

SOUTHWESTERN
COLORADO
TRAIL GUIDE



Meet the Partners

Audubon Colorado

Audubon Colorado exists to inspire and work with people to conserve, restore and enjoy natural habitats in our state. We focus on birds and other wildlife through education, research, careful use of our resources, and by serving as strong voices for the natural world. <http://co.audubon.org>



Colorado Division of Wildlife

Our mission is to perpetuate the wildlife resources of the state and provide people the opportunity to enjoy them. The watchable wildlife program promotes wildlife stewardship and awareness through positive viewing experiences. www.wildlife.state.co.us



Colorado Field Ornithologists

CFO is a non-profit statewide organization open to anyone interested in birds, including recreational birders and professional ornithologists. The diversity of our members' interests creates a dynamic organization and offers learning opportunities for all. www.cfo-link.org



Colorado State Parks

Our mission is providing outdoor recreation through the stewardship of Colorado's natural resources for the enjoyment, education and inspiration of present and future generations. www.parks.state.co.us



Great Outdoors Colorado

Known as GOCO to its friends, this board provides Colorado Lottery funds for worthwhile projects, statewide. Without the GOCO funds allocated for the printing of this Colorado Birding Trail Guide, the project could not have been completed. Show your support for wildlife by playing the Colorado Lottery! www.goco.org



National Park Service

The National Park Service preserves the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education and inspiration of this and future generations. Colorado features 12 unique NPS sites. www.nps.gov



Playa Lakes Joint Venture

The Playa Lakes Joint Venture's (PLJV) mission is to conserve playa lakes, other wetlands and associated landscapes through partnerships for the benefit of birds, other wildlife and people. www.pljv.org



Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory

Our mission is to conserve birds of the Rocky Mountains, Great Plains, and Intermountain West and the habitats on which they depend through research, monitoring, education, and outreach. www.rmbo.org



USDA Forest Service

Our mission is to lead in the conservation and wise use of the nation's forests and grasslands. We provide outdoor enthusiasts with amazing opportunities on 11 National Forests and 2 National Grasslands in Colorado. <http://www.fs.fed.us/>



CryBaby Design

CryBaby Design is a design studio specializing in web design & development, branding and print design for clients ranging from non-profit organizations to the Fortune 500. A great deal of their work focuses on conservation, ecology, wildlife and organic/natural lifestyle industries. www.crybabydesign.com



Bill Schmoker

Bill Schmoker is a science teacher, birder, and skilled photographer. Many of the wildlife images in this guide are provided through his generosity. You can learn more about Bill by visiting his website. www.schmoker.org

Additional Credits:

Nathan Pieplow and Andrew Spencer for all their hard work, Jennifer Kleffner, Dave Lovell, John Kosbak from the Colorado Division of Wildlife, Renee Herring, Glenn Giroir for additional photography, and the friendly people of Colorado who have embraced and implemented the Colorado Birding Trail vision for healthy wildlife resources and vigorous economies in their communities.

The Colorado Birding Trail

Join us on the Colorado Birding Trail to experience a wildlife adventure of your own! Explore Colorado's incredible diversity of wildlife and the habitats they depend on in unbelievably spectacular settings. From the dry grasslands of the short-grass prairie to the snowy peaks of the Rocky Mountains, Colorado has nearly 1,000 species of wildlife for you to seek in an endless variety of fantastic habitats.

Colorado's wildlife - It's something to see! From the sleek pronghorn antelope of the vast, high plains prairie to the camouflaged White-tailed Ptarmigan of the alpine tundra, an exciting outdoor adventure awaits you on the Colorado Birding Trail. The easily-navigated web site, Birding Trail Guide and trail maps will assist you in planning your personalized wildlife viewing experience.



Ammenities Legend

- * Site may require a fee to visit. Please see below for information on visiting particular sites.
- Some handicapped facilities are available.
- Hiking trails provide access to wildlife habitats.
- On-site services available.
- On-site facilities available.
- Staffed facility available during business hours.
- Provide enhanced wildlife viewing opportunities for visitors.
- On-site facilities available.
- Camping permitted - sites may vary from primitive camping to RV sites with hook-ups. There may be an additional fee for camping. Call specific sites for more information.
- Hunting licenses are required for all hunters.
- A fishing license is required for people between the ages of 16 and 64. Free licenses are available for seniors, age 64 and older.

*Admission:

State Wildlife Areas (SWA): No Fee. Open to the public for wildlife-based recreation subject to management closures, as posted.
State Parks: You must purchase a day pass or have a State Parks Annual Pass for your vehicle.
National Parks: You must purchase a day pass or have an Annual Pass for your vehicle.
US Forest Service: Most picnic and campgrounds require a user fee.
Private Sites: For most sites, contact the owner at least 48 HOURS prior to visit. Fee depends upon services/facilities provided. Please remember, many private sites are working ranches as well as a private residence, and there may be times when the landowner cannot accommodate visits. While you are on a private site, remember to stay on roads, leave gates as you find them (whether open or closed), and refrain from taking anything off the ranch or leaving trash behind.



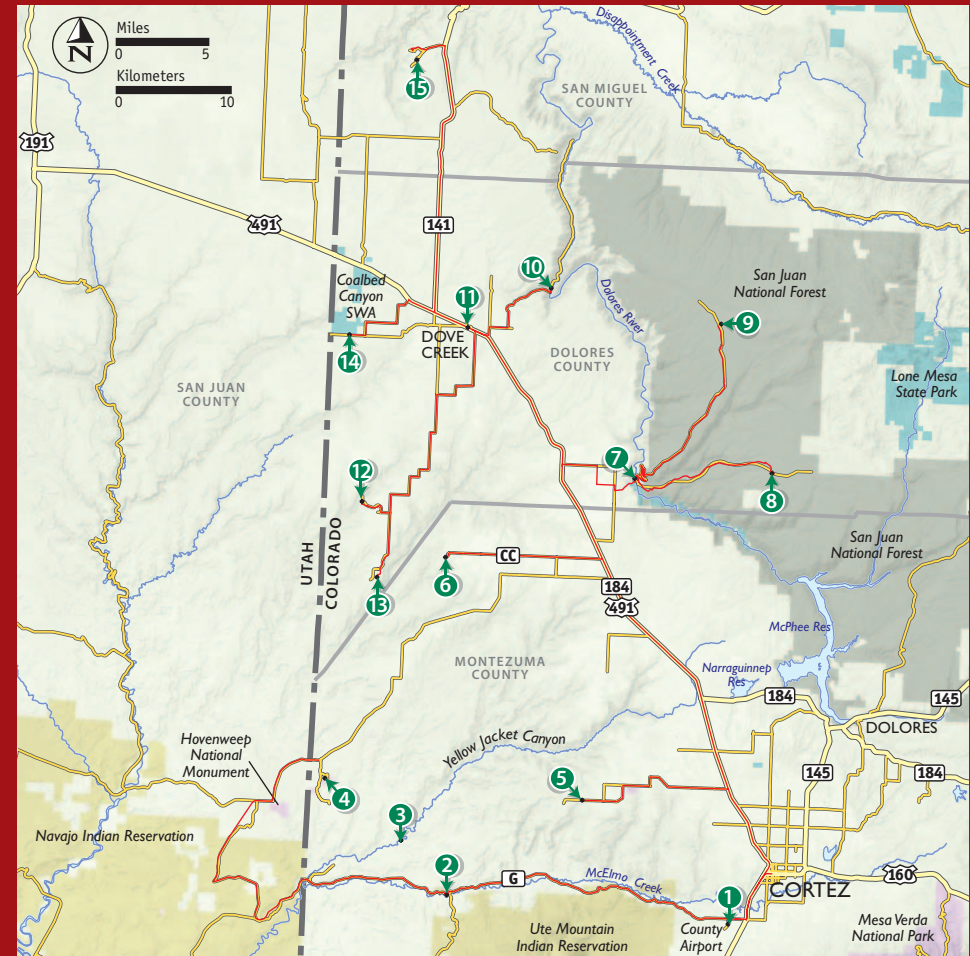
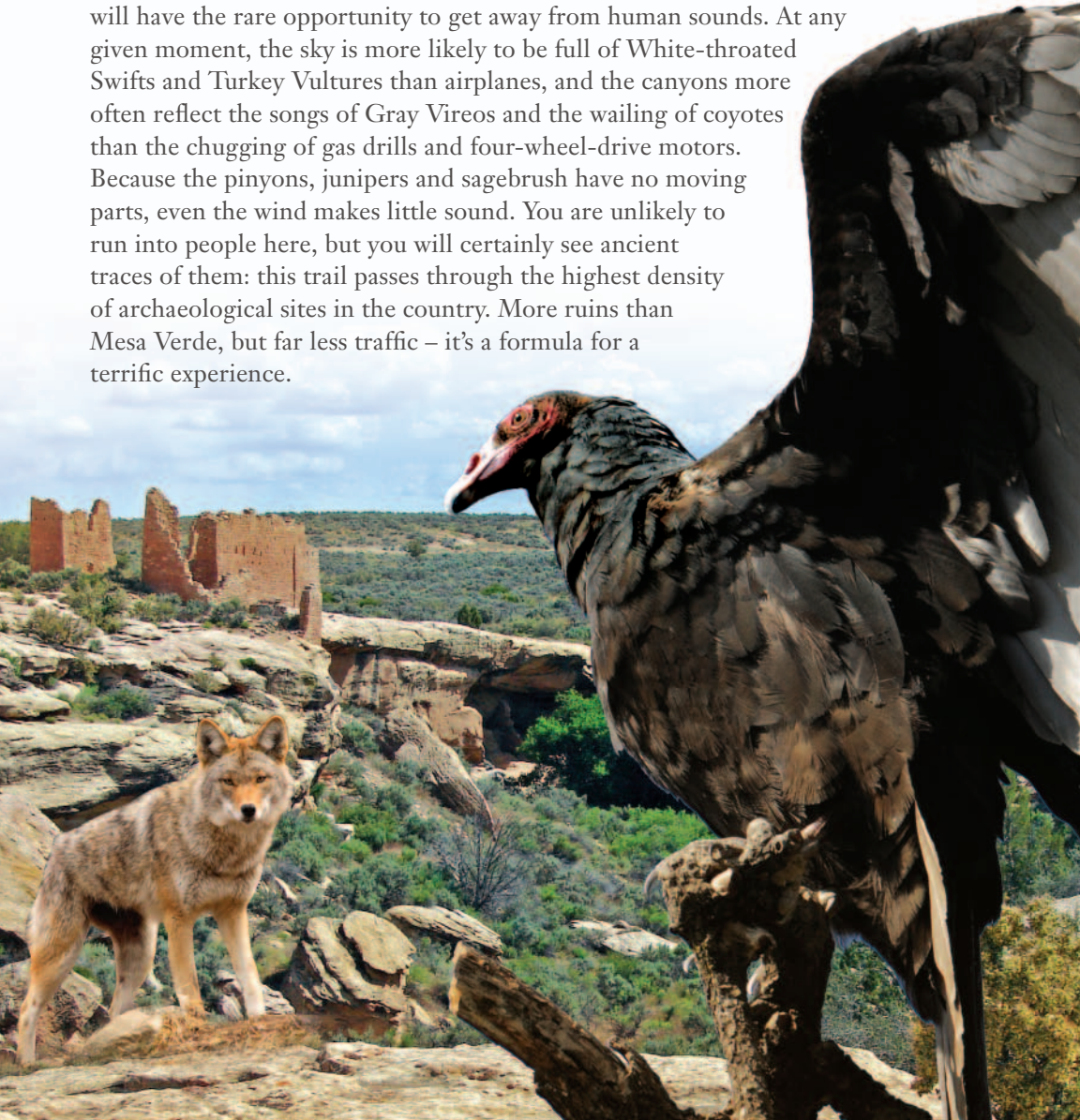


Canyon of the Ancients Trail



The Quiet Our Ancestors Heard

The Four Corners country may be the best place in the state to experience a true natural quiet. Here, inside national monuments called Hovenweep and Canyons of the Ancients, below red-rock cliffs and desert mesas, you will have the rare opportunity to get away from human sounds. At any given moment, the sky is more likely to be full of White-throated Swifts and Turkey Vultures than airplanes, and the canyons more often reflect the songs of Gray Vireos and the wailing of coyotes than the chugging of gas drills and four-wheel-drive motors. Because the pinyons, junipers and sagebrush have no moving parts, even the wind makes little sound. You are unlikely to run into people here, but you will certainly see ancient traces of them: this trail passes through the highest density of archaeological sites in the country. More ruins than Mesa Verde, but far less traffic – it's a formula for a terrific experience.



Sites on the Canyon of the Ancients Trail:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Cortez Airport and adjoining farmland | 9. Glade Lake |
| 2. McElmo Canyon | 10. Dolores Canyon |
| 3. Yellow Jacket Canyon | 11. Dove Creek |
| 4. Hovenweep National Monument | 12. Squaw Canyon |
| 5. Sand Canyon Pueblo | 13. Cross Canyon |
| 6. Lowry Pueblo | 14. Coalbed Canyon State Wildlife Area |
| 7. Lone Dome State Wildlife Area | 15. Bishop and Summit Canyons |
| 8. Ferris Reservoir | |



1. Cortez Airport and adjoining farmland

Description:

The farmlands around this small airport can be good for sparrows, and the large white-tailed prairie-dog colony has hosted Burrowing Owls in the past. Keep an eye out for shrikes and hawks, especially along the road to the Yucca House unit of Mesa Verde National Park.

Directions:

The airport and the road to Yucca House are off US 160/US 491 a few miles southwest of Cortez.

Access:

Open all year



2. McElmo Canyon

Description:

This area offers beautiful riparian habitat and access to Canyon of the Ancients and Hovenweep National Monuments and Yellow Jacket Canyon. Along the road itself, look for Gambel's Quail (rare in this part of Colorado), Black Phoebe (at the CR J bridge), Ash-throated Flycatcher and Cassin's Kingbird, and Black-throated Sparrow. Common Kingsnake, rare in Colorado, has been found along the road.

Directions:

From Cortez, head west on US 160 to the intersection with CR G. Turn right (west) on CR G. The CR J bridge is on the right, about 7 miles west of the highway.

Access:

Open all year

3. Yellow Jacket Canyon

Description:

To see Lucy's Warbler in Colorado, you will have to come here. Respect private property in the area. Most of the riparian grove is on private land; the part accessible to the public is the stretch north and east of the fence at the bottom of the hill on the road. Look for Summer Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Western Tanager, Yellow Warbler, Hairy Woodpecker, and migrants in season.

Directions:

From the intersection CR G and US-160/CO 491 just south of Cortez, head west on CR G for 20.2 miles to an unmarked and gated road on the right. Open the gate and head north for 2.4 miles. Bear left onto an inconspicuous and rough track. Drive down it as far as you can and walk the rest of the way (about 1.5 miles total). Follow the fenceline to the right, until you reach the top of the short cliff. Head right

(northeast) along the cliff until you find a safe place to descend. Stay east of the fence. You can bird upstream from here to about the first side canyon on the right and stay on public land.

Access:

Open all year



4. Hovenweep National Monument

Description:

The Hackberry Unit of this national monument resides in Colorado. The pinyon-juniper forests around the parking area are pristine and harbor Gray Flycatcher, Gray Vireo, Juniper Titmouse, and Black-throated Sparrow. The hike to the Hackberry Ruins takes you to a permanent water seep. Cooper's Hawks often nest in the small stand of hackberry around the seep. Please obey all signs.

Directions:

From US 491 (formerly 666) 18 miles northwest of Cortez, take CR CC west 5.5 miles to CR 10, which will take you to the Hackberry entrance road. The Hackberry road may not be signed, and it is easy to miss. If you hit Utah, you've gone too far!

Access:

Open all year



5. Sand Canyon Pueblo

Description:

The Sand Canyon Pueblo, the largest single Native American ruin in Colorado, has been left unrestored and underground. It is quite enlightening to see what the ruins look like when nature is allowed to take its course. The birding here is nothing to scoff at, either. Look for Gray and Plumbeous Vireos, Western Bluebird, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Black-throated Gray and Virginia's Warblers.

Directions:

From Cortez, drive north 5 miles on US 491, then turn left (west) onto CR P and follow for about 8 miles through some twists and turns (when you get to CR 18, turn left, then right onto P again). About 8 miles from US 491, turn left on CR 16. Then turn left onto CR N and watch for the BLM parking lot on the left.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk



6. Lowry Pueblo

Description:

Part of Canyon of the Ancients National Monument, this well preserved and partially restored Native American ruin is an excellent place to bring the family while birding in pinyon-juniper woodland. The forest surrounding the ruins is excellent for Gray and Plumbeous Vireos, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Gray Flycatcher, and Pinyon Jay. Lizards and snakes abound.

Directions:

From Cortez, go about 18 miles north on US 491 to CR CC in the tiny hamlet of Pleasant View. Turn left and follow the road about 9 miles to the Lowry Pueblo entrance road on the left (follow signs).

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk



7. Lone Dome State Wildlife Area

Description:

The riparian grove along the Dolores River is one of the best in southwestern Colorado. Look for Black Phoebe, Western Tanager, Lazuli Bunting, migrant passerines, Western Screech and Great Horned Owls, and wintering sparrows. The pinyon-juniper hillsides are good for Plumbeous Vireo, Gray Flycatcher, Pinyon Jay, and Ash-throated Flycatcher. Peregrine Falcon nest on some of the cliffs in the area.

Directions:

From Cortez drive north on US 491 about 17 miles to its intersection with CR 16 about 3 miles past Yellow Jacket and 1 mile short of Pleasant View. Turn right (north) on CR 16 and right again on CR S.00 (4.7 miles) to the SWA.

Access:

Open all year



8. Ferris Reservoir

Description:

This small, cattail-filled lake is excellent for many breeding and migrating duck species, as well as Yellow-headed Blackbird, rails, and migrant shorebirds. The nearby meadows play host to bluebirds galore, and the aspen and pine woodlands that surround them should be checked for birds like Cassin's Finch, Flammulated and Northern Saw-whet Owls, and Pygmy Nuthatch.

Directions:

From Cortez drive north on US 491 about 17 miles to its intersection with CR 16, about 3 miles past Yellow Jacket. Turn right (north) on CR 16 and right again on CR S.00. Continue east across the river to the junction with FR 504. Go south (straight) on FR 504. Turn left on FR 521 in about 100 yards. About 8 miles from this intersection, FR 521 will be joined by FR 520 coming in from the right at an acute angle in a meadow. Ferris Reservoir is just southeast of this intersection.

Access:

Open all year



9. Glade Lake

Description:

Remote, intermittent and not to be missed, this lake has the best waterbird potential in the county and perhaps the best shorebird potential as well. Breeders here include Eared Grebe, Pied-billed Grebe, Cinnamon and Green-winged Teals, Northern Shoveler, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck and lots of Yellow-headed Blackbirds. Other species that have been reported here include Virginia Rail, Bufflehead, Willet, Least Sandpiper and Red-necked Phalarope.

Directions:

From Cortez drive north on US 491 about 17 miles to the intersection with CR 16, about 3 miles past Yellow Jacket. Turn right (north) on CR 16 and right again on CR S.00. Continue east across the river to the junction with FR 504 and turn left (north). Glade Lake is on the east side of FR 504, about a mile past the turnout to FR 514.

Access:

Open all year



10. Dolores Canyon

Description:

Listen to the screams of nesting Peregrine Falcons from the shade of enormous old-growth ponderosa trees. A campground at the bottom of the canyon is a good place to look for species such as Plumbeous Vireo, Green-tailed and Spotted Towhees, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Lazuli Bunting. If you are lucky you could hear Northern Saw-whet or Flammulated Owl during the night.

Directions:

To get to the canyon floor, drive southeast out of Dove Creek along US 491 about 0.5 miles and turn left on CR J.00, then left onto CR 9.00 in a short dis-



tance. Turn right on CR H.00 (0.4 m) and left on CR 10.00 (1 m). Follow CR 10.00 to the canyon bottom.

