



## TOUR INFORMATION FOR COLORADO: Lekking Grouse tour

*These notes are designed to help you prepare for your tour. Please read carefully.*

**ENTERING THE UNITED STATES:** United Kingdom citizens need to have a passport that has a minimum validity of 6 months remaining after the tour has finished. This is an immigration requirement for many countries, including the USA. All nationalities require a machine-readable passport if travelling to the USA under the visa waiver programme (see below).

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has made changes to the immigration requirements. Travellers seeking to travel under the Visa Waiver Program must pre-apply for authorisation using the Electronic System for Travel Authorisation (**ESTA**). **ESTA** must be completed online via their website.

Having an **ESTA** is a mandatory requirement and applications should be made online at least 72 hours before departure via their website <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov> as although the majority of responses are immediate, it can take 72 hours for approval in some cases. There is a small fee to pay as a processing charge followed by a small fee when authorisation has been granted.

For further information, or if you don't have access to the internet, please contact the Embassy of the United States in London on 020 3608 6998. Citizens of other countries should contact their nearest US Embassy for entry requirements.

*Once you've applied for your ESTA please remember to print it out and take a copy of that document onto the aircraft with you.*

All visitors to the USA's first port-of-entry have their index fingerprints taken by an electronic scanner at Passport Control. You will also have your photograph taken at the same time. Although the process itself only takes a few minutes the queue can be quite long if several flights arrive at the same time! You will then need to reclaim your checked-in luggage, go through security, then hand your luggage back to the airline staff who will be waiting nearby to give assistance. Once your luggage is back with the airline please proceed to the departure gate for your onward flight.

It is always a good idea to take a photocopy of your passport and air ticket with you when travelling abroad. They can prove invaluable in helping you get replacements if your originals are lost or stolen. Obviously you should keep the photocopies in a separate bag to the originals.

**INTRODUCTORY MEETING:** There will be an introductory meeting at 18.00 on Day 1 of the tour. This informal meeting affords the leader the opportunity to introduce everyone to each other and to let you know generally what to expect on the trip - pace of the tour, daily routine, the next day's schedule, etc. After the meeting, we will have dinner together. We strongly recommend you arrange your flights so that you can be present at the introductory meeting. Please be aware that the birding day will start very early on Day 2.

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**CURRENCY:** Mastercard and VISA credit cards are widely accepted in the U.S., as are most major travellers' cheques. If you purchase dollar traveller's cheques rather than sterling ones you will be able to use these as currency in many places. As the tour price includes all travel, hotel and main meal costs, you need only bring enough money to cover items of a personal nature.

**CLIMATE:** April is a dynamic time of year in Colorado and nearly every type of weather is possible, from heavy snow to clear blue sky and mid-70's (F). It is possible for it to be 70°F, sunny and calm, only for the temperature to plummet to around 20°F with heavy snowfall, all in a period of two or three hours (to find the next day with temperatures in the 60's (F). Thus, be prepared for a wide range of weather conditions. Typical highs range in the 50's and 60's (F), with lows in the upper 20's and low 30's (F). Lows in the single digits (F) are rare, but not impossible. Early mornings spent at leks may be particularly cold. Snow is likely; Denver averages about nine inches for all of April. Rain and snow is possible at anytime. Given this, it is very important to *dress in layers*.

**PACE OF THE TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE:** This tour involves several early mornings (with 04:30 starts), as viewing the display leks requires waking about two hours BEFORE sunrise for a quick breakfast and a drive to the lek. We'll view the leks from the minibus or from controlled blinds and everyone will need to be relatively still and quiet for about two hours. During this time, the minibus must stay at the lek and none will be allowed to get out. All of this is essential to reduce disturbance to the birds.

