is one of North America's rarest and most localized bird species, found almost exclusively in the Gunnison Basin. Beyond the lek, Gunnison offers diverse habitats from sagebrush flats to montane

forests and canyonlands. After the morning display by the sage-grouse, we will have an opportunity for additional birding throughout the day as we drive west toward Montrose visiting several locations and waterways along the way. Other potential sightings in this area include American Dipper, Common and Barrow's Goldeneyes, Black-billed Magpie, Brown-capped Rosy-Finch, (and Black and Gray-crowned), Evening Grosbeak, Prairie Falcon, Golden Eagle, and Rough-legged Hawk - among many others. Overnight: Hampton Inn, Montrose.

**Day 4: Gunnison Basin and Black Canyon to Grand Junction.**

Montrose offers exceptional birding, with access to riparian corridors, wetlands, and canyon habitats. It is a strategic base for continuing to explore the Gunnison Basin and Black Canyon. Today we visit Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park where Dusky Grouse is possible. Black Canyon's steep cliffs, pinyon-juniper woodlands, Gambel



Dusky Grouse © Troy Hibbitts

oak uplands, and riparian zones along the Gunnison River create a mosaic of habitats that support a wide range of birds. In April, the park comes alive with breeding activity, early migrants, and resident species. Other notable species found here include White-throated Swift, American Dipper, Canyon Wren, Steller's Jay, Slate-colored Fox Sparrow, Woodhouse's Scrub Jay, Spotted Towhee, Clark's Nutcracker, Townsend's Solitaire, Violet-green Swallow, Peregrine Falcon, Hairy Woodpecker, Plumbeous Vireo, Western Tanager, and Northern Pygmy-Owl. Overnight: Holiday Inn Express, Grand Junction.



Brown-capped Rosy-Finch © Troy Hibbitts

**Day 5: Grand Junction to Craig.**

Located at the confluence of the Colorado and Gunnison Rivers, Grand Junction sits at the ecological crossroads of high desert, riverine woodland, and mesa country. April brings a surge of activity: wintering birds linger, early migrants arrive, and breeding residents become vocal and visible. In the



morning, we will explore the canyonlands of Colorado National Monument searching for Pinyon Jays, Juniper Titmouse and Black-throated Sparrows. The predominant pinyon-juniper woodland throughout this region offers critical habitat for a diverse array of bird species. This region also encompasses the habitat where the Chukar, an introduced species from Eurasia, can be found. Other notable species found in this area include Western Bluebird, Bushtit, Black-headed Grosbeak, Lesser Goldfinch, Red-tailed Hawk, Gambel's Quail, Mountain Bluebird, Say's Phoebe, Canyon, Rock and Bewick's Wrens, Black-throated Gray Warbler, and Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay among many others. Overnight: Best Western Plus Deer Park Hotel & Suites, Craig.



Sharp-tailed Grouse © Troy Hibbitts

**Day 6: Craig to Walden.** Located in Moffat County in northwestern Colorado, Craig sits at the heart of sagebrush steppe, cottonwood river bottoms, and canyon country, making it one of the best places in the state to observe Sharp-tailed Grouse during their peak lekking season. These areas host active leks where males perform their spectacular breeding displays at dawn. Along the way to Walden, we will search a few spruce forest areas for

American Three-toed Woodpecker, Pine Grosbeak and Clark's Nutcracker before continuing towards Walden. After crossing Rabbit Ears Pass, we'll descend into North Park - here we may find Sage Thrasher, Mountain Bluebird, Sandhill Crane, Northern Pintail, Redhead, Common Merganser, Mallard, and raptors such as Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, Rough-legged and Swainson's Hawks, and Prairie Falcon. Overnight: North Park Inn and Suites, Walden.

**Day 7: Walden to Fort Collins.** Located in North Park, a high-elevation basin surrounded by mountains, Walden sits at the heart of Colorado's sagebrush steppe and wetland ecosystems and one of the best places to find Greater Sage-Grouse in Colorado. We continue driving to Fort Collins after we have watched the Greater Sage-Grouse on their lek – exploring



Greater Sage-Grouse © Troy Hibbitts

several locations along the way. We will stop at Walden Reservoir State Wildlife Area, where there is a possibility of seeing fifteen species of ducks. We'll also search for other species in the foothills, including Sandhill Cranes, Green-tailed and Spotted Towhees, Vesper Sparrows, and various raptors. Cameron Pass will provide a final opportunity to observe any remaining boreal forest bird species, including Pine Grosbeak, Cassin's Finch, Canada Jay, and American Three-toed Woodpecker. As we proceed down Poudre Canyon toward Fort Collins, the route features impressive landscapes along the Poudre River, where American Dipper can be found and Common Merganser are known to nest. Overnight: Holiday Inn Express, Fort Collins.