Access:

Open all year



11. Dove Creek

Description:

The self-proclaimed “Pinto Bean Capital of the World” is an oasis in the midst of the sage and agriculture. The trees around town can be good for passerines in migration and finches in the winter. The many hummingbird feeders should be checked for Black-chinned Hummingbirds during the summer and Broad-tailed, Calliope, and Rufous Hummingbirds during the fall.

Directions:

Dove Creek is along the newly renamed US 491 between Cortez, Colorado and Monticello, Utah. From Cortez head northwest on US 491 for about 35 miles.

Access:

Open all year



12. Squaw Canyon

Description:

This is THE place in Dolores County for pinyon-juniper specialists. This area has a high density of breeding Gray Vireos in the state. Look along the road for Gray Flycatcher, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Pinyon Jay, Juniper Titmouse, Black-throated Sparrow, and maybe even Scott’s Oriole. The road requires high clearance, but can be walked if you desire.

Directions:

From Dove Creek, zig zag southwest and stay on the pavement some 14 miles on the following roads: drive west on CR J.00, turn south on CR 6.00, west on CR P.00, south on CR 6.00 again, west on CR S.00, south on CR 5.00, west on CR S.00, south on CR 5.00, west on CR T.00, south on CR 4.00, west on CR U.00 and finally right (north) on CR T.50, which snakes around past some farmsteads. At 0.7 miles, bear left onto an inconspicuous side road that drops down into the canyon; it may be necessary to open a barbed-wire gate at the entrance to public lands.

Access:

Open all year



13. Cross Canyon

Description:

The roads above this large pinyon-juniper filled canyon pass through extensive sage flats and scattered pinyon-juniper woodlands, making this the most accessible spot in the area to look for Sage and Black-throated Sparrows, Gray Vireo, Pinyon Jay, and other specialties of these habitats. Also keep an eye out for a variety of lizards and snakes, including the gaudy collared lizard.

Directions:

From Dove Creek, zig zag south west some 16 miles on the following roads: drive west on CR J.00, turn south on CR 6.00, west on CR P.00, south on CR 6.00 again, west on CR S.00, south on CR 5.00, west on CR S.00, south on CR 5.00, west on CR T.00, then south on Rd 4.00 to its end in PJ habitat. The lower slopes of Cross Canyon are part of the National Monument, but pay careful attention to property boundaries before leaving roads in this area.

Access:

Open all year



14. Coalbed Canyon State Wildlife Area

Description:

This State Wildlife Area on the Utah border is mostly made up of a pinyon-juniper filled canyon surrounded by sage flats. A hike into the small canyon should produce Gray Vireo, Gray Flycatcher, Juniper Titmouse, and Black-throated Gray Warbler, while the sage-filled areas contain Sage Thrasher, Sage and Vesper Sparrows, and various species of hawks.

Directions:

From Dove Creek, head west on US 491 for 2 miles and turn left on CR 6.00. After half a mile, turn right on CR J.00. Follow J.00 for just under 6 miles to the state wildlife area parking lots on the right.

Access:

Open all year



15. Bishop and Summit Canyons

Description:

A good place to come for the scenery as well as the birding. Western Bluebird, Plumbeous Vireo, Gray and Dusky Flycatchers, and Western Scrub-Jay are common. Look for typical canyon birds such as White-throated Swift, Canyon and Rock Wrens, and maybe even Peregrine Falcon. You can park when the road becomes too rough and hike down into

Summit Canyon.

Directions:

From Dove Creek, head west on US 491 for 2 miles and turn right (north) on CO 141. Follow this north about 14 miles and turn left (west) on CR 7.N. Follow this as far down into Bishop Canyon as your car will permit, then park and walk the rest of the way.

Access:

Summer



Did You KNOW?

A Change Of Taste American Goldfinches



American Goldfinches spend their entire winter eating sunflower and Nyger seeds at feeders, and dried weed seeds in the wild. In spring, when the first dandelions go to seed, and as other natural food sources become available, goldfinches begin spending most of their time eating far from feeders. This is very disappointing for feeder watchers, as this happens just as they are coming into their most gorgeous plumage.

The American Goldfinch is one of the latest nesters in North America. Goldfinches normally wait to begin nesting until late June or early July, when thistles, milkweed, and other plants with fibrous seeds have gone to seed. They use this downy material in nest construction, and the seeds themselves provide food for the chicks.

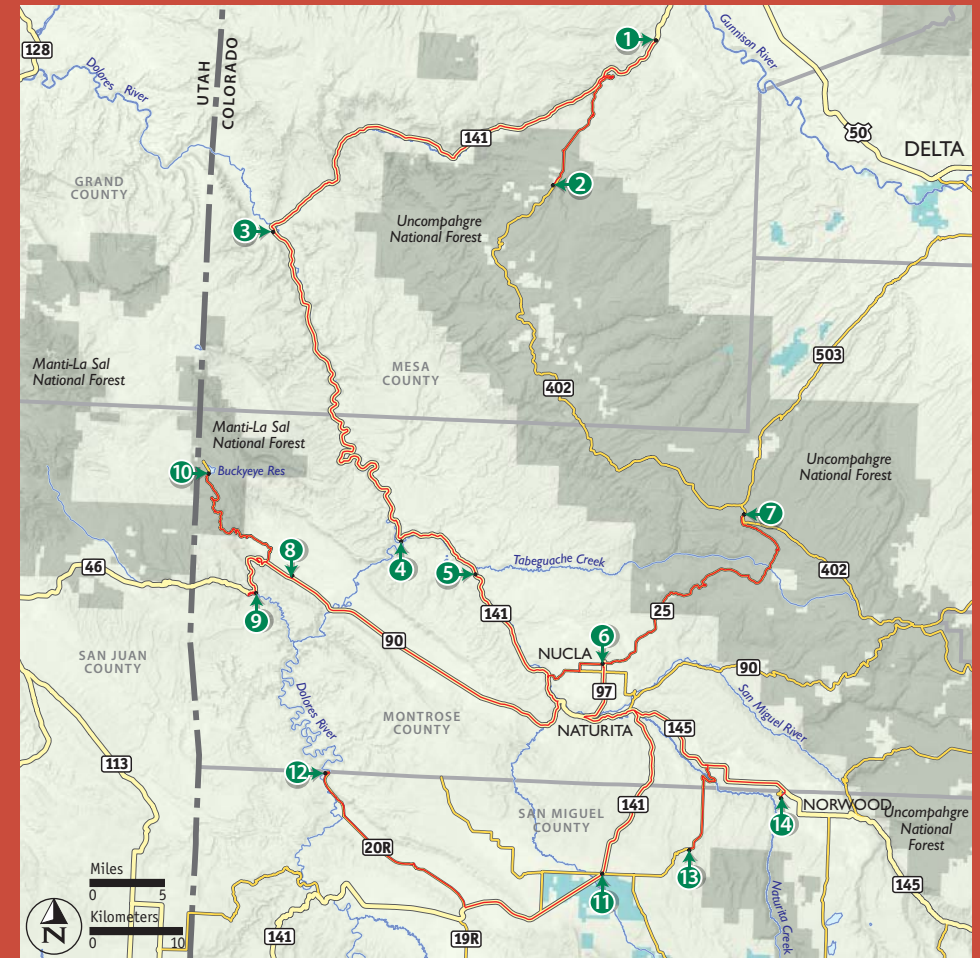
From The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's "The Bird Watching Answer Book" by Laura Erickson. Used with permission of Storey Publishing, LLC.

Uncompahgre Trail



Difficult To Translate, Easy to Understand

Everyone agrees that “Uncompahgre” is a Ute word, but few can agree on what it means. Some say it means “hot springs”; others say it means “red lake” or “the place where water makes the rocks red.” By the same token, people are unlikely to agree about what adjectives best describe the Uncompahgre Plateau, but everyone is likely to agree that it is an amazingly beautiful place. There are hot springs here and cold ones; there are rocks of many colors. There are rivers slicing through sheer canyons, with Black Phoebes hawking insects over the water. There are vast expanses of arid woodland where you might find an Ash-throated Flycatcher or a Virginia’s Warbler building a nest. In a couple of canyons lie hidden oases where lush vegetation harbors rare butterflies such as the Nokomis Fritillary. And on top of the soaring plateau are cool mountain forests, where sapsuckers excavate holes in aspens that Flammulated Owls might inhabit next season. It may be difficult to translate, but the special spirit of this place is easy for anyone to understand.



Sites on the Uncompahgre Trail:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Unaweep Canyon | 8. Paradox Valley |
| 2. Divide Road on the Uncompahgre Plateau | 9. La Sal Creek |
| 3. John Brown Canyon | 10. Buckeye Reservoir |
| 4. San Miguel River | 11. Dry Creek Basin State Wildlife Area |
| 5. San Miguel River Tabeguache Preserve | 12. Big Gypsum Valley |
| 6. Nucla | 13. Burn Canyon Burn |
| 7. Uncompahgre Plateau | 14. San Miguel CR W35 |



1. Unaweep Canyon

Description:

In a state known for scenic drives, this is one of the least known. Around Gateway and closer to Nucla some mind-blowing riparian habitat can be found, with Lazuli and Indigo (rare) Buntings, Black Phoebe, Gray Catbird, and Yellow-breasted Chat. The entire Byway is 133 miles long. Give yourself plenty of time to stop and enjoy the scenery.

Directions:

Go 5 miles south of Grand Junction on US Highway 50, then turn southwest on CO 141. Coming from the south, start at CO 145 in Placerville.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk



2. Divide Road on the Uncompahgre Plateau

Description:

The Uncompahgre Plateau has some of the best ponderosa pine forest in the state and excellent mixed coniferous forest, aspen woodland, montane shrubland and mountain meadows. This diversity of habitat brings a diversity of birds. Keep an eye out for mammals too, including Abert's squirrel, American badger, black bear, and, maybe a mountain lion or a bobcat.

Directions:

From US 50 southeast of Grand Junction, take Colorado 141 west for 15 miles. Turn left onto Divide Road (FR 402), switchback up the plateau, and continue to Montrose County.

Access:

Road closed during the winter months

3. John Brown Canyon

Description:

This scenic side canyon off of the Unaweep Canyon provides a good selection of lower-elevation habitats, from pinyon-juniper covered hillsides, stream-side riparian and montane shrubland to ponderosa forest. Check the lower portions for Black-throated Gray and Virginia's Warblers, Lazuli Bunting, Canyon and Rock Wrens, and Gray Flycatcher. Higher up, keep an eye out for Dusky Flycatcher, MacGillivray's Warbler, and Western Bluebird.

Directions:

From Gateway, head south on CO 141 for 1/2 mile to John Brown Canyon Road (CR 4.40 Road), on the right (west).

Access:

Open all year



4. San Miguel River

Description:

The San Miguel River from Naturita to its confluence with the Dolores River has some of the best lowland riparian habitat in southwest Colorado. Many Black Phoebes nest along the river; look especially around the old bridge at Uravan. The beautiful riparian area has species such as Yellow-breasted Chat, Indigo and Lazuli Buntings, Black-headed Grosbeak, Gray Catbird, and Blue Grosbeak.

Directions:

CO 141 runs along the stretch of the San Miguel River from Naturita to Uravan. Much of the land is public and access is easy.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk

5. San Miguel River Tabeguache Preserve

Description:

This Nature Conservancy preserve contains a 7-mile stretch of the San Miguel River. It contains some excellent lowland riparian forest of cottonwood and willow. Look for Bald Eagles and Peregrine Falcons; Black Phoebes are a good bet, too. The pinyon-juniper hillsides are good places to look for Gray Vireo, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Ash-throated Flycatcher, and Black-chinned Hummingbird.

Directions:

From Naturita, head northwest on CO 141 to mile marker 74. The visitors' area is on the right (north) side of the road. The preserve extends along the river from here to mile marker 67.

Access:

Open all year, difficult to access in winter



6. Nucla

Description:

The trees around this charming little town normally have Bullock's Oriole, Eurasian Collared-Dove, passerine migrants during migrations, and finches during the colder months. Nucla Town Reservoir is good for ducks, shorebirds when low, and the occasional gull or tern. The trees around the lake can be good for passerines. The sewage ponds west of town are good for ducks.

Directions:

Nucla is on CO 97, north of Naturita. For the sewage ponds, drive west from Nucla on CR CC. Turn north on CR 27.00 for 1/2 mile. Turn east a short distance to the ponds. For the reservoir, take CR CC east out of Nucla. This is 10th Avenue. Drive for 2 miles to the end of CR CC. Turn right (south) for 1/2 mile. The reservoir is on the left.

Access:

Open all year



7. Uncompahgre Plateau

Description:

The southern portions of this large plateau are more varied than the northern part. A full day between Unaweep Canyon and Nucla could produce quite an impressive list of species! The highest parts contain excellent spruce-fir woodland. Purple Martin can be seen in areas with aspen groves near large meadows. Grace's Warbler can be found in areas with extensive ponderosa.

Directions:

From Nucla take CR 25 (also known as Mesa Road or the Nucla-Delta road) northeast out of town and stay on this road to Columbine Pass. Twenty Five Mesa Road, as it is called locally, will become FR 503 at the Uncompahgre National Forest boundary. This road can also be accessed from the east.

Access:

Upper portions could be closed during the winter



8. Paradox Valley

Description:

Paradox valley was formed by the collapse of ancient salt dome caves beneath the Dolores River Canyon, resulting in a remote valley with excellent scenery. On the sage floor it is easy to find Sage Thrasher and Sage Sparrow. Also look for Ring-necked Pheasant. The pinyon-juniper hillsides should have Gray Vireo, Black-throated Sparrow, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Gray Flycatcher, and Pinyon Jay.

Directions:

Paradox valley is located along CO 90 west of Naturita. Drive along CO 90 until the highways run through good sagebrush. Look for roads or tracks that leave the highway and drive or hike in the sagebrush.

Access:

Open all year



9. La Sal Creek

Description:

Tall, sheer rock walls; thick, lush riparian woodland; a rushing mountain stream -- what more could you ask for? La Sal Creek is one of the great undiscovered gems of western Colorado. The riparian habitat hosts species such as Yellow-breasted Chat, Gray Catbird, and Indigo Bunting. The cliffs provide ideal habitat for Canyon and Rock Wrens and White-throated Swift. A number of local butterfly species inhabit the area, including Desert Marble and Southwestern Orangetip. Reptiles are especially diverse in this part of Colorado.

Directions:

From Paradox, head west on CO 90 for 5.3 miles to CR X4, on the left (south). Follow this road down into the canyon and La Sal Creek.

Access:

Open all year



10. Buckeye Reservoir

Description:

This small mountain reservoir sits in a beautiful natural setting of ponderosa pines that can attract many birds, including Red Crossbill, Pygmy Nuthatch, Grace's Warbler, and Western Bluebird. The reservoir itself can have a variety of waterbirds. The small riparian area on the road to the reservoir should be checked for migrants. Black bears also prowl the area.

Directions:

From Paradox, take CR U5 west until it becomes FR 371 at the border of the Manti-La Sal National Forest. Continue for 10 miles until Buckeye is reached.

Access:

Roads not maintained in winter



11. Dry Creek Basin State Wildlife Area

Description:

This large State Wildlife Area is mostly made up of extensive sage flats. Look for species like Sage Sparrows and Sage Thrashers in the sage flats, and Black-throated Sparrow, Black-throated Gray Warbler, and Ash-throated Flycatchers in the pinyon-juniper

forest. The number of deer in this area can be mind-boggling, and pronghorn are here, too.

Directions:

From the intersection of CO 145 and CO 141 east of Naturita, turn south on CR 141 and go 12 miles to Basin. From here, several side roads give access into the wildlife area.

Access:

Open all year



12. Big Gypsum Valley

Description:

The main draw here is an amazing red-rock canyon mouth with pinyon-juniper forest, cliff-faces, and riparian forests. Black-throated Sparrow, Gray Vireo, and Juniper Titmouse are all possible, and watch for the spectacular Scott's Oriole. The grasslands on the way in are excellent for Loggerhead Shrike and American Kestrel. Black Phoebe is a good possibility at the bridge over the Dolores River.

Directions:

East of Naturita, head south on CO 141 for 27 miles to CR 20R and turn right (northwest). Go west for 14 miles to the best birding areas.

Access:

Open all year



3. Burn Canyon Burn

Description:

The Burn Canyon fire of 2002 has left a fascinating mosaic in its wake. This varied forest is all part of a long-term experimental effort by the Public Lands Partnership to evaluate the effects of salvage logging on regeneration. The open meadows contain Lark and Vesper Sparrows, the standing burns attract woodpeckers and bluebirds; and the living forest can harbor Grace's Warblers.

Directions:

From the junction of CO 145 and CO 141 just east of Naturita, head south 12.5 miles on CO 141 to Basin and turn left onto CR U29. Follow CR U29 approximately 6 miles east to FR 607 on the right, which is the best road through the burn.

Access:

Roads not maintained in winter



14. San Miguel CR W35

Description:

This scenic canyon is very close to the town of Norwood, but feels very remote. The road runs through excellent pinyon-juniper habitat with Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and Black-throated Gray Warbler. The valley floor is private property so please stay on the road. The permanent stream supports an interesting oak/riparian community with Black-headed Grosbeak, among other birds.

Directions:

From the west end of Grand Avenue in Norwood, head north on CO 145 for a mile and turn left (west) on CR AA42, which becomes CR W35.

Access:

Open all year, but beware of poor road conditions in winter



Colorado's Scenic Byways Trail of the Ancients

Trail of the Ancients is the only National Scenic Byway totally dedicated to archaeology, and highlights both remote archaeological sites and significant cultural and historic sites in Southwest Colorado.

The visitor to this Byway returns home with memories of sandstone landscapes carved by wind and water into shapes of every kind. Geologic drama, tough and complex plant and animal life, the relationship between water and rock, all provoke the mind and imagination to learn about the origins of this ancient place. Most compelling is the long occupation by native human communities, present over a time spectrum rarely intact elsewhere. Extending from Paleolithic society to Ancestral Puebloans (Anasazi) to nomadic Navajo, Apache and Ute tribes to the impact of European settlers, these native communities endure.

The Ancestral Puebloans guarded their secrets closely. We know they dominated the Colorado Plateau for hundreds of years, yet basic questions about them - who they were, how they lived, what they believed - remain less than fully resolved. This 116-mile route across the broken, arid terrain of their former civilization is heavily laden with clues: cliff dwellings, rock art, pottery sherds. Hovenweep National Monument and Mesa Verde National Park both contain dense clusters of Ancestral Puebloan sites, and the Anasazi Heritage Center in Dolores offers background and interpretive information.

Trail of the Ancients was designated by the U.S. Secretary of Transportation as a National Scenic Byway in 2005. It is one of ten America's Byways® designated in Colorado.