After viewing the birds, we'll return to the hotel to gather luggage (and a more complete breakfast) and then head toward the next destination, birding along the way. Typically, a day's driving will total about 225 miles, sometimes on windy mountain roads. These drives will be broken by several birding stops, restroom breaks, etc. Walking will usually be on well-maintained trails or along roads, and will be less than a half mile in duration. We will endeavour to have between 45 and 60 minutes "off" each day before dinner, but most of the day will be spent in the field.

If the weather cooperates and roads are open, we'll look for White-tailed Ptarmigan on the first full day. This could involve a short walk on steep and snowy terrain, at an elevation of 12000 feet. People will have the option of staying in the minibus.

**HEALTH:** **It is essential that you contact your own doctor to obtain the latest information on the regions you are visiting.** Please contact your doctor well in advance of your tour's departure as some medication must be initiated weeks before the period of possible exposure.

It is recommended that you are up-to-date on routine vaccinations.

Colorado has no serious health risks other than altitude.

Altitude: Starting on the first full day of the tour, we'll be driving up to the highpoint of the tour, just above 12,000 feet. From this point we merely scan from a stationary position, but we may walk a short distance in snowy conditions. Otherwise we'll be at altitudes from 3000 to 8000 feet throughout. The best defence is to stay hydrated and wear the right clothes (layers) for warmth. High altitude can pose several problems from altitude sickness to sunburns. Even in winter, sunburns are frequent at high elevations; we recommend using strong (>30 SPF) sunscreen.

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It may be difficult to obtain any special medication during the tour, so bring all you are likely to need.

For further information on health advice refer to the Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad website [www.masta-travel-health.com](http://www.masta-travel-health.com)

**ACCOMMODATION:** We will be staying at standard, comfortable motels and/or lodges throughout the tour.

**LAUNDRY SERVICE:** A number of the hotels offer self-serve laundry facilities, but as most sites are visited for only a single night finding time to complete a load of laundry can be complicated. Grand Junction or Canon City would likely be the best places to wash clothes.

**ELECTRICITY:** 110/120V AC 60Hz. An international travel plug is useful and can be bought in most airport departure lounges. You may find the following website helpful: <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>.

**FOOD:** We'll eat in a variety of local restaurants where the food will in most cases be American standard. Some examples include an Italian restaurant in Denver, steakhouse in Gunnison and Mexican restaurant in Craig. Breakfasts are generally taken in our hotels (continental plus), and lunches will be in local or chain sandwich stores or cafes.

Sunbird tours are all-inclusive and no refunds can be issued for any tour meals participants choose to miss. While we will try to do all we can to accommodate the requirements of all participants, please note that we cannot guarantee all causes of food allergies can be avoided at every destination. Many restaurants offer set menus and are unable to accommodate all special requests within a group. Thus, participants with significant food allergies or special dietary needs should bring appropriate foods with them for those times when their needs can, regrettably, not be accommodated. Our tours are carefully scheduled to insure the best possible birding experience and although the leaders will do all they can to make sure the group eats at a reasonable time, sometimes early or late lunches and/or evening meals cannot be avoided. Any participants who need to eat at specific times may need to bring supplemental food with them.

**DRINKS:** Bottled water or soft drinks are provided at meals, as is coffee or tea. In addition, we keep a supply of bottled water on the tour vehicles. Bottled or filtered water may also be provided in some rooms where we stay.

**INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS:** As of 2015 all our hotels offer free WiFi access, although the service is slow in Walden and in Wray.

Mobile phones can be useful while on tour but keep in mind that many countries operate on a different cellular technology. Your phone may be incompatible with the local system, so please check with your local carrier. Fortunately, with the advent of smartphones, it is easy to download applications such as Skype or Google Voice, which can make calling home free or very inexpensive. Another option is to replace the data ("SIM") card in your phone in-country. The SIM cards, including data can be very cheap. If you wish to use this option you will need to check that your smart phone has a SIM card slot.

