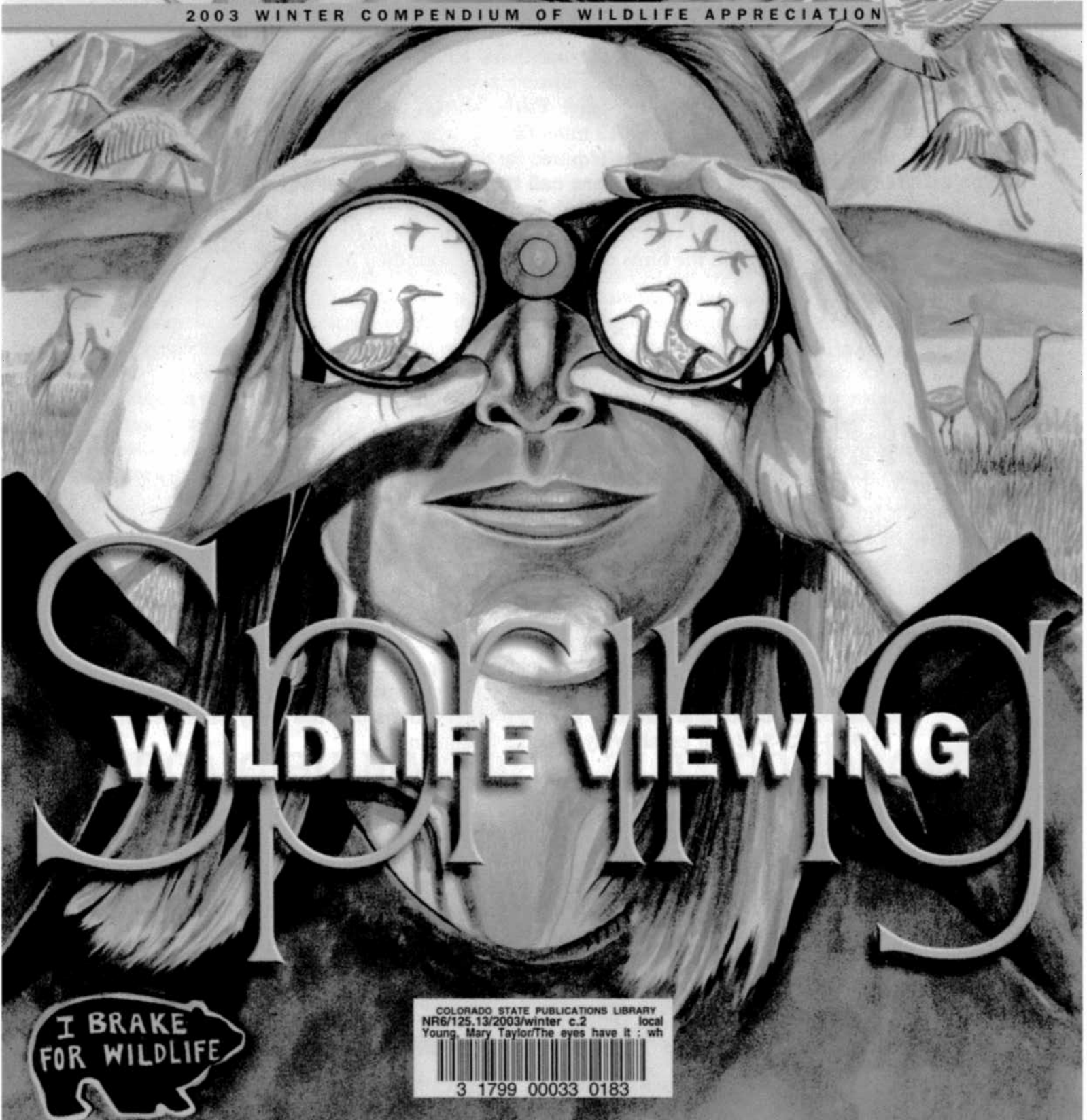


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2003 WINTER COMPENDIUM OF WILDLIFE APPRECIATION



Spotting WILDLIFE VIEWING



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The eyes have it:

Why watching wildlife is good, for you and for the neighbors

by Mary Taylor Young

Do you have the winter doldrums?