Length: 116 miles. Driving time: 3 hours

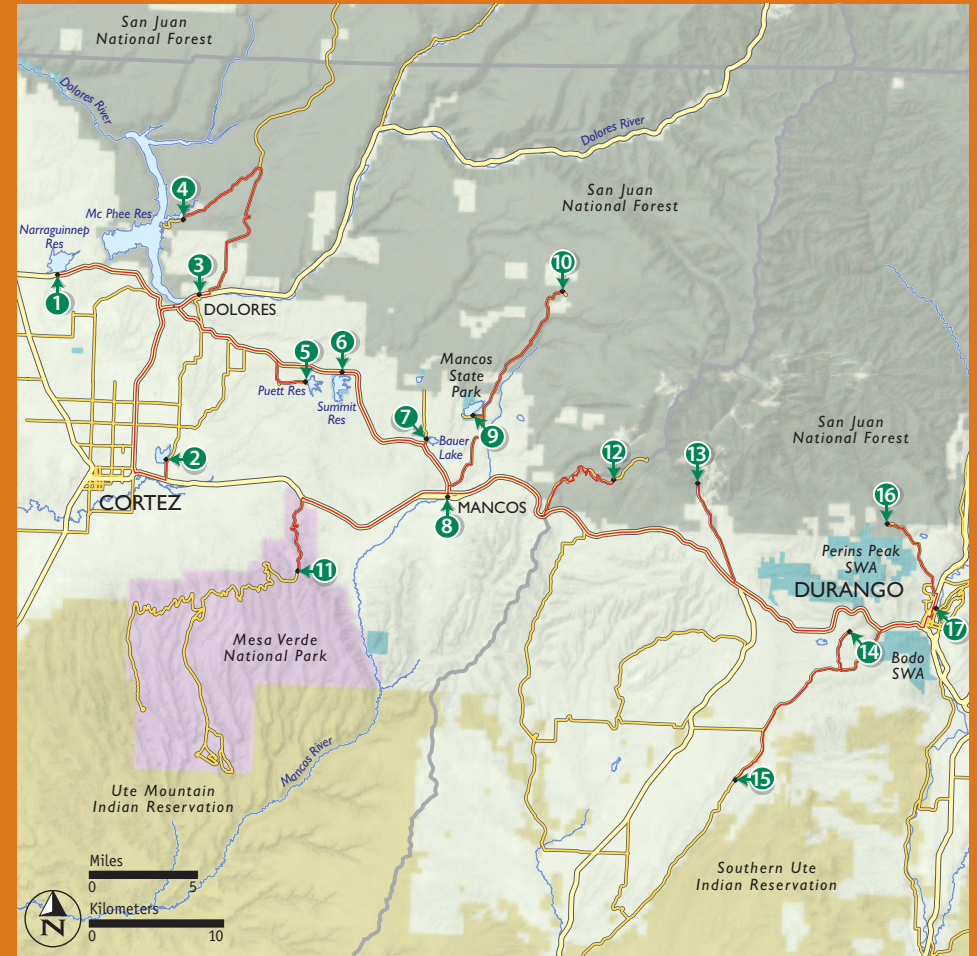


La Plata Trail



A Layer Cake of Diversity

This is a land whose great diversity is sorted into layers from the bottom of the mountain to the top. Down low, in the deserts around the floor of Mesa Verde, the land grows mostly shrubby and spiky plants, like prickly pear and saltbush, which are home to equally spiny creatures, like the short-horned lizard. A little higher up, you'll find the world-renowned cliff dwellings of the Ancestral Pueblo People, whose ingenuity in making a home out of the ruggedest of landscapes has never been matched by modern humans, but is put to shame by the unique adaptations of the local wildlife, like the pinecone-hunting Pinyon Jay. Farther up the mountain, you'll find pines and oaks and the beautiful Abert's Squirrel and Grace's Warbler. An intrepid few may venture still higher, into the spruce-fir forest of the high La Plata mountains and perhaps even out of the trees entirely, onto the alpine tundra with the pipits, pika and ptarmigan. For variety in a short distance, this trail is hard to beat.



Sites on the La Plata Trail:

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Naraguinnep Reservoir State Wildlife Area | 10. Jersey Jim Flats |
| 2. Totten Reservoir State Wildlife Area | 11. Mesa Verde National Park |
| 3. Dolores | 12. Madden Peak Road |
| 4. McPhee Reservoir | 13. La Plata Canyon |
| 5. Puett Reservoir State Wildlife Area | 14. Rafter J Acorn Woodpecker Colony |
| 6. Summit Reservoir State Wildlife Area | 15. La Plata County Road 136 |
| 7. Bauer Lake | 16. Junction Creek Campground |
| 8. Mancos area | 17. Animas River |
| 9. Mancos State Park | |



1. Narraguinnep Reservoir State Wildlife Area

Description:

This medium-sized reservoir can be very productive for waterbirds in migration, including loons, grebes, and ducks. When the water levels are low enough, shorebirds are possible. Bald Eagles sometimes soar overhead.

Directions:

From Cortez, head west on US 160 and then north on US 491 (formerly US 666) about 9 miles. Turn right (east) onto CO 184. Narraguinnep Reservoir is on the left (north) side of the road in about 1.5 miles.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk



2. Totten Reservoir State Wildlife Area

Description:

Because large bodies of water are rare in the Four Corners region, concentrations of water birds here can be very good; but a scope is required to see them well. Finding the vagrant gull or shorebird could require a long walk to the northeastern corner through pinyon-juniper habitat. This seems to be an especially good place to look for grebe species.

Directions:

From Cortez, head east on US 160 past the junction with CO 145 to CR 29 and turn left (north). Totten is north of US 160 about a mile.

Access:

Open all year



3. Dolores

Description:

This nice little town is a good home base for visitors and provides all the amenities. The best birding in town is at Riverside Park right off the main drag, where you can access a footpath through some very nice riparian habitat. You might find a dipper here, particularly in winter.

Directions:

Dolores is 17 miles north of Cortez on CO 145.

Access:

Open all year



4. McPhee Reservoir

Description:

The birding potential of this massive lake varies as widely as its water level. During the spring and fall the extensive mudflats can be excellent for shorebirds. During the late fall and early spring, ducks can be abundant and rarities like Barrow's Goldeneye, Common Loon, and Red-breasted Merganser are possible. Gulls and terns could be found at any water level.

Directions:

From the center of Dolores take CR 31 (FR 526) due north to bird the ponderosa areas on this plateau. Take a left onto FR 528 about 6 miles north of Dolores to get to the McPhee Reservoir campground.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk



5. Puett Reservoir State Wildlife Area

Description:

This is a medium-sized reservoir ringed by forest, both pinyon-juniper and cottonwood. Numbers of waterfowl here can be variable, but sometimes in the spring and fall you could hit the jackpot with large numbers and variety of ducks. Look in the surrounding pinyon-juniper forest for residents typical of that habitat, and in the cottonwoods for migrants in season.

Directions:

From the town of Mancos, head north on CO 184 approximately 11 miles to CR 33. Head south on CR 33 for 1 mile, then turn left (east) onto the State Wildlife Area access road, which sometimes requires 4WD.

Access:

Open all year



6. Summit Reservoir State Wildlife Area

Description:

This small reservoir usually doesn't have much in the way of waterbirds on it, but the surrounding ponderosa woodland can be good for Grace's Warbler, Red Crossbill, and Williamson's Sapsucker, among others. During rainy weather, thousands of swallows can be seen skimming low over the water.

Directions:

From the town of Mancos, head north on CO 184 approximately 8 miles to the lake, which is on the left (south). The surrounding land is private.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk



7. Bauer Lake

Description:

This private lake can be viewed from both the east and the west sides from county roads. Be careful of local traffic. The lake is often well worth a visit because in the spring and fall it can be full of waterbirds including ducks, grebes, and coots. Occasionally, a Bald Eagle might be seen flying over the water.

Directions:

From US 160 at Mancos, head north on CO 184 about 2 miles and turn right onto CR 41 to scan the east side, or proceed another mile and turn right onto CR 40 for the west side of the lake.

Access:

Open all year

8. Mancos area

Description:

This lovely town is a good base for exploring the surrounding area. The Mancos Riverwalk provides access to the riparian corridor along the Mancos River, as does the nearby Cottonwood Park just west of Spruce Street north of the river. Look for migrants in season, and Black-headed Grosbeak, Bullock's Oriole, Downy Woodpecker, and other riparian birds during the summer.

Directions:

Mancos is along US 160 about 15 miles east of Cortez. To get to the riverwalk, turn south from US 160 onto Beech Street and follow it to the parking lot behind the high school. Cottonwood Park is on Spruce Street.

Access:

Open all year



9. Mancos State Park

Description:

Mancos State Park is a great place to visit. While the lake itself isn't the best birding location, the surrounding woodland abounds with Grace's Warbler, Flammulated and Northern Saw-whet Owls, Red Crossbill, Band-tailed Pigeon, and other species typical of mid-elevation montane habitats. During the late summer and early fall keep an eye out for

hummingbirds. Four species are possible.

Directions:

From the town of Mancos, drive north 0.25 miles on CO 184, then turn right (east) on CR 42. In about 4 miles, turn left (west) on CR N and follow it about 0.5 miles to the park entrance.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk



10. Jersey Jim Flats

Description:

Jersey Jim Flats has some of the largest aspens and most extensive aspen groves in Colorado. The specialty of the area is Purple Martin, which nests in cavities in the largest aspens, usually in areas near meadows. Also check for Red-naped and Williamson's Sapsuckers, Dusky Grouse, Dusky Flycatcher, and other species typical of aspen groves.

Directions:

From Mancos, head west on CO 184 for a half mile to CR 42 and take a right. Go 14 miles to Jersey Jim Flats.

Access:

Summer



11. Mesa Verde National Park

Description:

Mesa Verde was created in 1905 to protect the amazing archaeological resources. The birding can also be stunning. The cliff faces are spectacular places to watch White-throated Swifts and Turkey Vultures playing in the thermals. Because the archaeological sites are so sensitive, much of the park is off limits. Please follow the restrictions as you explore.

Directions:

The road into the national park heads south from US 160 about 7 miles east of Cortez and 7 miles west of Mancos.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk



12. Madden Peak Road

Description:

This dirt road provides access to excellent ponderosa pine woodland and aspen groves. Driving



this road early in the morning during April is a fantastic way to find Dusky Grouse, which often display right along the road. A little later in the year, Purple Martins can sometimes be found in the larger aspen groves that border meadows.

Directions:

From Durango go west on US 160, and just west of the La Plata/Montezuma county line sign, turn right (north) on Madden Peak Road (FR 316).

Access:

Summer



13. La Plata Canyon

Description:

The La Plata Canyon road passes through the tiny settlement of Mayday, where rosy-finches come to feeders in winter and oak shrubland birds such as Western Scrub-Jays can be seen year-round. In summer you can drive much farther up the road, into dense coniferous forests with some riparian willows and mountain meadows. Here most of the high-elevation birds can be found.

Directions:

From downtown Durango travel west on US 160 about 10 miles and turn right (north) on CR 124 just past Hesperus. After about 6 miles the paved road ends, but the gravel road continues to above treeline.

Access:

Upper portion of the road open in summer only



14. Rafter J Acorn Woodpecker Colony

Description:

The only spot to see Acorn Woodpecker in the state is also an excellent spot to look for other ponderosa pine woodland specialties -- Western Bluebird, Lewis's Woodpecker, Grace's Warbler, and Pygmy Nuthatch are all reasonably easy to see. Black-throated Gray Warbler can sometimes be found in the areas with pinyon pine and juniper trees.

Directions:

From Durango go west on US 160 about 3 miles and turn left (south) on Wildcat Canyon Road (CR 141). Go west for about 3 miles and look for the Rafter J Subdivision sign on the right. Turn right on Meadow Road and go about 1 1/2 miles to the top of the road. Continue straight as the road turns to dirt for .7 miles. Look on the right for a very large, dead Ponderosa behind a mobile home.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk

15. La Plata County Road 136

Description:

This road provides access to the best pinyon-juniper woodland in the area. In summer, Cassin's Kingbirds can often be found along the northern portions of the road. Look and listen for Gray Vireo, Juniper Titmouse, Black-throated Gray Warbler, and Gray Flycatcher in areas where the forest approaches the road, and Sage and Black-throated Sparrows in areas with more sage.

Directions:

From Durango go west on US 160 about 3 miles and turn left (south) on Wildcat Canyon Road (CR 141). After about 8 miles CR 136 turns off to the left (southwest). The Cassin's Kingbirds are usually several miles down this road.

Access:

Open all year

16. Junction Creek Campground

Description:

This easy-to find campground is one of the most accessible places in the state for Grace's Warbler, Flammulated and Northern Saw-whet Owls, and Williamson's Sapsucker. The ponderosa pine/aspens mix can be excellent for these and a variety of other birds, and if you continue up into the spruce-fir you could come across Dusky Grouse, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and the other species typical of the habitat.

Directions:

From Durango go north on US 550 and turn left (west) at 25th Street. This becomes CR 204 and then FR 171. About a mile past the forest boundary is the Junction Creek Campground on the left. The road continues past the campground and reaches Animas Overlook in about 8 miles.

Access:

Open all year



17. Animas River

Description:

Undeniably the birding gem of Durango, the riparian area along the Animas River is among the best in southwestern Colorado. The area is best during migration, when a number of passerine migrants and the occasional rarity could be found. During the winter keep an eye out for finches and ducks along the river.

Directions:

From the intersection of US 160 and US 550, drive east on US 160 and turn right into Santa Rita park (at the light). Park here and walk downstream, under the bridge, along the trail. For the north section, drive north on US 550 and turn right into the Division of Wildlife fish hatchery just after crossing the Animas River. Park at the hatchery and walk north on the path.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk



Did You KNOW?

Suspicious Thieves Western Scrub-Jay



Some Western Scrub-Jays search out their food items on their own, while others raid the food caches stored by other scrub-jays and also by Acorn Woodpeckers and Clark's Nutcrackers. Researchers have found that when "thieving" scrub-jays hide their food items, they spend a lot of time looking around to check if other jays are watching them; nonthieving scrub-jays seem unsuspecting and don't look around before hiding their own food. The more a scrub-jay engages in stealing food from others, the more suspicious it becomes.

Some animals seem to love it when scrub-jays raid them for food – if that food happens to be parasites. Western Scrub-Jays frequently stand on the backs of mule deer, picking off and eating ticks. The deer seem to appreciate the help, often standing still and holding up their ears to give the jays access.

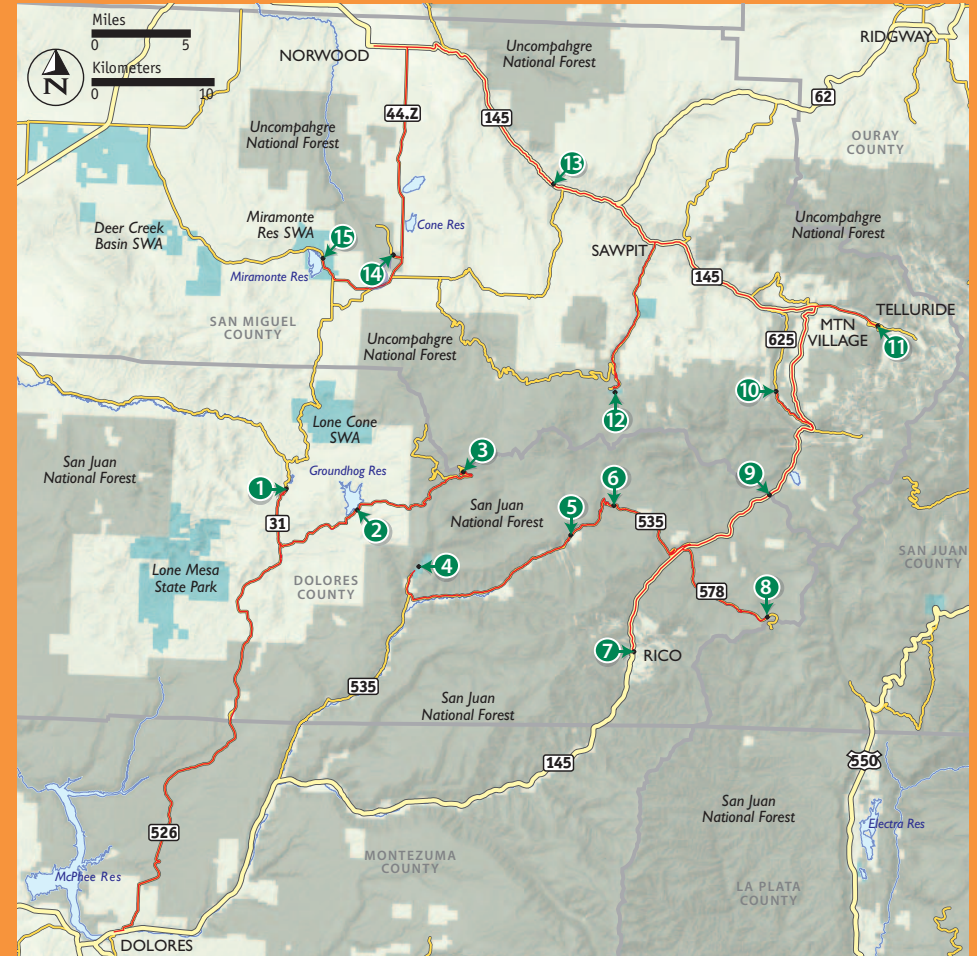
From The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's "The Bird Watching Answer Book" by Laura Erickson. Used with permission of Storey Publishing, LLC.

Lizard Head Trail



Wilderness With A Dash Of Culture

Above the road between Rico and Telluride, in the remote southwest San Juans, there rises a spectacular spire of rock that reminded its namers of a reptile's head. Few people drive over the pass from which you can see it, and fewer still stop to partake of the view. If you do so on a summer's day, you may find your view obstructed by Purple Martins and Black Swifts chasing down flying insects. You may watch a Williamson's Sapsucker drilling into a trunk in an aspen grove. You may encounter a bear shuffling around the edge of the mountain meadow. And then, if you like, you may drive down the road to the world-famous resort town of Telluride, to relax at a summer jazz concert in the cool of the evening. This loop is full of wilderness, but it has a dash of culture – a combination that is highly recommended.



Sites on the Lizard Head Trail:

1. Belmear Lake
2. Groundhog Reservoir State Wildlife Area
3. Black Mesa Area
4. Fish Creek State Wildlife Area
5. Dunton Road (FR 535)
6. Navajo Lake Trail
7. Rico
8. Bolam Pass Road
9. Lizard Head Pass
10. San Miguel River South Fork Preserve
11. Telluride
12. Woods Lake State Wildlife Area
13. San Miguel River Canyon Preserve
14. Forest Road 642
15. Miramonte Reservoir (Dan Noble) State Wildlife Area



1. Belmead Lake

Description:

Just north of Groundhog Reservoir, this small lake can hold a few diving ducks in season and is worth checking out when you are in the area. Viewing is distant and best achieved with a spotting scope from the side of the county road.

Directions:

From Dolores, drive north on CR 31 (FR 526). The lake is on your right, about 29 miles along CR 31, about 4 miles after the junction of CR 31 and CR H.00.

Access:

Spring through fall, roads not maintained in winter



2. Groundhog Reservoir State Wildlife Area

Description:

A remote destination that is mostly accessible from May through September. A spotting scope will usually reveal good numbers of ducks and Western and Eared Grebes; sometimes shorebirds, Bald Eagles or Ospreys, and even Surf Scoters have been seen. Purple Martins nest in the aspen groves near the water and sometimes forage over the parking lot.

Directions:

From Dolores, drive north on CR 31 (FR 526). After roughly 25 miles turn right onto CR H.00 (FR 533). Groundhog Reservoir SWA is on the left at about 4 miles.

Access:

Spring through fall



3. Black Mesa Area

Description:

The remote roads through this area are excellent places to look for Dusky Grouse and other high-elevation birds, including Pine Grosbeak, Gray Jay, and Golden-crowned Kinglet. Northern Goshawk breeds in the area. Keep an eye out for elk and snowshoe hares (white in winter, brown-and-white in summer). The roads are inaccessible from approximately late October to early May.

Directions:

From Dolores, take the Dolores/Norwood road (CR 31.00) until you reach CR H.00 (FR533), signed for Groundhog Reservoir. Turn east onto CR H.00 (FR 533). The road reaches high country in a few miles and ends at FR 611. Turn right on FR 611 and follow it to its intersection with FR 535 just north and east

of Dunton.

Access:

Spring through fall, roads not maintained in winter



4. Fish Creek State Wildlife Area

Description:

Set just off the beautiful Dolores River Valley, this small and remote State Wildlife Area contains perhaps the best publicly accessible mid-elevation riparian patch in the county. Look for species such as Cedar Waxwing, Lazuli Bunting, Black-headed Grosbeak, and other birds that can be hard to find in the county. The ponderosa and scrub oak on the hillsides contain Grace's Warbler.