Juniper Titmouse © Greg Lasley

**Day 8: Fort Collins to Wray.** Fort Collins offers excellent Front Range foothill birding with diverse habitats from riparian corridors to ponderosa pine foothills. Pineridge Natural Area, Fossil Creek Reservoir Natural Area, Arapahoe Bend Natural Area, and Pawnee National Grasslands are noted as some of the best locations for birding in the area. Notable species found in the area include Townsend's Solitaire, Pygmy Nuthatch, Mountain Chickadee,

Spotted Towhee, Mountain Bluebird, Canyon Towhee, Rock Wren, Mountain Plover, and Juniper Titmouse (uncommon but possible). We then start heading east to the Pawnee National Grasslands, where we will be looking for Ferruginous and Swainson's Hawks among the fields, along with Mountain Plover, Chestnut-collared and Thick-billed Longspurs. Overnight: Cobblestone Inn and Suites, Wray.

**Day 9: Wray to Scott City, Kansas.** Wray is one of the best places in the state to see Greater Prairie-Chickens. Wray sits in the heart of Colorado's eastern plains, surrounded by sandsage prairie and mixed-grass habitat – the preferred breeding grounds of the Greater Prairie-Chicken. We will most likely hear the Greater Prairie-Chickens



Greater Prairie-Chickens © Greg Lasley



before we can see them. Each spring, males gather at dawn on leks to perform booming displays, inflating bright orange neck sacs, stomping their feet, and raising feather plumes in a ritual that has captivated birders for generations. Other notable species in the area include Northern Bobwhite, Wild Turkey, Eastern Bluebird, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Mississippi Kite, Northern Shoveler, Green-winged Teal, Ruddy Duck, and Lark Bunting to name a few. We will then drive southeast, birding our way into Kansas in search of the Lesser Prairie-Chicken. Overnight: Best Western El Quartejeo Inn and Suites, Scott City.

**Day 10: Scott City, Kansas to Pueblo, Colorado.**

Early morning will find us on a Lesser Prairie-Chicken lek. Located in western Kansas, Scott City sits at the intersection of shortgrass prairie, playa lakes, and canyon country, making it a diverse and rewarding birding location. April is peak season for Lesser Prairie-Chicken lekking, and nearby reservoirs and state parks host a mix of migrants and breeding residents. In the afternoon,



Lesser Prairie-Chicken © Greg Lasley

we start making our way to Pueblo, searching along the way for any missing prairie birds like Mountain Plover, Burrowing Owl, and Longspurs. Overnight: Holiday Inn Express & Suites, Pueblo North.

**Day 11: Tour Conclusion & Departures.** On our final morning, we explore Pueblo Reservoir. The reservoir's location where mountains meet plains creates habitat diversity supporting both groups' species. The Arkansas River flowing into the reservoir provides riparian habitat attracting migrants and breeding birds. Surrounding grasslands and rock outcrops add additional habitat types. The reservoir excels during migration when waterfowl and shorebirds concentrate on mudflats and open water. Rarities also appear regularly, making Pueblo Reservoir a favorite among Colorado's serious birders. Participants may make arrangements to leave Denver after 2 p.m. today.

## TARGET SPECIES

Greater Sage-Grouse	Bald Eagle	Rock Wren
Gunnison Sage-Grouse	Burrowing Owl	Bewick's Wren
Dusky Grouse	Ferruginous Hawk	Juniper Titmouse
Sharp-tailed Grouse	Mountain Bluebird	Mountain Plover
White-tailed Ptarmigan	Canyon Wren	Black-throated Gray Warbler
Greater Prairie-Chicken	Black-billed Magpie	Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay
Lesser Prairie-Chicken	Steller's Jay	Rosy Finches
Horned Lark	Pinyon Jay	Thick-billed Longspur
Golden Eagle	Clark's Nutcracker	Chestnut-collared Longspur
Northern Harrier	Lewis's Woodpecker	Evening Grosbeak
Prairie Falcon	Lark Bunting	American Three-toed Woodpecker
Peregrine Falcon	Canada Jay	And much more!
Williamson's Sapsucker	Pine Grosbeak	

**REGISTRATION & PAYMENTS:** To register for this tour you will need to complete an online reservation form. The non-refundable deposit for this tour is \$300 per person. All payments, including initial deposits and final balances, may be made by credit card through PayPal, check, money order, or bank/wire transfer. Deposits are due 14 days from the date you submit your reservation form. The remaining balance is due as soon as the tour confirms or 60 days prior to the tour's departure date, whichever comes first. We will invoice you accordingly.

**Please read our Terms and Conditions for more information before booking any of our tours or services. Our Terms and Conditions include important information about how we operate our tours, including cancellation policy, travel insurance, health and fitness requirements, and more.**