Christmas is over; the New Year has passed; the Super Bowl has come and gone. Maybe you've spent the cold months indoors, playing video games, cruising the Internet, cooking, cleaning out the closets. You're tired of being cooped up indoors. *Aw, Mom, there's nothing to do!*

But Mom always knew the solution—go outdoors and play—and she's right. As winter winds down and spring approaches, there are a host of "events" happening in nature that offer a different version of spectator sports. These events have happened every spring for thousands of years, so it's time you got out there and watched!

Imagine a field filled with birds—not small sparrows but birds that stand higher than your waist. They bow and pirouette, prance and dance. Above it all rises a rolling music of croaks and trills. They're sandhill cranes and you can see them, playing this March in Colorado's own San Luis Valley.

Or how about visiting a secret spot on the prairie? As the sun comes up, prairie-chickens make their way onto a traditional courting ground. This spot has been used by the birds for generations, and this year you're invited too. Soon the prairie will be alive with wild chickens dancing and spinning. Orange pouches on their necks swell up like balloons, then deflate, filling the morning with wheezing pops that sound like a bagpipe band warming up. It's all happening in northeastern Colorado near the town of Wray.

Far across the state, there's another fellow to watch for. He won't be dancing or singing, but a 1,000-pound bull moose doesn't have to do more than stand there to make your jaw drop. The starting place for moose discovery is at the Moose Visitor Center in North Park, near Walden.

Are you interested yet?

Wildlife watching is fun. It's a wholesome activity ideal for family outings. It doesn't cost a lot of money and it doesn't require any equipment, though binoculars will improve the view. In this era when we all complain about too much stress, getting

outdoors in nature to look at animals is one of the best ways to relax and de-stress.

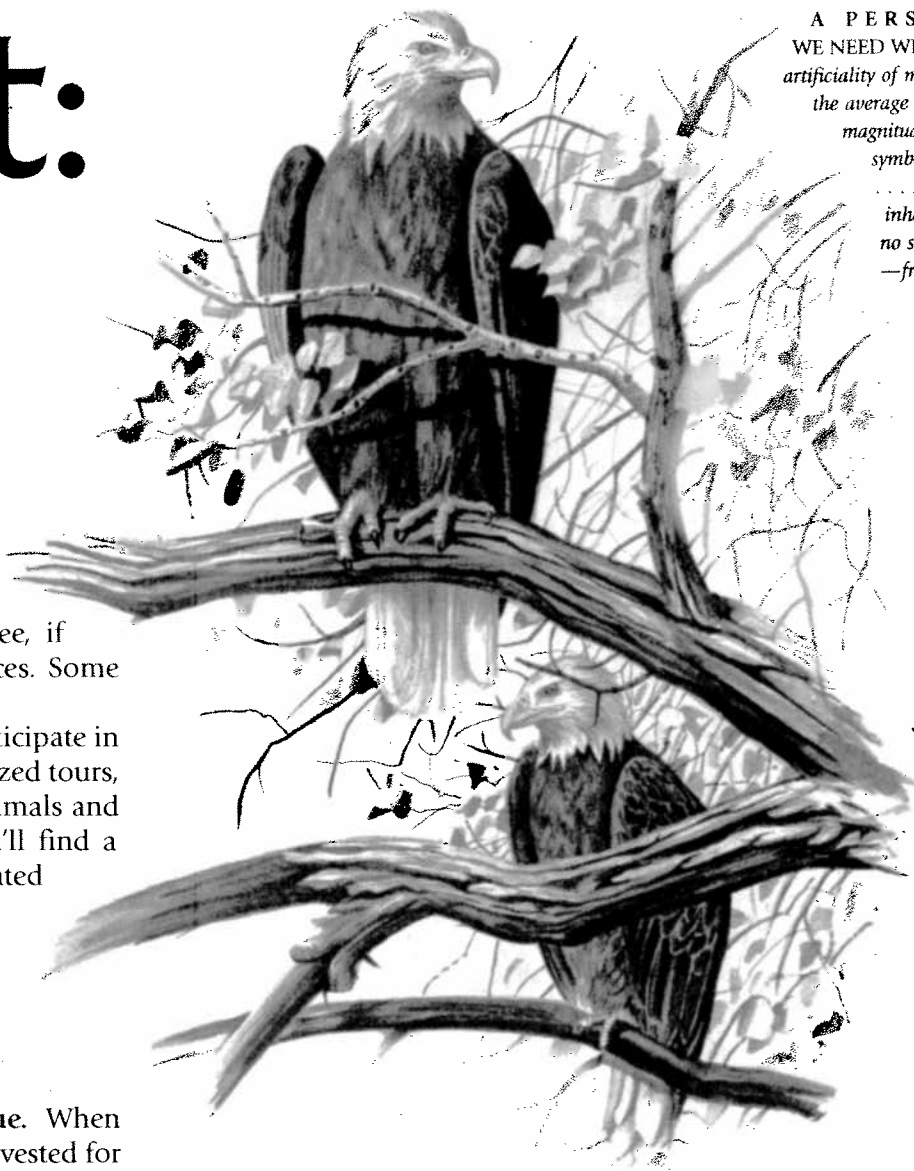
We're fortunate to live in a state with abundant wildlife, much of it fairly easy to see, if you go at the right times and to the right places. Some knowledge of the animals' habits will help too.