Directions:

From Rico, head north on CO 145 until you reach Dunton Road (FR 535) for 12.5 miles to the junction with FR 726, then turn north. Follow this road for about 1.5 miles to the property.

Access:

Spring through fall



5. Dunton Road (FR 535)

Description:

Great birding in wet meadow and willow habitats, with birds including Evening Grosbeak, Wilson's Warbler, Western Bluebird, Lincoln's Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Red-naped Sapsucker, Olive-sided Flycatcher, and Cassin's Finch. The Calico Trail, off the eastern part of the Dunton road before it hits CO 145, may produce American Three-toed Woodpecker and, if you are lucky, Northern Goshawk.

Directions:

Dunton Road (FR 535) loops to join CO 145 in two places. The west end heads northeast from CO 145 just west of Stoner; the east end rejoins CO 145 about 6 miles north of Rico. To get to the Calico Trailhead turn south from FR 535 onto Eagle Creek Road (FR 471) and drive the road to its end in about a mile.

Access:

Summer



6. Navajo Lake Trail

Description:

It's a strenuous but beautiful 4-mile hike to Navajo

Falls, the only publicly accessible nesting site in Dolores County for Black Swift. The swifts are best found here at dawn and dusk, so an overnight trip is recommended. The falls themselves are difficult to access, so we strongly recommend looking for the swifts from the trail.

Directions:

From Rico, head north on CO 145 until you reach Dunton Road (FR 535). Turn left (west) and travel for about 5 miles. The trailhead is on a small spur road that heads north from FR 535 at a hairpin curve.

Access:

Summer



7. Rico

Description:

A good place to base yourself when exploring the out-of-the-way areas of eastern Dolores County. Look for neighborhood seed feeders, which might attract rosy-finches in the winter; and in the summer, hummingbird feeders, which might attract Broad-tailed, Rufous and Calliope hummingbirds, the latter two in July and August. Swainson's Thrush and Fox Sparrow breed in the willows right along the river in town.

Directions:

Rico is 49 miles northeast of Cortez, along CO 145 between Cortez and Telluride.

Access:

Open all year



8. Bolam Pass Road

Description:

Although the lower portions of this road can accommodate cars, the upper portions should only be traveled by 4WD vehicles with high clearance. The lower part of the road runs through mixed-conifer forests. The upper part of the road accesses some excellent spruce-fir habitat where Boreal Owls have been heard at night.

Directions:

From CO 145 about 4.5 miles north of Rico (about 0.5 miles south of the Dunton Road/FR 535 turnoff), turn right (east) onto FR 578. It is about 6 miles to the pass.

Access:

Summer



9. Lizard Head Pass

Description:

Lizard Head Pass is a scenic overlook on CO 145 from which you can marvel at the odd shape of Lizard Head Peak. Trails starting from here traverse high-alpine meadows and spruce-fir forests with birds like crossbills, Dusky Grouse, and Pine Grosbeak. Wildflower displays here can be wonderful in late summer, with highlights including Parry's gentian and the aptly-named "elephant-head" flower.

Directions:

Lizard Head Pass is along CO 145 south of Telluride and north of Rico, at the San Miguel County/Dolores County line.

Access:

Open all year, but trails mostly in summer



10. San Miguel River South Fork Preserve

Description:

This pretty little patch is an excellent example of mid-elevation riparian habitat, featuring narrowleaf cottonwood, blue spruce and black twinberry. The 180-foot boardwalk with interpretive signage and the half-mile gravel trail make this one of the most handicapped-accessible birding sites in the area. During summer all along this road listen for breeding Swainson's Thrush and Fox Sparrow, among many other birds.

Directions:

From Telluride, head north on CO 145 approximately 2.5 miles past the turnoff to Rico, and turn left onto Illium Valley Road (FR 625). The preserve is approximately 5 miles from the highway along this road.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk



11. Telluride

Description:

Telluride is a great town for wildlife watching. There is an extensive trail system along the river which leads through cottonwoods, willows and wet meadows, where you can see bluebirds, Fox and Lincoln's Sparrows, and sapsuckers. Bridal Veil Falls, the tallest waterfall in Colorado, has a colony of Black Swifts, which can sometimes be seen high overhead in the evening.

Directions:

Drive through Telluride for 3 miles to the Bridal Veil

Falls overlook. Good birding can be found by hiking the trails or roads along the east of Telluride.

Access:

Open all year



12. Woods Lake State Wildlife Area

Description:

This is a small, beautiful and secluded lake set among mixed-conifer forest and aspen groves. Keep an eye out for typical species of the high-elevation aspen and spruce-fir forest. The mountain scenery here is spectacular, with beautiful views of Mount Wilson. Rugged trails lead into the Lizard Head Wilderness Area and, eventually, alpine tundra.

Directions:

At the intersection of CO 145 and CO 62 at Placerville drive towards Telluride on CO 145 for 3 miles. Turn right (south) on CR 57P, which becomes FR 618. It's about 10 miles to the campground and lake.

Access:

Roads closed during the winter months



13. San Miguel River Canyon Preserve

Description:

This Nature Conservancy Preserve includes two miles of the San Miguel River as it passes through magnificent Naturita Canyon, supporting a community of Colorado blue spruce, narrowleaf cottonwood, and thinleaf alder. There are no trails, but you can walk into the area from the north. Look for American Dipper and Peregrine Falcon.

Directions:

From the town of Placerville (junction of CO 145 and CO 62), head northwest on CO 145 for 4 miles until you see the the Canyon Preserve sign on the left. Park at any turn-out for the next 2 miles.

Access:

Open all year

14. Forest Road 642

Description:

Extensive ponderosa pine forest here makes this a good spot to look for Grace's Warbler, Cassin's Finch, Red Crossbill, Williamson's Sapsucker, and the rest of the ponderosa forest specialists. It's also a good place to look for mammals like deer, elk, and coyote.

Directions:

From Norwood drive 2 miles east on CO 145. Turn

right (south) on CR 44Z and drive for 10 miles. Then turn right (west) on FR 642 after entering the Uncompahgre national forest.

Access:

Open all year



15. Miramonte Reservoir (Dan Noble) State Wildlife Area

Description:

When not frozen, this high-elevation reservoir can provide some excellent birding. Everything from waterfowl to loons, gulls, shorebirds and waders could be found here. The sage flats around the reservoir contain many sparrows and also harbor the secretive and endangered Gunnison Sage-Grouse, but leks are not open to the public. Mule deer can be abundant in this area.

Directions:

From Norwood drive east on CO 145 for 2 miles. Turn right (south) on CR 44 Z and drive for 14 miles. At the intersection turn right (west) on CR L 40 and drive 3 miles to the reservoir.

Access:

Spring through fall, roads not maintained in winter



Colorado's Scenic Byways

San Juan Skyway

The San Juan Skyway is one of the most scenic drives in America, spanning elevations from 6,200 feet near Cortez to 11,008 feet at Red Mountain Pass. Along the route you'll find fresh alpine forests, historic mining towns, expansive cattle ranges, and prehistoric Indian Ruins.

The San Juan Skyway traverses two billion years of geologic history. Oceans have come and gone. Mountain ranges rose and were erased by glaciers, only to rise again. The remains of dinosaurs, dense fern forests, and costal lagoons formed coal fields and pools of oil. Boiling lava flowed from volcanoes, cooling into veins of gold and silver ore.

If Byways could claim royal lineage, this one would probably rule them all. Start with the major towns along the route - Durango, a well-preserved descendant of the Old West; picturesque Telluride, renowned for world-class skiing and film, jazz, and bluegrass festivals; and Silverton and Ouray, Victorian jewels tucked in deep alpine valleys. Add another crown - Mesa Verde National Park, home to one of the densest collections of prehistoric ruins in the U.S. - and five million acres of undisturbed national forest. Then there are the roads themselves, snaking through the woods in the shadow of impressive 14,000-foot peaks. The segment from Ouray to Silverton is called the "Million Dollar Highway." But you can't put a price tag on this experience.

The San Juan Skyway was designated by the U.S. Secretary of Transportation as an All-American Road, the highest level of designation, in 1996. It is one of ten "America's Byways" designated in Colorado.

Length: 236 miles. Driving time: 6 hours



Fruitgrowers Trail

A Well-kept Secret

Colorado peaches are a well-kept secret – as lush and flavorful as their Georgia cousins, but less of a household name. Likewise, this part of Colorado makes few headlines, but is rich with things to do. This trail takes its name from Fruitgrowers Reservoir, the best place on the West Slope of Colorado to see waterbirds, from huge flocks of Sandhill Cranes to squadrons of shorebirds and flotillas of ducks. In turn, the reservoir takes its name from those who tend the orchards scattered across the adjacent valley floor. Where there's no orchard, there may be sagebrush flats, or soaring canyon walls echoing with the calls of Chukars, or riverbottom cottonwood gallery forest, or spruce woods home to porcupines and American Three-toed Woodpeckers. This trail isn't far off the beaten path, but you'd never know it by visiting; the secret remains well kept.



Sites on the Fruitgrowers Trail:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Confluence Park | 8. Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area |
| 2. Escalante State Wildlife Area (eastern tracts) | 9. Hotchkiss National Fish Hatchery |
| 3. Escalante Canyon State Wildlife Area | 10. Crawford State Park |
| 4. Sweitzer Lake State Park | 11. Gould Reservoir |
| 5. Fruitgrowers Reservoir | 12. Zephyros Farm |
| 6. Grand Mesa (south) | 13. Raincrow Farm |
| 7. Peach Valley (CR 24.50) | 14. Paonia State Park |



1. Confluence Park

Description:

Named for the confluence of the Gunnison and Uncompahgre rivers, extensive walking trails lead through the riparian forest, where you might find Bewick's Wrens, Black-headed Grosbeaks, Western Screech-Owls, and Gambel's Quail. The lake is also quite productive, and could attract just about any type of waterbird. Great-tailed Grackles seem to be a permanent fixture in the parking area.

Directions:

From US 50 just north of downtown Delta and just south of the Gunnison River, turn west on Gunnison River Drive.

Access:

Open all year



2. Escalante State Wildlife Area (eastern tracts)

Description:

The good-sized pond could yield a variety of ducks, shorebirds when the water levels are right, and Sandhill Crane. The Lower Roubideau Tract contains a large and extensive cottonwood gallery forest. When open, look for Western Screech-Owl, migrating warblers and sparrows. There is a heron rookery near the confluence of Gunnison River and Roubideau Creek.

Directions:

Head 5.5 miles west of Delta along US 50 and turn left onto CR G.50. The State Wildlife Area is on your right, before you cross the river.

Access:

Open all year



3. Escalante Canyon State Wildlife Area

Description:

In addition to the birds, spectacular canyon scenery, historical cabins, and mammals make this a place worth visiting. Highlights for birders include Chukars, which are usually seen early in the morning, and can be found on the cliffs or feeding in the agricultural fields. Black Phoebe has been found nesting at various points a few miles south of US 50.

Directions:

From Delta, head west on US 50 12 miles. Turn left (south) onto Escalante Canyon Road (CR 6.50). Public lands are mostly 6 or more miles from the highway.

Access:

Open all year



4. Sweitzer Lake State Park

Description:

This small, reed-edged reservoir can be good for waterfowl of all types, including grebes and the occasional loon. The shrubby habitat on the periphery of the lake contains Gambel's Quail, and can be good for sparrows, including Sage, during migration. The trees around the entrance station should be checked for migrants.

Directions:

From Delta, drive south on US 50 about a mile. Park is on the east side of the highway.

Access:

Open all year



5. Fruitgrowers Reservoir

Description:

This is the best waterbirding spot on Colorado's West Slope. When the water levels are low look for a large variety of shorebirds and waterfowl. This is one of the few nesting areas for Willet in Colorado, and American Bittern can usually be found in the summer in the marsh on the north side of the dike road.

Directions:

From Delta, drive east on CO 92 to CO 65. Take CO 65 north to Eckert and make a right on North Road. Take North Road east until you see the reservoir.

Access:

Open all year

6. Grand Mesa (south)

Description:

This is the largest table mountain in the world, topped by excellent spruce-fir forest and aspen groves complete with an extensive trail system. Look for species such as American Three-toed Woodpecker, Gray Jay, Pine Grosbeak and Red Crossbill, and just about the entire suite of high-elevation birds. During calm spring nights, the owling here can be excellent.

Directions:

From Cedaredge, continue north on CO 65 which climbs up the mesa.

Access:

Open all year



7. Peach Valley (CR 24.50)

Description:

This is a reliable spot to find breeding Sage Sparrow, Western Meadowlark, Brewer's Sparrow, Golden Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Northern Harrier, prairie dogs, badgers, kit fox (please report to BLM if seen) and coyotes. For being so close to the beaten path, this road provides a remote experience.

Directions:

From Delta, go east on CO 92 to Austin. Take CR 22.00 south from Austin to CR F.00 and make a left (east). Follow BLM signs to Peach Valley Recreation Area.

Access:

Open all year



8. Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area

Description:

A small area of riparian and dense thickets at the Gunnison River here could be good for sparrows and migrant passerines. There are also saltbush flats here. Those with a high-clearance vehicle may wish to explore the south side of the river, where a myriad of roads provides more access points to the river, and sparse pinyon-juniper covered hills that could contain Gray Vireo, Chukar or Yellow-billed Cuckoo.

Directions:

From Delta, drive east on CO 92 for 14 miles to Pleasure Park Road (CR 28.10) on the right (south).

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk



9. Hotchkiss National Fish Hatchery

Description:

The Gunnison River, the thin riparian areas along it, and the cliffs can provide some interesting birding, including Great Blue Heron, ducks, eagles, dippers, swifts, and wrens. The wet cliffs along the entrance could harbor interesting winter species, such as Winter Wren and Hermit Thrush. The trout in the hatchery are also an interesting attraction.

Directions:

From Hotchkiss, go west 3 miles and turn south on CR 31.00. Take CR 31.00 1.5 miles to the end and go east on CR I.50. Go 1 mile on CR I.50 and look for the signs for the hatchery.

Access:

Open all year, 7:30am - 4:00pm



10. Crawford State Park

Description:

This small reservoir ringed by pinyon-juniper covered hills can be a reasonable location to look for waterfowl and Sandhill Cranes in migration. The pinyon-juniper habitat can be good for Pinyon Jay, Juniper Titmouse, Black-throated Gray Warbler, and others.

Directions:

From Crawford, continue south on CO 92 until you see the reservoir.

Access:

Open all year



11. Gould Reservoir

Description:

A small reservoir very similar to Crawford State Park Reservoir, this lake can produce the same suite of birds, but without the amenities.

Directions:

Drive south from Crawford on CO 92 for 8 miles. The reservoir is on the left (west) side of the road.

Access:

Open all year

12. Zephyros Farm

Description:

Set among the irrigated agricultural fields of the North Fork of the Gunnison River, Zephyros Farm is a small family run operation that has been featured in the New York Times and GQ magazine for their outstanding produce and fresh cut flowers. The property features an orchard and Russian olive grove, and several small ponds which provide safe harbor for waterfowl and waterbirds.

Directions:

From Hotchkiss take US Hwy 92 towards Crawford. About one mile after crossing the river turn left (east, then north) onto Back River Road. In about three miles take a right (east) onto Bone Mesa Rd. In

¼ mile turn left (north) on 3725 Rd. The farm is on the right, inside the deer fence, at the top of the hill.

Access:

Open all year, contact owner prior to visit



13. Raincrow Farm

Description:

Raincrow Farm – named for the Yellow-billed Cuckoo - is located in the beautiful North Fork of the Gunnison River valley. The farm grows vegetables, herbs, and flowers without the use of chemicals or petroleum-based fertilizers. 154 bird species have been seen or heard on the farm since April 2005 including the Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Owner is an avid birder and knows his stuff!

Directions:

From Paonia, take Matthews Road 1-2 miles southwest past soccer fields and Chaco factory to rodeo grounds. Turn right onto Lund Road just before railroad tracks.

Access:

Open all year, contact owner prior to visit



14. Paonia State Park

Description:

The namesake reservoir here, while scenic, is rarely attractive to waterbirds. The riparian habitat, however, is of much higher quality. Look for Lazuli Bunting, Black-headed Grosbeak, MacGillivray's and Virginia's Warblers, Mountain Bluebird, and Cordilleran Flycatcher. The scrubby hillsides along the access road to the lake are good for Spotted and Green-tailed Towhees, as well as other mountain shrubland birds.

Directions:

From Paonia, drive east on CO 133 for 19 miles to the entrance, on the right.

Access:

Campground closed during winter



Did You KNOW?

Crows Never Forget Either American Crow



We know that American Crows remember human faces, thanks to a fascinating 2008 study. To test whether the birds recognized faces separately from clothing, gait and other characteristics, Dr. Marzluff, a wildlife biologist at the University of Washington, got some rubber caveman and Dick Cheney masks. Wearing the caveman mask, he and his team trapped and banded seven crows on the university's campus in Seattle. In the months that followed, Dr. Marzluff and his students and volunteers walked prescribed routes around campus not bothering crows, but wearing either the caveman or the Dick Cheney mask. The crows scolded people in the "dangerous" caveman mask significantly more than they did before they were trapped, even when the mask was disguised with a hat or worn upside down. The Cheney mask provoked little reaction.

Read more about this fascinating experiment in The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's "The Bird Watching Answer Book" by Laura Erickson. Used with permission of Storey Publishing, LLC.

Colorado's Scenic Byways Alpine Loop

The Alpine Loop Back Country Byway is the high mountain route between Lake City, Silverton and Ouray Colorado. Leaving pavement and people behind, the loop crosses the remote, rugged, spectacular heart of the San Juan Mountains. Sculpted by the forces of volcanoes, glaciers, wind and rain, the resulting mountains are a masterpiece of nature.

Native Americans came to these mountains for centuries to hunt and gather food. In the late 1800's a wave of miners came into the region in search of rich veins of silver, gold, lead and zinc. These hardy pioneers carved a network of roads and trails through this rugged terrain to transport ore and supplies by mules and wagons. Today, most of the mines and mills are closed, but the roads remain and are used by a different sort of adventurer.

Depending on snow, the Alpine Loop is open from late May through October. This is wild country and is not suited for everyone. Nearly two-thirds of the route are dirt roads, suitable for two-wheel drive vehicles. To traverse Cinnamon Pass, Engineer Pass or Mineral Creek you will need a high-clearance, four-wheel-drive vehicle.

Surrounded by the best of the Rocky Mountains, visitors enjoy pristine mountain views, hiking and biking trails, great camping opportunities, abundant wildlife and ample solitude. Spend an afternoon exploring ghost towns and other former mining haunts. Enjoy an abundance of alpine wild flowers in July and August. The well-prepared motorist will reap unparalleled rewards.

