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**GROUSE EXTRAVAGANZA**

**DATES - April 7 – April 14, 2024**

Join us for 8 days/7 nights of birding in beautiful Colorado. April is the perfect time to see a bunch of grouse on their leks in full color. The males dance, blow up air sacks, hoot and holler, charge their rivals, and try to impress the ladies. We will see it all! This tour highlights Gunnison and Greater Sage-Grouse, Sharp-tailed and Dusky Grouse, White-tailed Ptarmigan, and Greater Prairie-Chicken.



We also bird in a variety of habitats traversing Colorado including the expansive prairie, Pinyon Juniper, Spruce-Fir Forest and everything in between. Other tour targets include Mountain Plover, Chestnut-collared and Thick-billed Longspurs on the prairie. In the mountains we will look for American Three-toed Woodpecker and Brown-capped Rosy-Finch. In Pinyon Juniper and Sage-brush Cholla areas we have a good chance for Scaled Quail, Gambel’s Quail, Curve-billed Thrasher, Juniper Titmouse, Gray Flycatcher and Pinyon Jay.

All experience levels welcomed on this trip. We travel via 12 passenger van with lots of early lek mornings. We cross the continental divide several times and have plenty of time for photographing. We will have time to enjoy the amazing scenery on this relaxed tour. Finally, we should see a variety of mammals along the way.

Your guide will be Sue Riffe, owner of She Flew Birding Tours. Sue is a retired music teacher and has been birding over 30 years, 18 in Colorado, and seen over 725 ABA birds. Check out her eBird profile here - <https://ebird.org/profile/Mjc1ODIy/world>

Cost per person double occupancy is $2995. Single supplement is $600. The cost includes all hotels, food, local transportation, expert guide, and a great birding experience. We have room for 8 guests plus Sue. **TO BOOK THIS TOUR** – contact Dawn Lemoine at travelprograms@goldengateaudubon.org





**Brief Itinerary**

Day 1– Plan on your flights arriving at the Denver International Airport (DEN) by 4:00 PM. Transfer to our hotel. We have our welcome dinner together and go over the trip details. Your evening is free. Overnight in Denver.

Day 2 – As we start our birding adventure, we head south down into the Gunnison Basin. The habitats include Pinyon-Juniper, Cholla high desert, and mixed conifer. Target species include Juniper Titmouse, Mountain Bluebird, and Bushtit in the Pinyon-Juniper, Canyon Towhee, Scaled Quail, and Curve-billed Thrasher in the Cholla, American Dipper, Red-naped Sapsucker, and American Three-toed Woodpecker in the mixed conifer. Traversing over Monarch Pass will be our first time of several over the Continental Divide of the trip. Overnight in Gunnison.



Day 3 - Our first lek experience will be watching the Gunnison Sage-Grouse. We will see the identifying marks to separate from its cousin, the Greater Sage-Grouse. These endangered grouse are seen from a distance to protect the lek. Heading west we visit the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. It is known as the Grand Canyon of Colorado. Green-tailed Towhee, White-throated Swifts, Fox Sparrow, and Canyon Wrens are common here. Fruitgrowers Reservoir supplies the local farmers water in this dry area and is considered one of the best waterfowl locations on the western slope. We will look for Marsh Wren, Ruddy Duck, 5 species of Grebes, Yellow-headed Blackbird, and shorebirds. Overnight in Grand Junction.

Day 4 – After yesterday’s early morning, today will be more relaxing. We’ll have a leisurely breakfast and head to the Colorado National Monument. This 32 square mile gem sits upon the Colorado Plateau. Have your camera ready for the sights from Rim Rock Drive through the park. Besides scenery, our three stops include hiking the two-mile Devil’s Kitchen Trail, and exploring both the visitors center and campground areas. Ash-throated and Gray Flycatcher, Gambel’s Quail, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Say’s Phoebe, Plumbeous Vireo, Pinyon Jay, Woodhouse’s Scrub-Jay, Black-billed Magpie, Western Bluebird, and Spotted Towhee are all possible. Our journey takes us north to Coal Canyon where we will look for Chuckers and Black-throated Sparrows. Rock and Canyon Wrens should also be seen here. There is a managed wild horse herd we might glimpse as well. Overnight in Craig.

Day 5 – Another early start for a Sharp-tailed Grouse lek site. You’ll know right away why they are called Sharp-tailed. Long-billed Curlews and pairs of Sandhill Cranes in the wet fields are possible in the Yampa River Valley. Driving toward North Park puts us over the Continental Divide again. North Park is 35 miles wide and 45 miles long and is home to the Greater Sage-Grouse as well as other goodies. As we descend into this beautiful basin, we’ll soak up the scenery as mountains surround us sitting at 8,800 feet. Walden Reservoir is a large body of water which could have up to 120 species this time of year. Expect to see the richly colored Cinnamon Teals, breeding American White Pelicans, California Gulls, and the western sub species of Willets. All these species will depend on the reservoir being open and not still frozen from the winter. Along with birds, this area has Wyoming Ground-Squirrels, White-tailed Prairie Dogs and Pronghorn. Overnight in Walden.

Day 6 – The Greater Sage-Grouse lek is up this morning. The sights and sounds are amazing. Bring your camera and be ready for the grouse show! After the lek and breakfast, up the mountain we go to Sub-alpine habitat. This is the best place in Colorado to get a glimpse of a moose. Stopping at a couple of feeders should allow access for some mountain species. Brown-capped Rosy-Finch, Mountain and Black-capped Chickadee, Pine Siskin, Dark-eyed Junco, Pine Grosbeak, Steller’s Jay, and Red-naped Sapsucker are all possible. Swainson’s and Rough-legged Hawks, Prairie Falcon, and Golden Eagle could be anywhere in the basin. Leaving the Walden area for Loveland Pass and the White-tailed Ptarmigan is our next destination. Where is Waldo will be the mantra here on this snowy pass. The afternoon will be spent driving east across the plains in preparation for seeing the Greater Prairie-Chickens. Finally, we’ll meet a private ranch owner before we visit his lek site the next morning. He has some fascinating stories and likes to meet everyone who comes on his amazing property. Overnight in Wray.

Day 7 – The Greater Prairie-Chicken lek will delight you this morning. Males will surround as we watch them dance and carry on for the females. I’m sure you’ll hear me laugh at least once as these are my favorites. After the lek, it is time to bird the prairie. Pawnee National Grasslands, comprising 193,060 acres, provides plenty of habit. We’ll focus on the western parcel where Mountain Plovers, Burrowing Owls, Thick-billed and Chestnut-collared Longspurs breed. We should tally 100’s of Horned Larks with plenty of time to compare their plumage variations. The final stop is at Stewart’s Pond, a surprisingly productive spot where we should round out our marshy habitat species. Our farewell dinner together is back in Denver.

Day 8 – departure for home via hotel shuttle and the Denver International Airport

**TO BOOK THIS TOUR** – contact Dawn Lemoine at travelprograms@goldengateaudubon.org

PHOTOS: Top - Gunnison Sage Grouse. Middle row - Dusky Grouse, Sharp-tailed Grouse, White-tailed Ptarmigan, and Greater Sage-Grouse. Bottom row - Mountain Plover, Scaled Quail, Brown-capped Rosy-Finch, and Chestnut-collared Longspur. Brief Itinerary – American Three-toed Woodpecker, Curve-billed Thrasher, Clark’s and Western Grebe, Pinyon Jay, Black-throated Sparrow, Clark’s Nutcracker, Sandhill Crane, Cassin’s Finch, and Greater Prairie-Chicken.