A good way to start wildlife viewing is to participate in an organized event, such as a festival with organized tours, lectures and workshops that teach about the animals and skills for enjoying them. Inside this issue, you'll find a guide to Colorado-wide spring festivals dedicated to wildlife.

Does wildlife watching make dollars and sense?

Wildlife have always had economic value. When Colorado was first settled, wildlife were harvested for food and to be sold to the market. Animal pelts and skins were valuable commodities. In the 20th century, recreational hunting and fishing grew in importance. Today they generate millions of dollars annually for the state economy. In recent decades, wildlife watching has grown to make a significant economic contribution, particularly in the communities watchers visit to see wildlife.

According to a 1996 US Fish and Wildlife Service survey, 62.9 million Americans fed, observed or photographed wildlife around their homes and on trips away from home in 1996. They spent \$29.2 billion on these activities, including \$9.4 billion on trip-related costs, \$16.7 billion for equipment, and \$3.1 billion on dues and contributions to wildlife-related organizations, and magazines. In Colorado in that year, wildlife watchers spent over \$786 million on their hobby, which generated \$23.6 million in sales tax revenue and \$13.9 million in state income tax revenue. It also accounted for 19,784 jobs. These dollars have particular impact in small and rural communities



A PERSPECTIVE FROM 50 YEARS AGO . . .
WE NEED WILDLIFE—Some of us would wither spiritually if we could not occasionally get away from the artificiality of modern life and regain perspective through watching the ways of our wild neighbors. But what about the average man; does he need this tonic? Is wildlife really important? . . . Plainly wildlife is a resource of the first magnitude . . . But how can we really put a dollar sign on anything as all-encompassing as nature? A monetary symbol can never express the beauty of a forest, the delicacy of a flower or the wonder of a thrush's song . . . Each animal that exists today is the end result of hundreds of millions of years of evolution. As the inheritors of the earth, it is our responsibility to see that our wild neighbors have living space and that no species is pushed out of existence.
 —from the National Wildlife Federation Wildlife Conservation Stamp Album, 1957

The Grandmother of Them All— Monte Vista Crane Festival

There are now over 70 crane festivals in the world, including one in Tibet, but the Monte Vista Crane Festival, to be held in 2004 for the 21st year in a row, is the great-great-great grandmother of them all, says Donna Kingery, one of the festival's early organizers.

The Monte Vista festival may be the first wildlife festival of its kind in the U.S. It's certainly the first festival devoted to cranes. In 1982, a group of Monte Vista locals involved with the chamber of commerce and the economic development council got together to brainstorm how they could do something to celebrate the cranes that gathered around their town every spring. The first event, in spring of 1983, was fairly simple. Kingery talked about the cranes, people went out to look at them, and there was an arts and crafts fair. Over the years the festival evolved, with banquets and speakers, art shows and classes, but the highlight has always been the tours to see the cranes.

Today an estimated 10,000 people visit the crane festival. Countless more are drawn to the area before and after the festival to see the cranes on their own. Revenue figures compiled in the mid-1990s by the festival committee found that the one-weekend festival brought an estimated \$500,000 into the community, proof of the economic boon wildlife viewing brings to the area.

Beyond that, says Kingery, is the educational value. "People come to have fun, and they learn by accident about the birds and the environment and biodiversity."