Length: 63 miles. Driving time: 4-6 hours

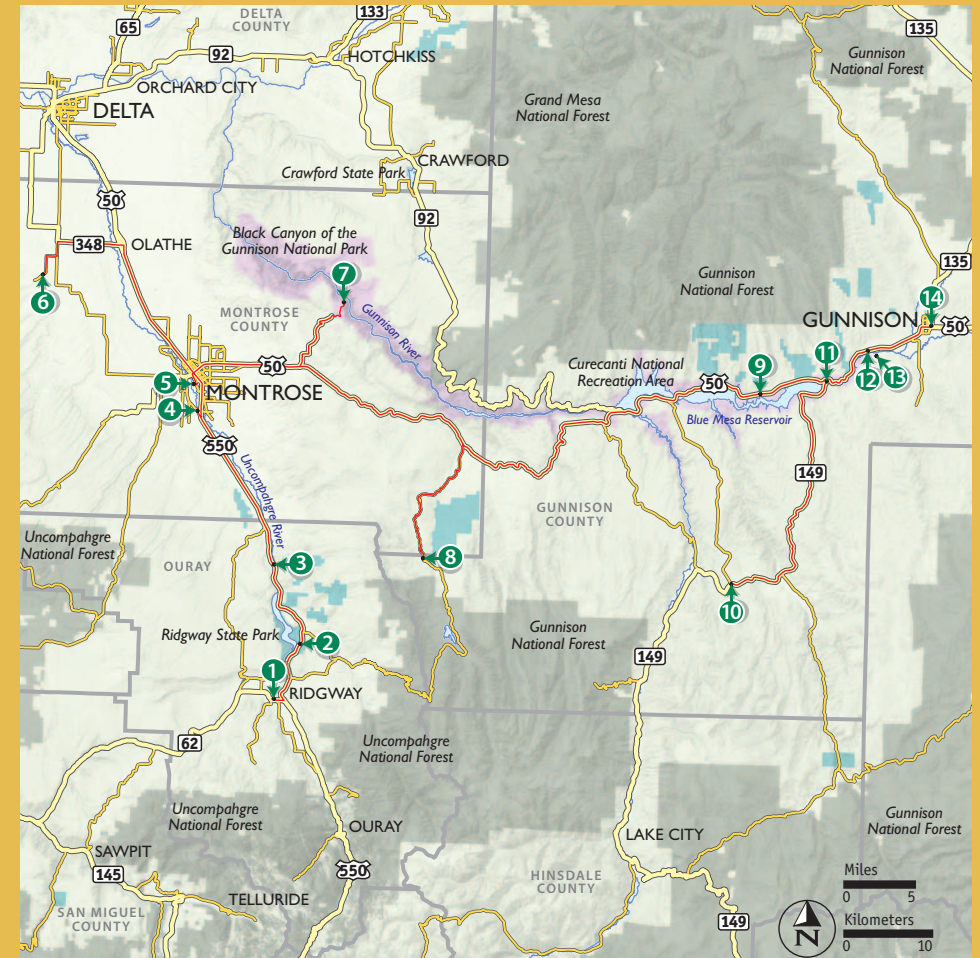


Black Canyon Trail



A River Runs Through It

Where the Gunnison River comes tumbling out of the mountains, it gurgles through deciduous bottomland forests that seem to have been transplanted straight from New England, complete with Least Flycatchers and the occasional Veery. Then it pools into Colorado's largest body of water, providing rest and nourishment to huge rafts of waterfowl and gulls. For its grand finale, it roars down into the ground to rush past Colorado's tallest sheer cliffs in the magnificent Black Canyon – a canyon the river carved, slicing through solid granite. Along the way, the river sees the Dusky Grouse puffing and strutting in April, hears the White-throated Swifts whizzing overhead in June, and reverberates with the bugling of rutting elk on autumn mornings. If you follow the river down this trail, you'll never be far from the water – or from the diversity it has created.



Sites on the Black Canyon Trail:

1. Ridgway
2. Ridgway State Park
3. Billy Creek State Wildlife Area
4. Chipeta Lake State Wildlife Area
5. Montrose
6. Green Place Ranch
7. Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park
8. Owl Creek Pass Road
9. Rainbow Lake Road (CR 724)
10. Sapinero Mesa Road/Lake City Cutoff (CR 26)
11. Blue Mesa Reservoir
12. Cooper's Ranch and the Neversink Trail
13. McCabe's Lane Wetlands
14. Gunnison



1. Ridgway

Description:

This little town is a wonderful place to refuel or refresh while exploring Ouray County. Look for migrant warblers and other landbirds in spring and fall. An influx of Evening Grosbeaks or Cassin's Finches may happen any time of year. A nice river-walk trail just north of town provides interpretive displays about the Bald Eagles that winter locally.

Directions:

Ridgway straddles CO 62 just west of US 550.

Access:

Open all year



2. Ridgway State Park

Description:

The large reservoir at Ridgway State Park provides waterbirds with one of their only stopping places on migrations through the San Juans. Birding can often be very good on the water, with many species of ducks and shorebirds possible in spring and fall, along with Great Blue Herons, White-faced Ibis, and occasionally loons. Look for eagles in the winter months.

Directions:

From Ridgway, travel north on US 550 to the Dallas Meadows entrance to Ridgway State Park. To look at the lake, turn north past the entrance kiosk and then quickly left.

Access:

Open all year



3. Billy Creek State Wildlife Area

Description:

This interesting State Wildlife Area will reward the adventurous birder. It consists of several distinct and separate tracts of land that encompass low hills covered in montane shrubland. Dusky Grouse can be numerous in the dense Gambel oak woodlands, and breeding warblers include Virginia's and MacGillivray's. Western Screech-Owls have been seen in the riparian forest along the stream bottom.

Directions:

From Ridgway, travel north on US 550 past Ridgway Reservoir to CR 4 and turn east.

Access:

Closed Jan-March to protect wintering big game



4. Chipeta Lake State Wildlife Area

Description:

This small State Wildlife Area attracts migrant and breeding birds and ducks in any season; the reeds around the water will produce Common Yellowthroat and Song Sparrow in summer; the trees are great places to look for the pendulous nests of Bullock's Orioles. With luck, you might find a Gray Catbird or a covey of Gambel's Quail.

Directions:

South out of Montrose on US 550, turn right (west then north) on Chipeta Road. The lake and parking lot is on the right side. The riverfront trailhead is a little beyond the lake along the same road.

Access:

Open all year



5. Montrose

Description:

The largest town in this part of Colorado, Montrose is a great place to base yourself for a naturalist expedition into the surrounding areas. The best birding in town is along the bike trail that follows the river, that can have numerous migrant birds in spring and fall, and breeding species like Black-headed Grosbeak in summer.

Directions:

Montrose is at the junction of US 50 and US 550. For the river trail, from South Townsend Ave, head west 3 blocks on East Oak Grove Road, which then becomes South Rio Grande Ave. Turn left onto Apollo Drive to parking lot.

Access:

Open all year



6. Green Place Ranch

Description:

The Green Place Ranch was originally homesteaded in 1924. The ranch is off-grid using solar and wind systems for electricity and solar thermal for hot water and heat. Natural grass-fed beef, chickens and turkeys are raised without pesticides, herbicides, antibiotics and vaccines. They can all be seen grazing on the mesa. A suite of birds and other wildlife abounds in this remote location and diverse habitat.

Directions:

High clearance vehicle required. From Olathe turn west onto CO 348. Turn left (south) on 55.00 Rd,

then right (west) on Falcon road. Go left (south) on 54.25. Keep going over the cattle guard. Continue over the narrow bridge. At the rock pile, take the right fork and begin climbing. Ahead and to your left across the canyon you will see a large open area on a mesa - that's the ranch. From the rock pile it is 5 1/2 miles.

Access:

Open all year, contact owner prior to visit. Access limited in winter due to road conditions.



7. Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park

Description:

World-famous for scenery, this national park is also well-known as a site for the often-elusive Dusky Grouse. Male grouse perform their mating displays individually in the oaks along the south rim road in spring. This is also a terrific place to see White-throated Swifts swooping dramatically along the cliff edges at eye level, with accompanying music of Canyon Wrens.

Directions:

From Montrose drive east on US 50 for 6 miles. Turn left (north) on CO 347 and continue to the entrance of Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.

Access:

Open all year, North Rim road is closed in winter



8. Owl Creek Pass Road

Description:

This remote area has terrific views of the north San Juan mountains. The gravel roads wind through mountain meadows, aspen groves and spruce-fir forests. The birdlife is diverse: look for Mountain Bluebirds, Fox Sparrows, Dusky Flycatchers. In the spruce-fir look for Three-toed Woodpecker or even Northern Goshawk. Butterflies here may include Mustard White and Queen Alexandra's Sulphur.

Directions:

From the junction of US 50 and 550 in Montrose, head east about 22 miles on US 50 and turn right onto Cimarron Road. At the "T" bear left onto CR P77, which becomes FR 858, the Owl Creek Pass Road.

Access:

Spring through fall, weather permitting (winter closure)



9. Rainbow Lake Road (CR 724)

Description:

A summertime destination, this road climbs from Blue Mesa Reservoir into the high montane forests, passing through several habitats along the way. In the sagebrush look for Sage Thrashers and Brewer's Sparrows; in the shrublands, for Green-tailed Towhees and MacGillivray's Warblers. The high country can produce Clark's Nutcracker, Gray Jay, Red Crossbills, and Pine Grosbeak. July wildflowers are stunning.

Directions:

Go west of Gunnison on US 50 to milepost 143. Rainbow Lake Road (F5724) is on the north side of the reservoir.

Access:

Spring through fall, weather permitting (winter closure)



10. Sapinero Mesa Road/Lake City Cutoff (CR 26)

Description:

Burned and living ponderosa pine trees provide an excellent place to search for woodpeckers, including the uncommon Three-toed Woodpecker. Other forest birds include all three species of nuthatch, Mountain and Western Bluebirds, Western Tanager, and possibly even Grace's Warbler. Road is sometimes closed in spring to protect the nesting Gunnison Sage-Grouse, which are elusive in any season.

Directions:

From Gunnison, go west on US 50 to CO 149. Turn left (south) onto CO 149. Between mile posts 97 and 96, turn right (north) at the top of the hill onto Sapinero Mesa Road (CR 26).

Access:

Spring through fall, weather permitting (winter closure)



11. Blue Mesa Reservoir

Description:

This can be a great place to see waterbirds in spring and fall. Concentrations of ducks can be especially impressive, with good numbers of Barrow's Goldeneye during the weeks before the water freezes in December. Butterfly enthusiasts can find a population of Strecker's Giant-Skipper in the yucca-covered hillsides to the south along CO 149. Pronghorn may also be seen.

Directions:

The reservoir is along US 50 west of Gunnison. The best birding is at the east end, starting 9 miles west of town, where CO 149 heads south along the shore.

Access:

Open all year, reservoir is frozen in winter



12. Cooper's Ranch and the Neversink Trail

Description:

Cooper's Ranch and the Neversink Trail provide access to an extensive mature cottonwood forest along the Gunnison River. You can find a great diversity of breeding birds here including Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, White-breasted Nuthatch, Black-headed Grosbeak, and even a few pairs of Least Flycatchers which are quite rare this far west. Many other species might be found during migration.

Directions:

To get to Cooper's Ranch from Gunnison, head west on US 50 to mile post 151. Turn left at the sign and park at the bottom of the hill. The Neversink Trailhead is 1/2 mile to the east along US 50.

Access:

Open all year

13. McCabe's Lane Wetlands

Description:

These mitigation ponds provide excellent birding, especially in spring and fall, when many species of ducks and other waterbirds come through. This is one of the most reliable places on Colorado's West Slope to find Snowy Egrets in migration. In the warmer months expect several species of swallows. Beware of access road conditions after rain or snow.

Directions:

From Gunnison, head west on US 50 to mile post 153. Turn left (south) and cross the bridge onto 32 Road. Look for parking area and ponds.

Access:

Open all year

14. Gunnison

Description:

This town provides a central base from which to look for Gunnison Sage-Grouse in spring and flocks of rosy-finches and other winter wandering birds at feeders in the colder months. Sometimes Lewis's Woodpeckers can be found in late spring and summer in the cemetery or in the city park. Look

for American Dippers along the river, especially in winter.

Directions:

Gunnison is along US 50 at its junction with CO 135.

Access:

Open all year



Did You KNOW?

Eating On The Wing Common Nighthawk



The Common Nighthawk is specialized for taking insects in flight. It has an extremely small beak that is loosely attached to its huge soft mouth. It opens its mouth wide and flies at moths and other flying insects, which go straight down the throat and esophagus without the bird stopping to swallow. But when the bird is on the ground, the most succulent bug could walk right past without being eaten: the bill is too small and frail, and the vestigial tongue too far back, for even the hungriest nighthawk to pick it up.

From The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's "The Bird Watching Answer Book" by Laura Erickson. Used with permission of Storey Publishing, LLC.

Colorado's Scenic Byways Silver Thread

The very name of the Byway alludes to the abundant silver mining that peaked here in the late 1880's. Once a toll road and stage route for the miners, Colorado Highway 149 weaves 75 miles over the Continental Divide and allows you to take in the spectacular scenery along the Lake Fork of the Gunnison and the Rio Grande Rivers. The byway crosses the Gunnison and Rio Grande National Forests, offering five Forest Service campgrounds should you want a more rugged experience.

The colorful old mining camps of the Silver Thread offer history, scenic beauty, and a heavy dose of authenticity. The heights around Creede and Lake City remain strewn with abandoned mining structures, most of them accessible via rugged backcountry roads. The Silver Thread Historic Milepost Guidebook is available at the Chamber of Commerce in Lake City, Creed and South Fork.

Between Lake City and Creede, Highway 149 shadows the upper reaches of the Rio Grande, serving up a bounty of natural wonders - sparkling North Clear Creek Falls, the Slumgullion earth slide, and the shark-like fin of Uncompahgre Peak. Wildlife abounds in this remote part of the state, and elk, deer, bighorn sheep and moose have all been spotted.

The Byway was recently extended on the north end from Lake City to Blue Mesa Reservoir, at the intersection of US Highway 50 and State Highway 149. This new section provides access to a diversity of scenic wonders, historical landmarks, and extensive recreational opportunities for hiking, camping and fishing.

Length: 117 miles. Driving time: 3 hours

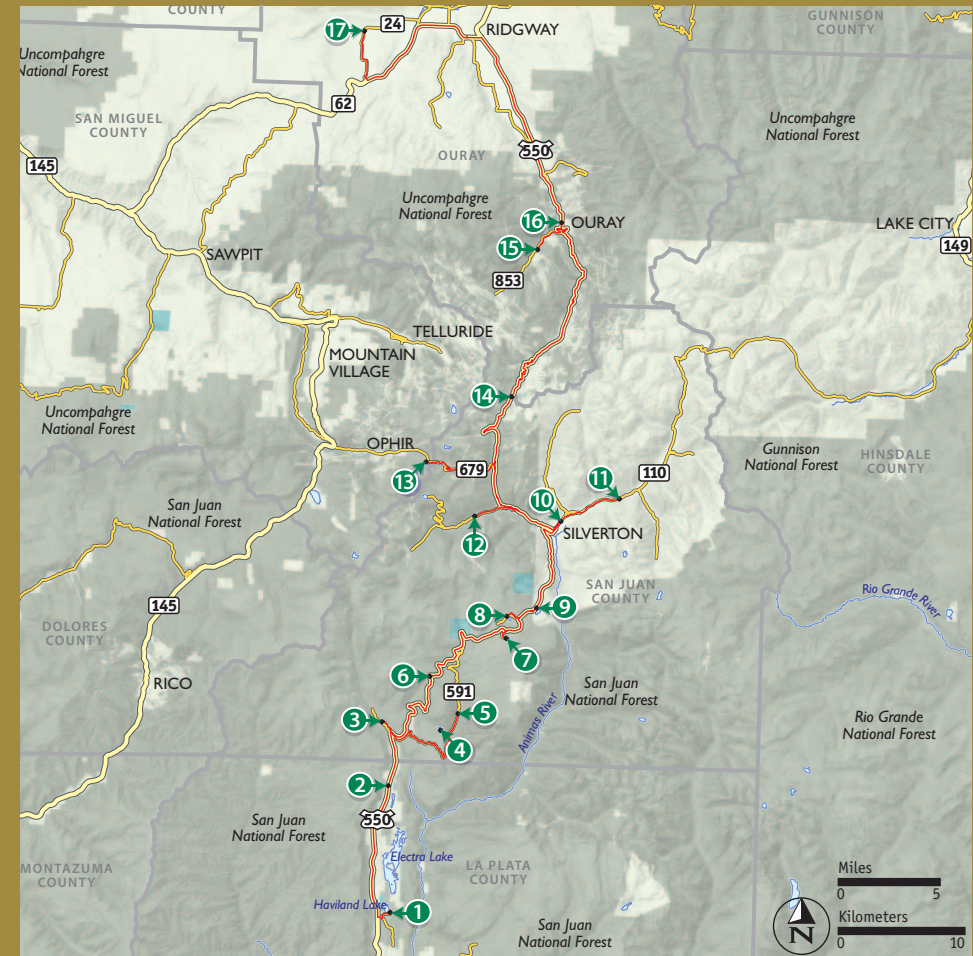




Black Swift Trail

The Colorado You Came For

It's been called "the coolest bird": a bizarre creature which cannot perch on a branch or a wire, but can only cling to vertical surfaces. The Black Swift spends its days so high in the air that it can rarely be seen from the ground. It builds its nest so close to waterfalls, that a fledgling's first flight may actually be the first time its feathers are dry. The Black Swift is legendarily difficult to observe, but in summer, here in the heart of Colorado's San Juan Mountains, a sighting is virtually guaranteed. Also guaranteed are heart-stopping views of some of Colorado's grandest peaks and most impressive waterfalls, as well as hospitality in quaint mining towns that haven't lost their character, and vast tracts of alpine forest and tundra to explore. This is the Colorado that you came for, and it won't disappoint.



Sites on the Black Swift Trail:

- | | |
|---|------------------------------|
| 1. Haviland Lake State Wildlife Area | 10. Silverton |
| 2. Durango Mountain Resort Ski Area and Sig Creek | 11. Animas River – North |
| 3. Cascade Creek | 12. South Mineral Creek |
| 4. Spud (Potato) Lake | 13. Ophir Pass Road (FR 679) |
| 5. Old Lime Creek Road | 14. Red Mountain Pass |
| 6. Coal Bank Pass | 15. Camp Bird Road |
| 7. Andrews Lake | 16. Ouray |
| 8. Little Molas Lake | 17. Pleasant Valley |
| 9. Molas Lake | |



1. Haviland Lake State Wildlife Area

Description:

At this beautiful mountain lake surrounded by ponderosa, look for a variety of montane bird species, including Evening Grosbeak, Grace's Warbler, Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets, Brown Creeper, and Williamson's Sapsucker. On the lake itself, look for Ring-necked Duck, Pied-billed Grebe, and other waterfowl during fall migration.

Directions:

From Durango, go north 18 miles on US 550, then turn right on FR 671 and follow signs.

Access:

Closed to cars during the winter months, but open to cross country skiing and snowshoeing



2. Durango Mountain Resort Ski Area and Sig Creek

Description:

Sig Creek Campground is set amid truly beautiful old-growth spruce-fir forest, with lots of deadfall and lichen hanging from practically every branch. American Three-toed Woodpecker can often be found in the vicinity of the campground, along with Pine Grosbeak, Red Crossbill, Gray Jay, and other high-elevation forest birds.

Directions:

From Durango, go north on US 550 about 25 miles to Durango Mountain Resort. Just past the main entrance turn left on FR 578. After about 2 miles turn left on FR 581. Sig Creek campground is further up on FR 578.

Access:

Campground open only in summer



3. Cascade Creek

Description:

Cascade Creek and the road paralleling it provide good access to beautiful spruce-fir woodland. A wide array of montane birds can be found, including Dusky and Cordilleran Flycatcher, Red-naped Sapsucker, Red Crossbill, Evening and Pine Grosbeaks, and American Three-toed Woodpecker.

Directions:

About 27 miles north of Durango, the first hairpin switchback crosses Cascade Creek. Turn left (west) and drive back past the cabins to the trail head.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk



4. Spud (Potato) Lake

Description:

Spud Lake is at the end of a one-mile hike from Old Lime Road. The trail passes through excellent forest. Olive-sided Flycatcher, Pine Grosbeak, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, and Wilson's Warbler can be seen. Black Swifts sometimes hawk for insects overhead, and you may stumble across a Northern Goshawk.

Directions:

On US 550 about 28 miles north of Durango is the southern end of Old Lime Creek Road. Turn right (east) here and travel about 3 miles to parking area at the trailhead for the lake.