**FIELD CLOTHING:** Dress is informal throughout. The very best way to regulate against cold is with layers. Outer layers of clothing should fit (at least) slightly loosely over inner layers, the warmed air space between providing additional insulation. The tighter the clothing fits, the faster you will get cold so err on the side of articles being too large.

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If you do not have an adverse physical reaction to wool, this should be your material of choice as it retains its insulating properties even if it gets wet. A clothing combination that works very well is a shirt underneath a sweatshirt/sweater underneath a winter coat (an insulated parka with hood being best). Below the waist, heavy wool trousers over sweatpants/trousers over thermal underwear (polypropylene being the best) works well. If you don't have wool trousers, bring the heaviest material/tightest knit trousers you have (blue jeans get wet easily are therefore not the optimum choice).

Hands, feet and ears are especially susceptible to the cold. We strongly recommend bringing, if at all possible, insulated boots with felt liners (e.g. Lacross or Sorel brand boots) as opposed to leather walking/hiking boots. It is important that they are loose-fitting enough to accommodate easily a pair of heavy (wool) socks.

**Note:** We recommend sturdy shoes of at least ankle height as a safeguard against twisted ankles when walking over uneven terrain. Waterproof boots are important for walking on wet ground and snow.

Gloves with two layers, leather outers and wool inners, are best. A warm cap that covers the ears is essential and a scarf can add an extra bit of comfort. Those of you especially sensitive to cold may want to consider a balaclava. Hand and toe warmers can make early morning lek visits more comfortable.

In all likelihood, you will not need all of these layers, but it is best to be prepared for the possibility of very cold weather. Layering allows you to remove articles easily if the weather ends up being mild.

The following items are basic (but see above):

Heavy-weight sweater/fleece or jacket	Warm hat and gloves
Long trousers of quick-drying fabric	Winter coat
Long-sleeved cotton shirts	Water-proof clothes
Thermal underwear	Wind-proof jacket
Cap or hat (for sun protection)	T-shirts
Sturdy, waterproof shoes or boots	Boots for walking in snow

### **MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS:**

Notebook and pencil	Alarm clock
Day pack/small rucksack	Water bottle
Torch with extra batteries (for optional owling)	Sunglasses, lip balm
Ear plugs (if you are a light sleeper)	Personal medication

**Optional:** Telescope & tripod, camera & film or memory cards, spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guides. A telescope does come in handy for scanning for Ptarmigan, viewing the Gunnison Sage Grouse from the blind, and looking for waterfowl and waders at various reservoirs.

**LEADER'S EQUIPMENT:** The leader will provide the following:

Telescope	Basic first aid kit
Field library	Maps
Playback equipment	Laser pointer

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**LUGGAGE:** Our Final Information document, which will be sent to you approximately three weeks before departure, will give details about baggage weight and size restrictions imposed by the airline used for this tour.

If possible, please bring your luggage in soft-sided bags or cases (rather than large hard 'Samsonite'-type suitcases) as these pack more easily into our vehicles during the tour. Please note that on many tours there are no porters to carry your luggage so please ensure that **no bag is so heavy that you are unable to lift and carry it yourself.**

As a general rule, in addition to using your luggage labels, it is a good idea to fix identification to the *inside* of each piece of luggage.

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** Scenery and memory shots will be plentiful and simple to obtain. Although there will be occasions when bird photography is possible, a birdwatching tour is not normally the best means of pursuing this aim. Bring all your film or memory cards with you as it may be difficult to find precisely what you need during the tour. Camera equipment should be packed in moisture- and dust-proof bags, as a precaution. "Digiscoping" is perfectly compatible with the tour, though it is recommended you bring your own telescope as the leader's telescope is not available for this activity.

There will be plenty of opportunities to take photos of birds, mammals and scenery and the leaders will do all they can to accommodate anyone wishing to take photographs. However if you are a serious photographer please bear in mind that this is first and foremost a birdwatching tour. Please do not allow your photographic desires to conflict with other participants' birdwatching activities.