Today the cranes aren't just big, noisy birds that show up every spring, but an educational and economic resource that Monte Vista wouldn't be the same without.

such as Wray, Walden, Monte Vista and Hayden. As opportunities emerge for local communities to realize the economic value to wildlife beyond directly harvesting the animals, the citizens whose land and neighborhoods are home to wildlife will have more incentives to support wildlife conservation.

So, how does watching wildlife help me and my neighbors?

When you watch wildlife, particularly if you travel to different parts of the state, you not only de-stress and have fun, you benefit and support your fellow Coloradans. That's how wildlife watching is good, for you and for the neighbors—both human and animal!



2004 Springs WILDLIFE HAPPENINGS GUIDE

Got the itch to see wildlife? A variety of festivals and viewing opportunities throughout the state will help you discover the many wildlife "events" of spring.

SOUTH CENTRAL Sandhill Crane Festival — Monte Vista

There's been a crane festival in the San Luis Valley for thousands of years. It's only been in the last twenty that it included an arts and crafts fair. Greater sandhill cranes have been stopping in their northward migration to rest and feed in the Valley for millennia. The festival is devoted to watching the cranes as they gather in fields and wetlands around Monte Vista. The sight of thousands of three-foot tall birds milling in the fields, bowing and leaping, gives a glimpse of the vast gatherings of wildlife from America's past.

The 2004 event is scheduled for March 12 to 14. Crane-watchers will enjoy guided bus tours to the nearby Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge and surrounding farm fields where they can see the cranes up close. There are lectures, demonstrations, an arts and crafts fair, even a visit to a local potato warehouse. But the bird-viewing is the highlight. Besides the cranes there are waterfowl and water birds of all kinds, bald eagles and other raptors plus chances to glimpse a variety of other critters. **For information on the upcoming festival visit www.cranefest.com or contact the Monte Vista Crane Committee at 719-852-3552.**

SOUTHEAST

High Plains Snow Goose Festival — Lamar

Honk if you love geese. Construction of irrigation reservoirs across the Eastern Plains created wonderful habitat for migrating water birds. In late winter, thousands of snow geese begin to wing their way north to summer nesting grounds in the Canadian Arctic, stopping by the many ponds and lakes of eastern Colorado to rest and feed. Part of the Western Central Flyway population, the geese have spent winter in southeastern Colorado, New Mexico, the Texas panhandle and northern Mexico. Among the many snowy white geese you will notice a few blue-gray ones in the crowd. They're a color phase of snow goose known as blue geese. The High Plains Snow Goose Festival, **February 27-28, 2004** in Lamar, will celebrate the gathering of the geese. Wildlife watching tours at various hours of the day are the highlight. There will also be an arts and craft fair, history tours of the area, lectures and other diversions. **Visit the Web site at www.lamarchamber.com/goose for more info.**

NORTHWEST Moose Viewing — North Park

Walden, Colorado calls itself the moose-watching capital of the world, and there's no question North Park is the place to go to seek out this largest member of the deer family. Though there is no moose-watching festival scheduled, a self-guided visit should begin at the Moose Visitor Center at Gould along Highway 14. It's **open daily 9 A.M. to 5 P.M.** Here visitors will see a mount of a full-sized bull moose and learn plenty about the life and times of moose in Colorado. Armed with information about the critter, and where and when to look for it, visitors can seek out moose at their leisure. **For information and directions call 970-723-8366.**

Greater Sage-Grouse Viewing — North Park

The courtship dance of sage-grouse rivals the display of its cousins the prairie-chickens. Like prairie-chickens, sage-grouse also gather on traditional dancing grounds, or leks, where the large males, which are more than two feet long and can weigh over seven pounds, display for the much smaller females. The males inflate white air sacs on their necks, which balloon to huge proportion, nearly obscuring their heads. The resulting release of the air in a wheezy pop from dozens of displaying grouse sounds like the bubbling mud pots of Yellowstone National Park. Sage-grouse display in **late April and May**. Weekend packages to see the grouse begin in Walden. They include lodging, an educational lecture, dinner and a guided, pre-dawn tour to the lek.

For information on dates and costs call the Walden Chamber of Commerce at 970-723-4600.