Access:

Open all year, although snowshoes may be necessary in winter



5. Old Lime Creek Road

Description:

This scenic, rough and narrow road is best traveled in a high-clearance vehicle. Nice high-elevation riparian willows bring Lazuli Bunting, Western Wood-Pewee, Cordilleran Flycatcher, and Black-headed Grosbeak. Aspen groves may yield Red-naped Sapsucker, Warbling Vireo and Orange-crowned Warbler. Some spruce-fir forest and lily-fringed ponds complete the habitat selections.

Directions:

On US 550 about 28 miles north of Durango is the southern end of Old Lime Creek Road. This road, which rejoins US 550 about 8 miles north, is rough in spots and a high-clearance vehicle is recommended.

Access:

Summer



6. Coal Bank Pass

Description:

A parking area at the top of the pass sits amid beautiful spruce-fir forest. Two trails provide access to the trees where species such as Pine Grosbeak, Red Crossbill, Gray Jay, and American Three-toed Woodpecker can be found. Even if you don't walk

the trails, this a nice spot to watch the chipmunks and golden-mantled ground squirrels.

Directions:

From the San Juan/La Plata County line on US 550 travel north about 8 miles. The rest area is on the right (east) side of the road.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk



7. Andrews Lake

Description:

Situated on a small bench near Molas Pass, the boggy willows on this lake can support Fox and Lincoln's Sparrows, Wilson's and MacGillivray's Warblers, and Dusky Flycatcher, and the spruce-fir could produce Pine Grosbeak, Hammond's Flycatcher, Red Crossbill, and more. During the winter months White-tailed Ptarmigan can be found around the lake, but bring your snowshoes.

Directions:

Andrews Lake is about a mile south of Molas Pass on US 550 and about 7 miles south of Silverton on the east side of the road.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk



8. Little Molas Lake

Description:

This small lake just south of Silverton is a good spot to camp out and bird in spruce-fir woodland: species such as American Three-toed and Hairy Woodpeckers, Pine Grosbeak, Red Crossbill, and Gray Jay are possible. During the winter months, snowshoe in to look for White-tailed Ptarmigan in the willows around the frozen lake.

Directions:

From Silverton travel south on US 550 about 5 miles and turn west (right) into the Little Molas Lake campground.

Access:

Open all year



9. Molas Lake

Description:

The largest lake in San Juan County offers the most tourist infrastructure. The lake itself often

holds some ducks and other waterbirds during the warmer months, and the willows around the lake could harbor Fox and Lincoln's Sparrows, Wilson's and Orange-crowned Warblers, and Swainson's Thrush. During the later summer look for up to three species of hummingbirds at the feeders.

Directions:

Molas Lake is about 5 miles south of Silverton on US 550 on the east side of the highway and well signed.

Access:

Summer, dawn to dusk



10. Silverton

Description:

A fantastically scenic mountain town with a pioneer feel. A number of feeders around town can have a variety of finches, Steller's Jay, woodpeckers, and species more typical of lower elevations like Black-headed Grosbeak. During the colder months large flocks of rosy-finches can be seen in the feeders around town, or along the road leading to the ski area.

Directions:

Silverton is a high mountain town on US 550 between Durango and Ouray. In winter some of the best feeders for rosy-finches are on Snowden Street, 2 blocks to the northwest of the main street.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk



11. Animas River – North

Description:

The Animas River provides a good variety of montane habitats. Willow carrs line much of the river, and species such as Fox Sparrow, Wilson's Warbler, and Swainson's Thrush are possible. In the spruce-fir woodland keep an eye out for woodpeckers including American Three-toed, as well as Gray Jay, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Brown Creeper.

Directions:

From Silverton drive northeast on CO 110/CR 2 towards Howardsville and beyond.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk



12. South Mineral Creek**Description:**

This pleasant mountain road runs for a number of miles along willow-lined Mineral Creek. Look for typical willow carr specialties, including Fox Sparrow, and spruce-fir species, including American Three-toed Woodpecker. Elk can be common in the area, and pine marten have been sighted nearby.

Directions:

From Silverton drive north on US 550 about 2 miles from the junction with CO 110. The turnoff for FR 585 is on the left (west) side of the road. The campground is several miles off the highway.

Access:

Summer

**13. Ophir Pass Road (FR 679)****Description:**

This seasonal 4x4 road is a good introduction to the jeep trails in the San Juan mountains. Best approached from the eastern side, the drive goes through thick forest. In the spruce-fir, mountain meadows and willow carrs look for Pine Grosbeak, Olive-sided and Hammond's Flycatchers, and Fox and Lincoln's Sparrows. Hike some of the tundra to look for ptarmigan.

Directions:

From Silverton, head north on US 550 about 5 miles. The FR 679 turnoff is on the west side of the road.

Access:

Spring through fall

**14. Red Mountain Pass****Description:**

Driving this high mountain pass is not for the faint of heart. However, if you brave the steep drop-offs and disturbing lack of guardrails, you will be treated to one of the most scenic drives in Colorado. A good variety of montane passerines can be seen, and Black Swifts are often spotted flying overhead.

Directions:

From Silverton travel north on US 550 to the pass, where there is parking and an overlook of a historic mining area on the west side.

Access:

Open all year

**15. Camp Bird Road****Description:**

The narrow mountain road up to Camp Bird traverses a variety of montane habitats and can be good for Dusky Flycatcher, Western Tanager, Pine Grosbeak, Red Crossbill, and more. Keep an eye out for Black Swifts, which can be seen feeding high over the mountains. Yellow-bellied marmots will announce your presence with their loud "chip" noises.

Directions:

Go south from Ouray on US 550 to the first hairpin turn above town to FR 853, also known as Camp Bird Road and Ouray CR 361. Turn right and follow the road as long as you wish.

Access:

The first 3-4 miles are open all year, the upper portion is open in summer only

**16. Ouray****Description:**

How many places are there where you can have all the amenities and also walk to a Black Swift colony? The feeders around town are excellent for finches, and can attract rarities during the fall and winter. Box Canyon Falls (fee area) has Black Swift nests and can be good for White-throated Swift, Cordilleran Flycatcher, Cassin's Finch, and Red-naped Sapsucker.

Directions:

The town straddles US 550 about 10 miles south of Ridgway. Box Canyon Falls is just off of US 550 at the south end of town.

Access:

Open all year

**17. Pleasant Valley****Description:**

This aptly named valley provides a good alternate route when driving from Ridgway to Telluride. A good variety of forests, including mixed conifer and aspen woodlands as well as mountain meadows and some riparian groves, can be seen from the road along with a good selection of montane birds.

Directions:

From Ridgway, take CO 62 west just over a mile to CR 24A and turn north. Go a mile to CR 24, turn west. Turn left at first intersection, right at second intersection. Continue back to CO 62.

Access:

Open all year

Colorado's Scenic Byways

West Elk Loop

A Forest Service Ranger described the West Elk Loop as "the closest you can come to a wilderness experience in a passenger car." Considering that the route circumnavigates one large designated Wilderness Area – The West Elk – and skirts five others, the Maroon Bells – Snowmass, The Raggeds, Fossil Ridge, Black Canyon of the Gunnison and Gunnison Gorge, plus thousands of acres of National Forest – the statement is without exaggeration.

Not all of the route is paved, and little of it is flat or straight. The drama of the terrain is reflected in the contours of the Byway as it carves along canyon rims, edges along coursing rivers, cuts through the dappled shade of evergreens and aspen, and cleaves though desert and sagebrush plains.

The twin summits of Mount Sopris and the incomparable Black Canyon of the Gunnison anchor the ends of the West Elk Loop. This magnificent landscape has been home to uncounted generations of Native Americans, most recently the Utes. White settlers originally came in search of minerals and stayed to farm and ranch. Carbondale, Hotchkiss, Crawford, Gunnison, Crested Butte, and other towns offer a slice of Colorado's rich history, varied lifestyles, and natural beauty. The route gives access to the White River and Gunnison National Forests, the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park and Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area, Curecanti National Recreational Area, and Crawford and Paonia State Parks.

Less than 150 years ago, the country seen from the West Elk Loop was a great, unspoiled wilderness, and in many places, it still is.

Length: 205 miles. Driving time: 6-8 hours

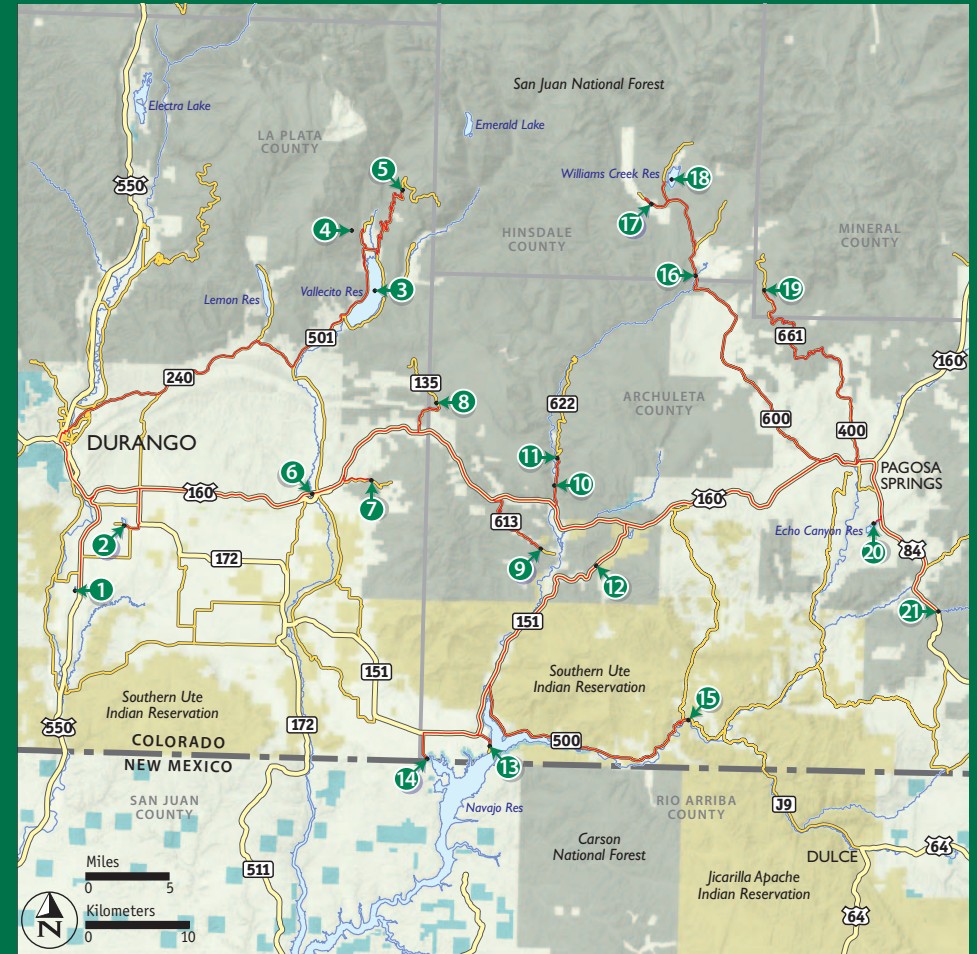


Piedra Trail



A Mecca For Naturalists

The Piedra River collects most of the water from Colorado's largest wilderness area, the Weminuche, running from permanent snowfields in the high mountains through subalpine meadows down into forests of gigantic ponderosa pine. The landscape along this trail is quintessential Colorado, but the nature here is spiced with elements of the southwest: Grace's Warblers abound in the pines, and you may spot the spectacular Arizona Sister butterfly. In the Piedra River itself, if you are lucky, you might be treated to the frolicking of a family of endangered otters. On a summer night in the forest, Flammulated Owls may hoot at your campsite from four or five directions, while poorwills sing their names over and over in the moonlight. Southwest Colorado is a mecca for naturalists from around the world, and if you visit, you'll see why.



Sites on the Piedra Trail:

1. Zink's Pond
2. Pastorius Reservoir State Wildlife Area
3. Vallecito Reservoir
4. Lake Eileen
5. Middle Mountain Road
6. Bayfield
7. Saul's Creek
8. Beaver Creek Road (FR 135)
9. Fosset Gulch Road (FR 613)
10. Lower Piedra Campground
11. First Fork Road (FR 622)
12. Chimney Rock Archaeological Area
13. Navajo State Park
14. Sambrito Marsh
15. San Juan River
16. Piedra Road
17. V.A. Poma Ranch
18. Williams Creek Reservoir
19. Southwest Corner of Mineral County
20. Echo Canyon Lake State Wildlife Area
21. Blanco River Road



1. Zink's Pond

Description:

Here in one of the driest parts of a dry state, this permanent spring-fed pond is a major attraction for birds. Species including Sora, Virginia Rail, Marsh Wren, Common Yellowthroat, and even Bald Eagle have nested here or nearby. The pond is on private property and can be viewed only from the road.

Directions:

From Durango go south on US 550 towards Farmington, New Mexico. After about 6 miles turn right (west) on CR 214. At the bottom of the hill turn left (south) on CR 215. In about a mile, after a sharp right turn, there is an overlook on the right side for the pond.

Access:

Open all year

2. Pastorius Reservoir State Wildlife Area

Description:

Almost any bird could show up at this State Wildlife Area. In spring and fall, many species of ducks, geese, and shorebirds stop here, along with smaller numbers of gulls, terns, and ibis. The riparian woods and undergrowth on the north side of the water are a great place to look for common birds like Bullock's Oriole and rare ones like Prothonotary Warbler.

Directions:

From Durango drive east on US 160 about 6 miles. Turn right onto CO 172. After about 2 miles turn right (west) on CR 302. After about 1 mile turn right on CR 304, an unpaved road. Pastorius is ½ mile in on the right.

Access:

Open all year



3. Vallecito Reservoir

Description:

In migration, this reservoir can attract loons, grebes, gulls, and quite a few species of ducks, including the occasional Barrow's Goldeneye in winter. Starting in October, dozens of Bald Eagles may gather at the lake, attracted by a plentiful supply of kokanee salmon. The forests around the lake support breeding Grace's Warblers, Hammond's, Dusky, and Cordilleran Flycatchers, and Dusky Grouse.

Directions:

From Durango drive east on US 160 to Bayfield. Turn left (north) on CR 501. Follow CR 501 north about 13 miles until you reach CR 503, which crosses the dam on the south side of the reservoir.

Access:

Open all year



4. Lake Eileen

Description:

It's a strenuous two-mile hike up to beautiful Lake Eileen in the Weminuche Wilderness. The trail climbs about 1,000 feet through aspen groves and mixed-conifer forests. Look for Hammond's and Olive-sided Flycatchers, Williamson's Sapsucker, Three-toed Woodpecker, and Dusky Grouse. You are likely to encounter pine squirrels, golden-mantled ground-squirrels, chipmunks and other mammals including snowshoe hare are possible.

Directions:

From Durango drive east on US 160 to Bayfield. Turn left (north) on CR 501. Follow CR 501 past Vallecito Reservoir. Look for the Forest Service "Work Center" on the right (east) side of the road and park here on the shoulder. The trail head is on the left (west) side and signed.

Access:

Summer



5. Middle Mountain Road

Description:

This very scenic road provides a great way to get into the high country near Durango. A burn area near the top has been good for Three-toed Woodpeckers in recent years. Deer and elk graze in the meadows, where you might find Vesper Sparrows and American Pipits also. Sightings of Pine Grosbeaks and Red Crossbills are fairly common.

Directions:

From Durango drive east on US 160 to Bayfield. Turn left (north) on CR 501. Follow CR 501 to Vallecito Reservoir. Drive along the west side of the lake and continue around to the northeast corner and turn left (north) on Middle Mountain Road (FR 724).

Access:

Road closed in winter



6. Bayfield

Description:

Pine River Park in this little town has some nice riparian habitat that has Lewis's Woodpecker, Cordilleran Flycatcher, Cedar Waxwing, Northern Rough-

winged Swallow, Belted Kingfisher and the like. This is a nice spot for a picnic not far off US 160.

Directions:

Pine River Park is along the river in Bayfield on the south side of US 160.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk



7. Saul's Creek

Description:

This area contains a mix of ponderosa forest and mountain meadows, with some pinyon-juniper creeping in around the edges. It's a relatively untraveled area, and birds can be numerous. Expect to see breeding Pine Siskin, Plumbeous Vireo, Western Tanager, and Williamson's Sapsucker, with a chance at lower-elevation birds like Gray and Ash-throated Flycatcher.

Directions:

From the traffic signal in Bayfield travel east on US 160 for about 2 miles and turn right (south) at the sign to Saul's Creek. Take the first left (east) on CR 527. Bear right at the fork onto FR 755 (also CR 528). Cross the gate and drive or walk up the road about a half mile to the ponds on the right side.

Access:

Roads not maintained in winter



8. Beaver Creek Road (FR 135)

Description:

To hear owls, this is a good place to visit at night. Flammulated and Great Horned Owls are often heard here on late spring and early summer evenings; Northern Saw-whet Owl is possible, as is Northern Pygmy-Owl, which usually only vocalizes at dawn and dusk, but rarely in the middle of the night.

Directions:

From Bayfield, go east on US 160 about 8 miles, until just before the Archuleta County line. Turn north (right) onto a gravel road (FR 135). The Flammulated Owl habitat is 5-7 miles up this road.

Access:

Road not maintained in winter



9. Fosset Gulch Road (FR 613)

Description:

This dirt road off US 160 in the western part of the county has good ponderosa forest habitat. Grace's Warblers can be found here during the day, and Flammulated Owls call during the night. In summer, wildflower displays can be impressive along this road, particularly in some of the meadows.

Directions:

From Pagosa Springs, head west on US 160 approximately 24 miles (4 miles past the Piedra River crossing) to the turnoff on the left (south).

Access:

Road closed in winter



10. Lower Piedra Campground

Description:

This is an excellent area for wildlife watchers. The stream through the campground supports some of the best deciduous riparian thickets in southwest Colorado, as well as high-quality ponderosa pine forest. Here you can find nesting Gray Catbirds and Grace's Warblers. The river is also a reintroduction site for river otter, a state endangered species and the world's most entertaining mammal.

Directions:

From US 160 just west of mile marker 121 and just after crossing the Piedra River is a signed gravel road (FR 621) which goes north into the Lower Piedra Campground. The campground is only a mile off the highway.

Access:

Roughly mid-May to mid-November



11. First Fork Road (FR 622)

Description:

The first part of this road passes through excellent ponderosa pine forest where Audubon's and Grace's Warblers will sing during the summer. The stream bottom supports butterflies, including the striking Weidemeyer's Admiral. As you climb higher along FR 630, you can get into high-elevation spruce-fir forest where you'll find the likes of American Three-toed Woodpecker and Olive-sided and Hammond's Flycatchers.

Directions:

From US 160 around mile marker 122 turn north on signed First Fork Road (FR 622). This road parallels the Piedra River on the east side and allows access



to higher elevations by going right on FR 630.

Access:

Roads not maintained in winter



12. Chimney Rock Archaeological Area

Description:

A San Juan National Forest Archaeological Area and a National Historic Site, Chimney Rock is managed mostly for archaeological tourism, with four daily guided walking tours of ancestral Pueblo settlements from May through September. This can also be a good place to look for birds: Peregrine Falcons and White-throated Swifts nest on the namesake cliff spires.

Directions:

From Pagosa Springs, travel west to CO 151. Turn left (south) onto CO 151. The entrance to the archaeological area is about 3 miles on the right (west) side of the road.

Access:

Daily tours May 15 - Sept 30, 9:00 AM to 4:30 PM



13. Navajo State Park

Description:

Navajo is best for wildlife viewing in the colder months. Gulls, grebes, loons, shorebirds, and waterfowl are all possible on the lake. The pinyon-juniper woodlands produce Ash-throated and Gray Flycatchers, Bushtits, and Pinyon and Western Scrub-Jays. Black Phoebes may be seen under bridges in the area, especially at the designated Watchable Wildlife Area near the old narrow-gauge railroad bridge over the Piedra River.