**TRANSPORT:** We will be travelling by 15- or 12- passenger minibuses, depending on the group size. When using the 15-seater minibuses we will take a maximum of seven passengers plus the leader/driver. The leader will arrange a seating rotation. Participants should be able to ride in any seat in tour vehicles.

**SMOKING:** Smoking is not allowed in the vehicles or when the group is gathered for meals, checklists etc. If you are sharing a room with a non-smoker, please do not smoke in the room. If you smoke in the field, we ask that you do so well away and downwind from the group if possible.

**TRAVEL INSURANCE:** Travel insurance is essential and we insist that you take out suitable cover as soon as your tour is booked. If you are bringing expensive optical equipment or other valuable items, please make sure they are also adequately insured on your home contents policy, as most travel insurance policies do not cover very expensive individual items. You may wish to consult your insurance broker regarding coverage. Please also ensure that your policy covers you in the event of a medical emergency, cancellation of a trip or severe delays. Medical costs abroad can often be extremely expensive. Please note that Sunbird is not liable for any medical or repatriation costs resulting from injury or illness during a tour or for covering any costs resulting from a flight delay such as extra hotel accommodation.

If you wish, insurance can be arranged by Helen Fisher, Bullerwell Independent Insurance Brokers, 13 Goldington Road, Bedford, MK40 3JY. Tel: 01234-866964. Please contact Helen for a quote and she will send the schedule directly to you.

**TIPPING:** All tour-based tips are included in the tour price. These include tips to local guides, drivers, hotel porters, and waiters and waitresses. You only need to pay tips for personal services such as room service or drinks from the bar.

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### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

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Davis, Wade. 2013. River Notes, a Natural and Human History of Colorado, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Island Press. **ISBN-13:** 978-1610910200

Dunn, Jon, L., and Jonathan Alderfer. 2011. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*, Sixth edition. National Geographic Society, Washington, DC. One of the top two field guides for North America. **ISBN-13:** 978-1426208287 **Recommended.**

Gallagher, Jolie Anderson. 2011. A Wild West History of Colorado: Pioneers, Gunslingers, and Cattle Kings on the Eastern Plains. **ISBN-13:** 978-1609491956

Kaufman, Kenn, Rick Bowers, and Nora Bowers. 2007. *Kaufman Focus Guide to Mammals of North America*, 12<sup>th</sup> Edition. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston. **ISBN-13:** 978-0618951888

Kingery, Hugh E. 1998. Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas, first edition. Colorado Division of Wildlife. **ISBN-13:** 978-0966850604

Michener, James. 1987. Centennial. Faucett Reprint Publishing. **ISBN-13:** 978-0449214190

Sibley, David Allen. 2003. *The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. A regional guide containing the same concise and accurate illustrations and information as in the more comprehensive guide though smaller and much easier to carry. **Recommended.**

**OBTAINING BOOKS:** Most of the field guides and the major ornithological references in print are available by mail order from booksellers specialising in natural history titles.

Natural History Book Service Ltd  
Tel: 01803 865913  
[www.nhbs.co.uk](http://www.nhbs.co.uk)

Subbuteo Books  
Tel: 0870 010 9700  
[www.wildlifebooks.com](http://www.wildlifebooks.com)

WildSounds  
Tel: 01263 741100  
[www.wildsounds.co.uk](http://www.wildsounds.co.uk)

**MAPS:** Maps of the region may be available from:

The Map Shop  
Tel: 01684 593146  
[www.themapshop.co.uk](http://www.themapshop.co.uk)

Stanfords  
Tel: 020 7836 1321  
[www.stanfords.co.uk](http://www.stanfords.co.uk)

**FINAL INFORMATION:** Final information with instructions for meeting the group, hotel addresses, etc., and your air tickets will be sent to you about three weeks before the start of the tour. Other news will be communicated as necessary. If you have any questions about any aspect of the tour, please contact us.