Gunnison Sage-Grouse Viewing — Wuanita State Wildlife Viewing Area

This smaller cousin of the greater sage-grouse, which has only recently been designated a separate species, performs a similar courtship display in **late April and May**. There are no guided tours or viewing blinds, but visitors should, as with all grouse courtship viewing, arrive before dawn at the roadside pull-out at the state wildlife area. Remain in your car. Binoculars or a window-mount spotting scope are a good idea. An interpretive sign at the site offers more information. **The viewing area is located approximately**

Eagle Day Festival — Pueblo

February 7 is a day to celebrate our national symbol, the bald eagle, at Lake Pueblo State Park. Hundreds of bald eagles winter in Colorado. Lake Pueblo and along the Arkansas River is a good place to spot them, along with a great variety of waterfowl. In addition to viewing opportunities, the Festival will offer a scavenger hunt for kids, talks, walks and other activities. **For further information and directions, contact the park at 719-561-5300 or visit the Web site at www.eagleday.org.**

Lesser Prairie-Chicken Viewing — Campo

Lesser prairie-chickens dance and wheeze on communal dancing grounds, called leks, like their counterparts, the greater prairie-chickens. The most obvious physical difference between the two is that the air sacs of the lesser are yellow, while the greater's are orange. **Early March through mid-May is the time to visit** the lesser prairie-chicken lek, located about 12 miles east of Campo, on the Comanche National Grassland. This is a self-guided tour but reservations are required for the viewing blind there. **To register, and for information on directions and local road conditions call the Carrizo Ranger District at 719-523-6591.** Arrive well before dawn to be in the blind before the birds gather. There is only limited space in the blind so if it is occupied when you arrive, remain in your car to avoid disturbing the birds. Too much activity—movement, car doors slamming, noise—can flush the birds off the lek and disturb their mating.

NORTHEAST

Greater Prairie-Chicken Viewing — Wray

It's amazing, it's comical, it's one of the outstanding spectacles of wildlife viewing in North America. It's the courtship dance of the greater prairie-chicken and you've probably never seen anything like it. The sight of dozens of birds pirouetting and inflating orange sacs on their necks is definitely in the *ooh-aah* category. All the leks, or dancing grounds, are located on private property but the Wray Chamber of Commerce offers a series of chicken-watching **weekends from late March through April.** The one or two-night tour packages include accommodations, educational lectures and some meals, depending on the package. The highlight, of course, is the early-morning guided field trip to see the birds (don't drink coffee before you go as there are no facilities at the lek!). **For information on costs and dates or to make reservations call the Wray Chamber of Commerce at 970-332-3484 or email wraychamber@plains.net.**

Wildlife Viewing On Your Own — Statewide

Festivals and guided tours are fun, but often the best wildlife viewing is done on your own. There's something to see everywhere in the state. For a guide to 200 sites throughout the state, including who, what, when and where, consider the **Colorado Wildlife Viewing Guide**, available for \$12.95 plus \$2 shipping and handling from the Colorado Wildlife Heritage Foundation, 6060 Broadway, Denver, CO 80216. **Call 303-291-7212 for information or online at www.ColoradoWildlifeFoundation.org.**

17 miles east of Gunnison — $\frac{9}{10}$ of a mile north of Hwy 50 on County Rd 887.