Directions:

From US 160 west of Pagosa Springs, go south on CO 151 to the small town of Arboles and follow the signs to the park headquarters. The lake should be scoped from several points on both the east and west sides.

Access:

Open all year



14. Sambrito Marsh

Description:

Part of Navajo State Park, this marsh can be accessed by a nature trail that provides good viewing. Using a spotting scope is best to identify birds far

out on the water. During migration, many birds can be found here including Sage Sparrow and Sage Thrasher. Watch for good numbers of hawks, especially if you are here in the winter.

Directions:

From CO 151 west of Navajo State Park, just east of the La Plata County line, turn south on CR 988. This road goes directly to the marsh parking area.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk



15. San Juan River

Description:

The road following the San Juan River is not a route to take when you're in a hurry. But you'll find plenty of nature without many people. The cottonwoods and deciduous tangles along the river support Yellow-breasted Chat, Lazuli Bunting and other birds typical of the habitat. Be alert for Black Phoebes, whose numbers are increasing in this area.

Directions:

About 20 miles west of Pagosa Springs on US 160, turn south on CO 151. Once you reach the reservoir, turn left on CR 500, which runs along the north shore of Navajo Reservoir, then follows the San Juan River. Where the road crosses the San Juan, Black Phoebes sightings are possible. CR 500 continues east northeast and ends in Pagosa Springs.

Access:

Open all year

16. Piedra Road

Description:

The southern part of Hinsdale County is a great birding area with mountain meadows, ponderosa pine forests and riparian habitat. You'll find Western Bluebirds, Lewis's Woodpeckers, and maybe even Grace's Warblers, though they are rare here. The Piedra Picnic Area just past the county line has Song Sparrow, Spotted Towhee, and Yellow Warbler.

Directions:

About 2 miles west of Pagosa Springs on US 160, head north on Piedra Road (CR 600). Stay on this road for 15.5 miles to the Hinsdale County line. This road then becomes Hinsdale CR 631 and crosses the Upper Piedra River. Just past the river is the Piedra Picnic Area on the left.

Access:

Open all year, weather permitting (winter closure)



17. V.A. Poma Ranch

Description:

The V.A. Poma is a guest ranch in the Weminuche Valley of southwest Colorado. Located not far from the Continental Divide, visitors have access to a diversity of forest habitats as well as meadows and willow-riparian zones near the Weminuche River, various ponds and privately owned Martin Lake. A plethora of different hummingbirds make the Ranch House porch their home.

Directions:

The V.A. Poma Ranch is located in Hinsdale County in southwestern Colorado, about 23 miles northwest of Pagosa Springs. Please call for specific directions: 970-731-5746

Access:

Memorial Day through Labor Day, contact owner prior to visit



18. Williams Creek Reservoir

Description:

A popular destination for waterbirds ranging from Cinnamon Teal to Western Grebe, most of which congregate along the reservoir's north shore. The road north of the reservoir traverses some mid-elevation riparian areas with Red-naped Sapsucker; thick willows along the stream in the valley floor harbor Fox Sparrows and MacGillivray's Warblers. Williams Creek Trail has Cassin's Finch, Hammond's Flycatcher and American Three-toed Woodpecker.

Directions:

Go 2 miles west of Pagosa Springs on US 160, head north on Piedra Road (CR 600). Stay on this road for 15.5 miles to the Hinsdale County line, where it becomes Hinsdale CR 631. Continue north for 6.2 miles to CR 640. Go right (north) on CR 640 for 1.5 miles to the reservoir. The Williams Creek trailhead is at the end of CR 640.

Access:

Open all year, weather permitting (winter closure)



19. Southwest Corner of Mineral County

Description:

This remote area gets very few visitors, but good forest roads wind through miles of ponderosa pine and montane shrub habitats here. A nocturnal trip on some of these roads in June can result in multiple Flammulated Owl encounters. The species is common in the area. Green-tailed Towhee and

Evening Grosbeak can be found here as well.

Directions:

From Pagosa Springs, take north 5th street, which becomes 4 Mile Road (CR 400), and then FR 634. After about 15 miles, FR 634 crosses the southwest corner of Mineral County for 6.3 miles before passing into southeast Hinsdale County.

Access:

Roads not maintained in winter



20. Echo Canyon Lake State Wildlife Area

Description:

Echo Canyon is a small State Wildlife Area with a popular fishing lake that can attract ducks and possibly some shorebirds during spring and fall. At the east end of the lake you will find a good cattail marsh where Marsh Wrens and Yellow-headed Blackbirds breed. In the colder months, look for Bald Eagles soaring over the water.

Directions:

From downtown Pagosa Springs travel north on US 84 toward Chama, NM. The area is on the right (west), marked as "recreation area," about 3 miles south of US 160.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk



21. Blanco River Road

Description:

This road heads east from US 84 south of Pagosa Springs a short distance through nice mixed-conifer forest and a little mid-elevation riparian habitat to a Forest Service campground. There is some aspen and Gambel oak mixed in. Look for Western Tanagers and Warbling Vireos. With great luck, you may see a weasel chase a vole through the campground.

Directions:

From US 160 just east of Pagosa Spring, go 11 miles south on US 84, cross the second bridge across the Rio Blanco, and turn left (east) on Blanco River Road (FR 656).

Access:

Spring through fall

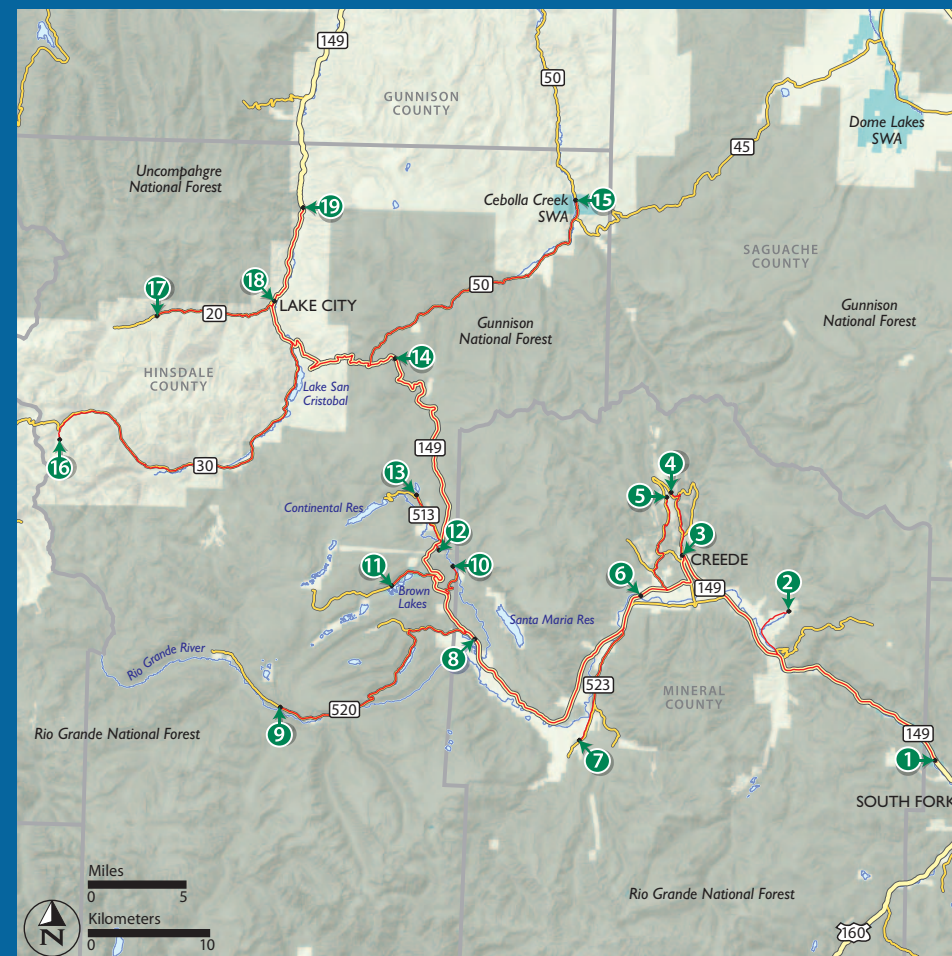
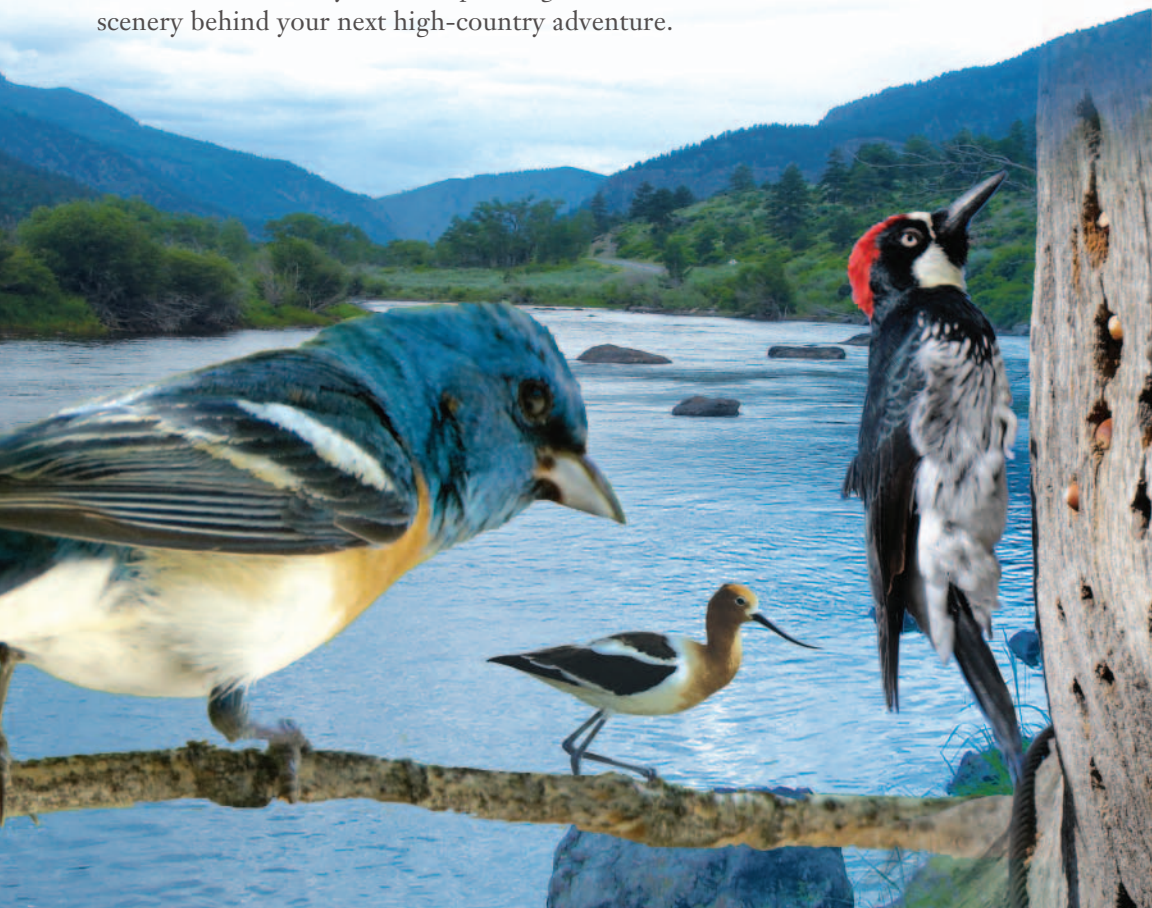


Silver Thread Trail



Scenery in Many Senses

Tracing a high and remote path through Colorado's least populated region, the Silver Thread Scenic Byway winds its beautiful way through montane forests and meadows from the low to the high, past mountain lakes that teem with waterfowl in migration. The stunning mountain skyline of this place has formed the scenic backdrop for much of Colorado's most colorful Wild West history, which is still on display in the old mining towns of Lake City and Creede. The wildlife here make the scenery audible as well as visual: the choral music of Hermit and Swainson's Thrushes backs up the improvisational riffs of Cassin's Finch, while five species of woodpecker drum out the rhythm section's beat. And the scenery doesn't even sit still: here you'll find the geological oddity called the Slumgullion Earthflow, a slow-motion rockslide the size of a mountain, which bottled a whole valley to form sparkling Lake San Cristobal. This should be the scenery behind your next high-country adventure.



Sites on the Silver Thread Trail:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Collier State Wildlife Area | 11. Brown Lakes State Wildlife Area |
| 2. Wheeler Geologic Area | 12. North Clear Creek Falls |
| 3. Creede | 13. Rito Hondo State Wildlife Area and Continental Reservoir |
| 4. FR 503 North of Creede | 14. Slumgullion Pass |
| 5. Last Chance Mine | 15. Mason Family (Cebolla Creek) State Wildlife Area |
| 6. Broadacre Ranch Pond | 16. American Basin |
| 7. Pond along FR 523 | 17. Engineer Pass Road |
| 8. Reservoirs along CO 149 | 18. Lake City |
| 9. Rio Grande Reservoir and Road Canyon Reservoir | 19. Lake Fork of the Gunnison State Wildlife Area |
| 10. North Clear Creek Campground | |



1. Collier State Wildlife Area

Description:

This State Wildlife Area follows the Rio Grande for several miles through willows teeming with Yellow Warblers. At the north end of the property, you will find the best riparian habitat, with mature cottonwoods and more willows; look here for House Wren, Cordilleran Flycatcher, Green-tailed Towhee, Warbling Vireo, Song Sparrow and the like. American Dippers nest under the bridge.

Directions:

Collier SWA stretches along CO 149 starting about 5 miles northwest of South Fork. There are various parking lots for the SWA along CO 149.

Access:

Open all year



2. Wheeler Geologic Area

Description:

This is one of the most remote and difficult-to-access locations on the entire birding trail. It also has some of the most unique geology and striking scenery in the state. You'll need either four-wheel-drive and high clearance or a mountain bike and a strong pair of legs. You will pass through amazing spruce-fir habitat, with crossbills, Gray Jays, and American Three-toed Woodpeckers.

Directions:

From Creede go 7.3 miles southeast on CO 149 to Pool Table Road (FR 600, also known as Spring Gulch). Turn north and travel northeast approximately 10 miles. At the remains of the old Hanson's Sawmill there is a trailhead and parking area. At this point you can hike (Trail 790) or continue driving on FS 600 if you have 4WD. The road winds about 12 miles to the boundary fence of the Wheeler Geologic Area.

Access:

Summer



3. Creede

Description:

This historic silver-mining town is today a quaint little mountain village with quite a bit of personality. It's a fine base for exploring of the southern San Juans. In town, residents feed birds that can include Steller's Jays and many species of finch, even rosy-finches in the winter.

Directions:

Creede is along CO 149 about 20 miles northwest of South Fork.

Access:

Open all year



4. FR 503 North of Creede

Description:

This is a scenic and historic road that runs through a spectacular canyon past numerous abandoned silver mines and extensive stands of bristlecone pine. White-throated Swifts hurtle overhead in the canyon, and once you emerge in the north into montane forests and meadows, almost any high-elevation bird is possible. This area is also home to moose!

Directions:

FR 503 is the continuation of Main Street in Creede, and goes north for 7.5 miles before becoming a four-wheel drive road.

Access:

Summer



5. Last Chance Mine

Description:

The Last Chance Mine, perched on a canyon wall high above West Willow Creek, was one of Creede's richest silver mines, running almost continuously from 1891 to 1947. Mining ended in the early 1960's. In addition to prospecting for high elevation subalpine birds and abundant wildlife, rock hounds are allowed to collect specimens for a small fee per pound. Proprietor Jack Morris is happy to take visitors on a tour and share the area's abundant history.

Directions:

Located five miles north of Creede on the south loop of the Bachelor Historic Trail. Turn on Bachelor Road across from the Creede ball field. Just after mile marker 5, (one mile past the historic town site of Bachelor), turn right (east) onto the Last Chance Mine Road.

Access:

Memorial Day to October, contact owner prior to visit



6. Broadacre Ranch Pond

Description:

This small pond is private, but easily scanned in five minutes from the north side of CO 149. Hooded Mergansers have turned up here among lots of Common Mergansers, and the pond could attract other goodies too. Don't zoom past it if you're headed this way.

Directions:

This pond is on the north side of CO 149 about 4 miles west of Creede, 1.4 miles west of Miners Creek Road and 2 miles east of Middle Creek Road.

Access:

Open all year

7. Pond along FR 523

Description:

A rather small farmer's pond that is somewhat distant from the road, this body of water nonetheless attracts a good number of ducks in spring and fall, in addition to birds like Western Grebe and Wilson's Phalarope. A spotting scope is recommended to see the birds well from the public road.

Directions:

From Creede, go west on CO 149 for 6.5 miles to Middle Creek Rd. (FR 523). Take a left and go 6.5 miles, bearing right at the fork at 4 miles, to the small pond on the right.

Access:

Open all year

8. Reservoirs along CO 149

Description:

Surrounded by miles of mountainous terrain with very little standing water, these small and rather nondescript ponds can attract many waterbirds in spring and fall, including various ducks, Western and Eared Grebes, Bald Eagles, and the occasional gull. Mountain Bluebirds breed in the nearby meadows, which provide grazing areas for elk, deer, and occasionally moose.

Directions:

The first pond is along the west side of CR 149, 18.5 miles west of Creede. It is best scanned from CO 149. The second pond is also along CO 149, and is best scanned from FR 520, which is left off CO 149, 1.5 miles past the first reservoir.

Access:

Open all year

9. Rio Grande Reservoir and Road Canyon Reservoir

Description:

The small Road Canyon Reservoir often hosts migrating diving ducks such as Ring-necked Duck, Redhead, and Lesser Scaup. Rio Grande Reservoir is part of the Rio Grande headwaters, whose waters eventually flow between Texas and Mexico. Although it is not a great place to look for ducks, large herds of elk can sometimes be seen in the meadows near the lake.

Directions:

From CO 149, just east of the Hinsdale/Mineral County line, turn west onto FR 520. Road Canyon Reservoir is 4 miles along FR 520 on the left. At 2.8 miles, bear left with FR 520 instead of going straight. Rio Grande Reservoir is about 8 miles further west on FR 520.

Access:

Open all year



10. North Clear Creek Campground

Description:

This is a very nice hosted campground among aspen and spruce trees with plenty of birds, including Pine Grosbeak, Fox Sparrow, Cassin's Finch, and Gray Jay. Black Swifts, presumably from the colony at North Clear Creek Falls, have been seen flying overhead. The flowery meadows are a good place to look for nectaring butterflies. Bears are also in the area.

Directions:

From Lake City, go 23 1/2 miles along CO 149 to the intersection with FR 510, on the left (east). Go south 2.4 miles to the campground on the left. FR 510 loops back to CO 149 further south.

Access:

Summer



11. Brown Lakes State Wildlife Area

Description:

This is one of the best birding locations on the Silver Thread Trail. Many species of ducks stop here in spring and fall, as do Eared Grebe, Spotted Sandpiper, and various swallows. Fox Sparrows breed in the willows below the dam, and you might see a Black-crowned Night-Heron too. Bald Eagles can sometimes be seen in the area.

**Directions:**

From Lake City, go south on CO 149 for 26.5 miles to FR 515, on the right (west). Go west on FR 515 to the SWA.

Access:

Open all year

**12. North Clear Creek Falls****Description:**

This is one of the more impressive waterfalls in Colorado. For birders, the main attraction is the nesting colony of Black Swifts. But these birds are very difficult to see, slipping in unnoticed below the horizon at dawn and dusk. Even if you miss the swifts, you should be able to see American Dippers.