Sharp-Tailed Grouse Viewing — Hayden

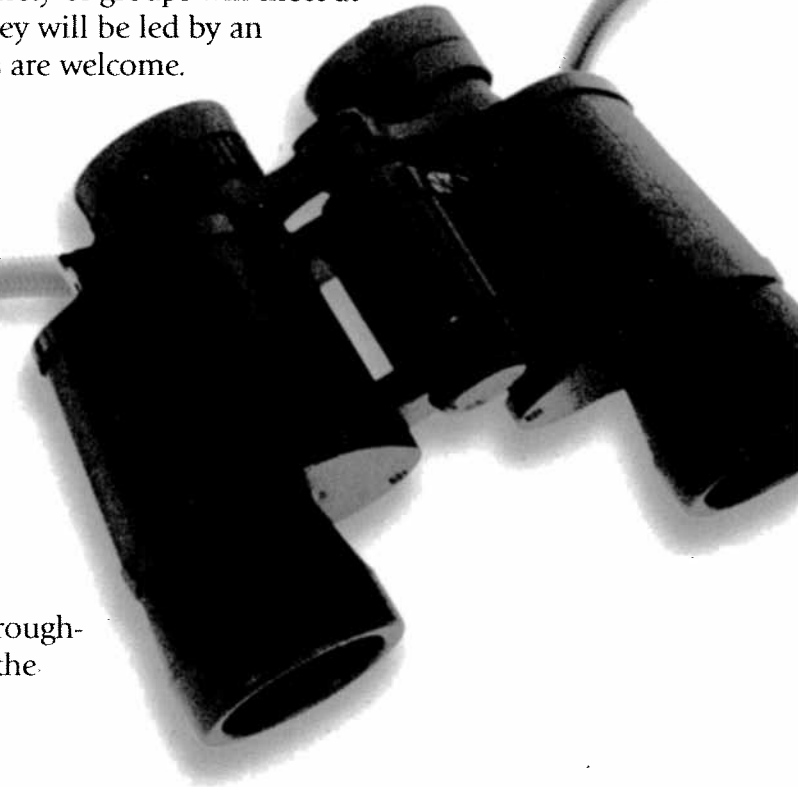
Sharp-tailed grouse offer yet another fascinating version of grouse courtship. They also gather on a communal lek, where the males inflate purple air sacs on their throats and emit a soft boom or coo. They raise and fan their trademark tails with the pointed feathers ("sharp tail"), rustling and vibrating their wings. **Mid-April through mid-May** is the time to catch a Division of Wildlife guided tour to see them in the Yampa Valley. This includes strictly the guided visit to the lek with a district wildlife manager. Meals and accommodations are up to the visitor. **For more information or to book a tour, call 970-871-2854.**

DENVER METRO Dinosaur Ridge Hawkwatch — Jefferson County Open Space

Operated from **March 12 to May 15** by the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, this hawk watch site atop Dinosaur Ridge on the Dakota Hogback is just west of Denver off of I-70. Visitors can drop by to help researchers search the sky for hawks, eagles, falcons and vultures while learning how these birds make their migration flights and why this area is their chosen route. Hawkwatchers will have to make a short but steep hike up the ridge. **For information and exact directions, contact Jennie Rectenwald with RMBO at 303-659-4348 or visit their Web site at www.RMBO.org.**

Dawn Chorus Day — Areawide

May 2nd is the day to join other lovers of nature for Dawn Chorus Day to celebrate the return of spring and the joy of birds. Chorusers are up and out before the sun to listen to the birds and see how many species they can note. A variety of groups will meet at parks and sites throughout the metro area, where they will be led by an experienced leader. All interest and experience levels are welcome. **For information contact Debbie Lerch with the Division of Wildlife at 303-291-7328 or debbie.lerch@state.co.us.**









WILDLIFE WATCH



Is your life filled with too much stress? Does spending time outdoors learning the secrets of Colorado's wild creatures sound fun? Wildlife Watch was

designed for you. This half-day viewing-skills workshop offered by the Colorado Division of Wildlife will help you:

-  Know when/where to find wildlife
-  Sharpen your senses to sights and sounds
-  Use binoculars and field guides
-  Act responsibly outdoors
-  Master new outdoor skills
-  Know where to get more information

Each class includes a one hour nature walk.

Individuals, families, community groups, scouts, service organizations, tourism industry professionals and anyone else seeking to enhance their enjoyment of the Colorado outdoors are welcome.

Don't think you have to go on a guided nature walk to enjoy nature. Equipped with the skills from Wildlife Watch, you'll enjoy every hike and picnic even more.

"It used to be, if I didn't see an animal, I didn't pay attention," said one attendee. "Now, I'll never not look again."

Public workshops are held regularly at various sites statewide. The cost is \$15 per household. Re-certification credits are available for educators. **For more information, visit www.WildlifeWatch.net, call the Wildlife Watch hotline at 303-291-7258, or e-mail Renee Herring at renee.herring@state.co.us. To arrange a group workshop, call 303-291-7250.**



The Division of Wildlife's mission is to manage the state's wildlife for all the people of Colorado. The Watchable Wildlife program promotes wildlife viewing recreation by creating wildlife viewing sites, offering information through books, brochures and interpretive signs, sponsoring the Wildlife Watch learn-to-view workshops, and publishing this compendium to wildlife appreciation.

Colorado's Wildlife Company and accompanying educator's guide are available online at WWW.WILDLIFE.STATE.CO.US/COLO_WILD_CO/HOME/P/CWCINDEX.HTM

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COLORADO

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