Directions:

North Clear Creek Falls is just east of CO 149 on FR 510, 6.5 miles from the Mineral/Hinsdale county line, and 23.5 miles south of Lake City.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk

**13. Rito Hondo State Wildlife Area and Continental Reservoir****Description:**

Rito Hondo State Wildlife Area contains a small lake that can be covered with diving ducks in spring and fall. To the west is Continental Reservoir, a larger body of water that can also host waterfowl. The birding isn't as good at Continental Reservoir, but the scenery is better. Along the road between the lakes look for yellow-bellied marmot.

Directions:

From Lake City, go south on CO 149 for 23.5 miles to the intersection CR 11 (FR 513). Go northwest on FR 513, bearing right at the fork, for 3 miles to Rito Hondo Reservoir. Bearing left at the fork will take you to Continental Reservoir, 5 miles from CO 149.

Access:

Open all year

**14. Slumgullion Pass****Description:**

Slumgullion Pass and Spring Creek Pass just to the south are the high points along CO 149. The highway runs through excellent spruce-fir forest where Pine Grosbeak and Red Crossbill can be found;

White-winged Crossbill has also been seen. Boreal Owls breed here. A side attraction is the Slumgullion Earthflow, an enormous mudslide that is still slowly moving.

Directions:

Slumgullion Pass is along CO 149, 9.5 miles south of Lake City and 21 miles northwest of the Hinsdale Mineral County Line.

Access:

Open all year

**15. Mason Family (Cebolla Creek) State Wildlife Area****Description:**

Formerly known as "Cebolla Creek", this area has a striking mix of habitats, including rocky cliffs, wet meadows, streamside willow thickets, and montane coniferous forest. Look for Rock Wrens and Savannah, Lincoln's, and Brewer's Sparrows. Dusky Grouse are in the area, and Gray Jays might steal your food if you picnic.

Directions:

From Blue Mesa Reservoir, take CO 149 towards Lake City. After about 14 miles, turn left (east) on CR 27. Go south on CR 27 (which becomes CR 5) for 15 miles. Entrance is on the right (south).

Access:

Open all year

**16. American Basin****Description:**

This beautiful high-elevation basin is on the southern part of the Alpine Loop. With caution, most passenger cars should be able to make it to the basin. You will need to hike to get to ptarmigan and rosy-finch, but this is probably the shortest hike to these birds in Hinsdale County. With a 4WD you can continue all the way to Silverton.

Directions:

South of Lake City from CO 149, turn right (west) to Lake San Cristobal. About 10 miles past the lake, keep right at an intersection. This is CR 4. Drive as far as you feel comfortable. If you make it to a fork in the road, the right branch of which heads to Cinamon Pass, park. You're at the bottom of American Basin.

Access:

Summer

17. Engineer Pass Road**Description:**

This road connects Lake City with Silverton as the northern part of the Alpine Loop. Engineer Pass requires 4WD, but accesses some of the most beautiful and extensive tundra habitat in the state. Those without 4WD can hike up the Nellie Creek road (or drive it in a high-clearance vehicle). The spruce-fir habitat is excellent for American Three-toed Woodpecker and Pine Grosbeak.

Directions:

From Lake City on CO 149, turn right (west) on Engineer Pass Road (CR 20). Go as far as you are comfortable. The Nellie Creek road (FR 877) heads north from the Engineer Pass road about 5 miles west of Lake City. The base of the Nellie Creek road is accessible in a passenger car.

Access:

Summer

18. Lake City**Description:**

Lake City is a great place to base yourself as you explore the surrounding wilderness. In the northwest corner of town is Pete's Pond, where Rose-breasted Grosbeak has been seen and several species of ducks can be found in the warmer months. The two cemeteries north of town can have migrants in season and all three species of nuthatch year-round.

Directions:

Lake City is along CO 149 between Blue Mesa Reservoir (near Gunnison) and South Fork. To reach Pete's Pond, from the intersection of 8th St. and CO 149, go west on 8th St. and then right on Bluff St. until it ends.

Access:

Open all year

**19. Lake Fork of the Gunnison State Wildlife Area****Description:**

This small State Wildlife Area and fishing easement is only a hundred yards from the highway, but gets very few visitors. The rushing stream is lined with willows and some cottonwoods where you can find many nesting species of bird including Yellow Warbler, American Dipper, and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. The canyon walls provide nesting areas for White-throated Swifts and Violet-green Swallows.

Directions:

The SWA is just off CO 149, along a small, unmarked road that angles sharply to the northeast, 7 miles

north of Lake City.

Access:

Open all year



Did You KNOW?

As Silent As The Grave Turkey Vulture



Turkey Vultures lack a syrinx and the voice-producing muscles associated with it, so they are essentially always silent. They can make a guttural hiss when agitated, either by a disturbance at the nest or when two birds are vying for the same part of the carcass. And nestlings make a characteristic hiss that is almost inaudible while they're still blind and unable to hold up their heads. By the time they're a week old or so, they make a specific nestling-hiss when disturbed. The sound volume and quality depend on the age of the nestling, the intensity of the hiss, how close the observer is, and the acoustic qualities of the nest area. The sound is often given by both nestlings at once. If disturbed, nestlings can also stomp their feet or loudly flap their wings.

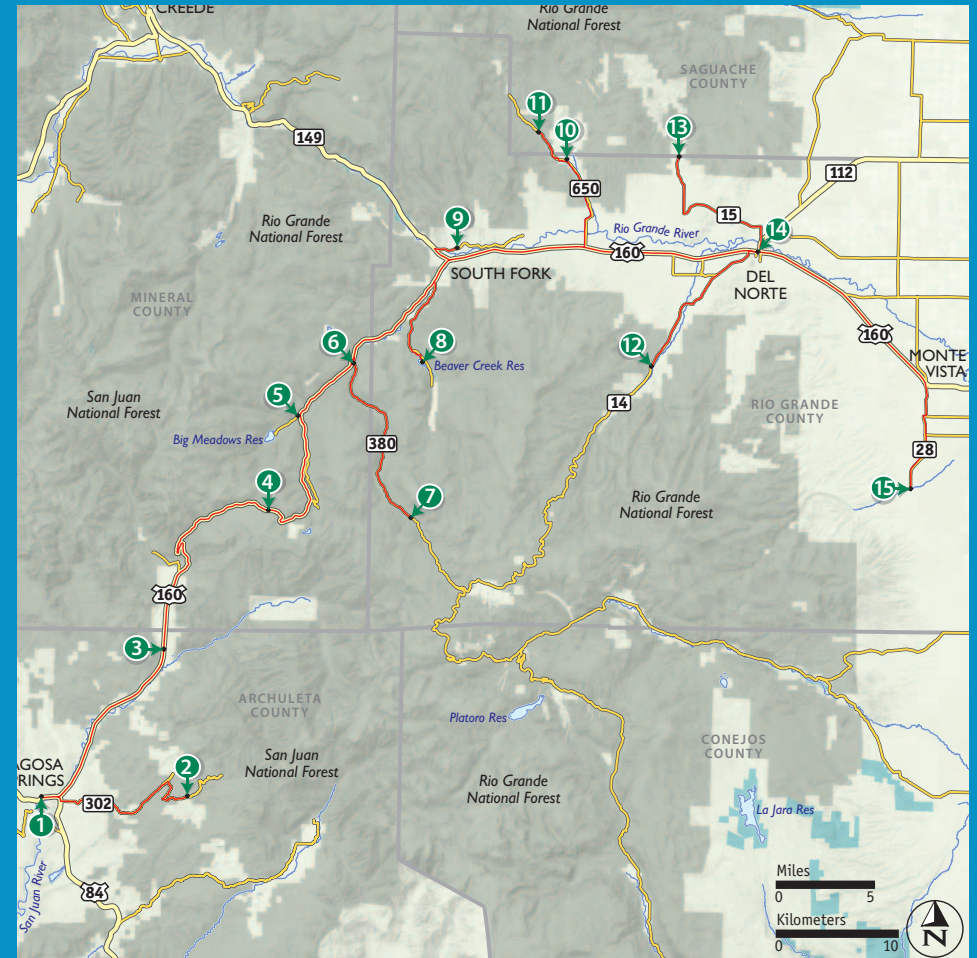
From The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's "The Bird Watching Answer Book" by Laura Erickson. Used with permission of Storey Publishing, LLC.

Wolf Creek Trail



Where The Highway Meets the Wilderness

The summit of Wolf Creek Pass is one of the snowiest places in Colorado during the winter. During the summer, it's one of the most scenic. The famous overlook on the west side offers you a chance to be swarmed by panhandling Steller's Jays, while swifts and swallows wheel in huge flocks overhead. South of the pass lie the South San Juan mountains, one of Colorado's least visited ranges, where the subalpine spruce-fir forest stretches for miles along nearly-deserted logging roads and untraveled hiking trails, serenaded by the lovely warble of Pine Grosbeaks during the day and the haunting tremolo of the Boreal Owl late at night. There is a vast wilderness here open to wildlife-and open to you, if you choose.



Sites on the Wolf Creek Trail:

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 1. Pagosa Springs | 9. Alder Creek Road |
| 2. Mill Creek Road | 10. Groundhog Park Road (FR 650) |
| 3. Upper San Juan River | 11. Embargo Creek |
| 4. Wolf Creek Pass | 12. Pinos Creek |
| 5. Big Meadows Reservoir State Wildlife Area | 13. Old Woman Creek |
| 6. Park Creek | 14. Del Norte |
| 7. Summitville area | 15. Rock Creek |
| 8. Beaver Creek Reservoir State Wildlife Area | |



1. Pagosa Springs

Description:

Pagosa Springs has all the amenities. If you spend any time in and around town, you are likely to see a Lewis's Woodpecker. More looking might net you an American Dipper along the river. The ponds along the highway west of town can be great places to see waterfowl.

Directions:

Pagosa Springs is along US 160 before you head east over Wolf Creek Pass.

Access:

Open all year



2. Mill Creek Road

Description:

Just east of Pagosa Springs is some of the best ponderosa pine forest in the state. Towards the end of FR 029, Williamson's Sapsucker is the most common woodpecker, and you can also find good numbers of Virginia's and Grace's Warblers, Red Crossbills, and even Band-tailed Pigeons.

Directions:

From US 160 just east of Pagosa Spring, head south on US 84. A quarter mile south, turn left (east) on Mill Creek Road (CR 302). A little over 6 miles up the road, turn right onto FR 665, then take another right in a little under 3 miles on FR 029. This road goes through excellent habitat, particularly near its end.

Access:

Roads not maintained in winter



3. Upper San Juan River

Description:

The East Fork of the San Juan River carves a steep, lush valley out of the mountains just south of Wolf Creek Pass. Approaching from Pagosa Springs, the unpaved road follows a stream through thick willows, where you might see American Dipper or Swainson's Thrush. Surrounding montane forest might yield Grace's Warbler or Gray Jay.

Directions:

From the junction of US 160 and US 84 on the east end of Pagosa Springs, travel northeast on US 160 for 9.6 miles to the junction with East Fork Road (FS 667) on your right (east).

Access:

Road not maintained in winter



4. Wolf Creek Pass

Description:

The first big switchback west of the pass provides astonishing views of the valley to the west. On summer evenings the skies near the overlook fill with swifts and swallows, and birders who search each bird carefully should be rewarded with a sighting of a Black Swift from the nearby colony at Treasure Falls.

Directions:

Wolf Creek Pass is along US 160, 19 miles west of South Fork (Rio Grande County), and 24.5 miles east of Pagosa Springs (Archuleta County).

Access:

Open all year, best viewing in summer



5. Big Meadows Reservoir State Wildlife Area

Description:

This small body of water near Wolf Creek Pass is not normally noted for attracting many waterbirds, but in 2002 a Brown Pelican was found here. The surrounding high-elevation forests are good for all the usual spruce-fir birds, including Pine Grosbeak. The Forest Service campground here has interpretive programs in summer.

Directions:

From the intersection of CO 149 and US 160 in South Fork, go 11.5 miles west on US 160 to FR 410. Take a right (north) and go 1.5 miles to the reservoir.

Access:

Open all year, weather permitting



6. Park Creek

Description:

This is a good road to Summitville from US 160. At the beginning of the road, in the riparian trees along the Rio Grande, look for Lazuli Bunting and Black-headed Grosbeak, in addition to American Dipper along the river. As you follow the road higher, keep an eye out for Dusky Grouse, Cassin's Finch, and White-crowned, Lincoln's, and Fox Sparrows.

Directions:

On US 160 west of South Fork, just west of the Rio

Grande County line, turn left (south) onto FR 380. The road follows Park Creek for many miles.

Access:

Road not maintained in winter



7. Summitville area

Description:

Summitville is the site of an old abandoned mining town and a more-recently abandoned open-pit gold mine. Although the mine seriously polluted the area's creeks and rivers in the 1980's and 1990's, the surrounding spruce-fir forests remain some of the healthiest and most extensive in the state. A good map is essential, as the road system is substantial.

Directions:

On US 160 west of South Fork, just west of the Rio Grande County line, turn left (south) onto FR 380. Follow FR 380 14 miles south and east to Summitville. There are a variety of other Forest Service roads that will also lead you here.

Access:

Roads not maintained in winter



8. Beaver Creek Reservoir State Wildlife Area

Description:

Busy on weekends, this small, scenic mountain reservoir can attract waterfowl in spring and fall. The road is the bigger attraction, however, passing through a fascinating mixed-conifer forest which transitions gradually from the low-elevation woodlands dominated by juniper to high-elevation dominated by bristlecone pine and Engelmann spruce. Along the way you may see Bushtits, Red-naped Sapsuckers, Western Tanagers and American Dippers.

Directions:

On US 160, just over a mile west of South Fork, turn left (south) onto Beaver Creek Road (FR 360).

Access:

Higher roads not maintained in winter



9. Alder Creek Road

Description:

This road traverses the rugged foothills of the La Garita mountains, snaking through mountain

meadows with scattered ponderosa and bristlecone pines. Along the creek, look in the willows for breeding Yellow Warblers and Dusky Flycatchers. The relatively open slopes and good visibility along certain parts of this drive make it a good place to look for deer and elk.

Directions:

Head north on CO 149 from South Fork. Just north of town, after you cross the Rio Grande River, turn right (east) on CR 15, then left (north) on Alder Creek Road (FR 610).

Access:

Road not maintained in winter



10. Groundhog Park Road (FR 650)

Description:

Not far north of the junction where the roads split from the Embargo Creek road, look for a pond with a nice marsh. Expect to see breeding Yellow-headed Blackbird, Eared Grebe, Ring-necked Duck, Gadwall and Mallard. The road continues through aspen groves and coniferous forest and is also a good place to look for Dusky Grouse in the mornings and evenings.

Directions:

From Del Norte, head west about 8.5 miles on US 160 and turn right (north) on 18 Road. After you cross the river, turn right (east) at the T intersection, then in 1/2 mile turn left (north) on FR 650. Follow this north, staying right at the junction of FR 650 and FR 640.

Access:

Road not maintained in winter

11. Embargo Creek

Description:

FR 640, which follows Embargo Creek, runs through some of the best ponderosa pine habitat in this area. On the south side of the road and in about 4 miles, a short hike might yield Williamson's Sapsucker, Pygmy Nuthatch, Western Bluebird and Cassin's Finch. Nomadic species such as Clark's Nutcracker and Red Crossbill can occasionally be very common in this area too.

Directions:

From the junction of US 160 and CO 149 in South Fork, head east on US 160 for 2 3/4 miles. Turn left (north) onto 15 Road (N River Road), and travel about 5 miles northeast. Turn north (left) onto FR 650. Bear left onto FR 640.

Access:

Open all year, campground open Memorial Day through fall



12. Pinos Creek

Description:

This is the most direct route from the floor of the San Luis Valley to Summitville and passes through many habitats along the way. In the dry scrub and pinyon-juniper woodlands, look for Western Scrub-Jay and Pinyon Jay. In the ponderosa pine area you may see Western Tanager and Band-tailed Pigeon. Higher up, look for Olive-sided Flycatcher and Northern Goshawk.

Directions:

From west of Del Norte on US 160, turn left (south) on Pinos Creek Road (CR 14), which becomes FR 330.

Access:

Higher roads not maintained in winter



13. Old Woman Creek

Description:

This short scenic loop route out of the town of Del Norte passes through the saltbush scrub on the floor of the San Luis Valley, then rises into the low foothills with pinyon-juniper and some open ponderosa pine woodland. Along this route you might see Mountain and Western Bluebirds, Green-tailed Towhee, Gray Flycatcher, Pinyon Jay, and Clark's Nutcracker.

Directions:

Just north of the Rio Grande bridge on CO 112 in Del Norte, turn left (northwest) on paved CR 15. When this road heads toward a dump, turn left (west) to stay on CR 15. At the "Y" with FR 660 stay right onto FR 660. FR 660 turns into CR A-32 which T's with CR 38A. Turn right (south) onto CR 38A to loop back to CR 112 about 2 1/2 miles northeast of where you started.

Access:

Open all year



14. Del Norte

Description:

This is one of the San Luis Valley's population centers, and you'll find most anything you need here in

terms of lodging and provisions. Bird feeders often produce Evening and Black-headed Grosbeaks, Cassin's Finch, American and Lesser Goldfinches, Pine Siskin, and (in summer) hummingbirds of up to four species.

Directions:

Del Norte is at US 160 at CO 112, west of Monte Vista and east of South Fork.

Access:

Open all year



15. Rock Creek

Description:

This wonderful backcountry drive rises from low dry canyon country all the way up to the cold moist spruce-fir forests. In early morning, you might find a Dusky Grouse or a mule deer on the road. A nocturnal expedition could turn up singing poorwills and (in the high country) Boreal Owl, plus porcupines, foxes, and snowshoe hares.

Directions:

Head south for 2 miles on CO 15 from Del Norte. Turn right (west) onto CR 25. After about 2 miles, take a left (south) at the T onto CR 28. It is about 12 miles from here to the Rock Creek Campground, about 9 of which is unpaved.

Access:

Road not maintained in winter



Colorado's Scenic Byways

Los Caminos Antiguos

("The Ancient Roads")

The San Luis Valley is a land of contrasts. Although the Valley is Colorado's only true desert, it sits atop an aquifer containing billions of acre-feet of ground water. An enormous sun-baked flat larger than Connecticut, nestled between the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and the San Juan Mountains, life here seems not to have changed much since the 1600's, when Spain cast its claim over this region.

Early Spanish explorers, priests, adventurers and settlers found well-worn ancient paths of the Ute, the Navajo and the Apache. The Camino Real, the Old Spanish Trail and a network of abandoned forts and encampments trace the excursions of Don Diego de Vargas in the 1690's, Juan Maria Antonio de Rivera in 1765, and Juan Bautista de Anza in 1779.

Mexico began issuing land grants for settlers in 1821. Beginning in the late 1840's and the 1850's, settlers from the south began traveling the ancient roads. Following the Mexican-American War, the San Luis Valley became part of the Territory of Colorado. By the time settlers from the eastern states first arrived in the 1860's, bustling Hispanic villages thrived along the Valley's fertile bottomlands.

Los Caminos Antiguos takes you to Colorado's oldest surviving community (San Luis, 1851), its oldest church (Our Lady of Guadalupe, in Conejos), one of its first military posts (Fort Garland) and to the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve, one of nature's most wondrous creations. Hundreds of feet high and more than a thousand miles from the nearest ocean beach, these drifting dunes accumulated over the eons as winds swept sand against the west face of the Sangre de Cristo Range.

Length: 129 miles. Driving time: 3 hours



Gunnison Sage-Grouse Trail

A Special Place For A Special Bird

The Gunnison Sage-Grouse is a special bird. Formally described by science only in 2000, it evaded detection for decades because people looked at it without seeing it – they assumed all sage grouse were the same. But those with an eye and an ear for detail noticed that the Gunnison differs from its sister species in many small but significant ways – and that an undiscovered species of bird had been living right under their noses. To see in person what makes this bird unique, you have no choice but to come to Colorado: the bird is found almost nowhere else. You must come to the sage flats of the high Gunnison Basin, ringed by Colorado's tallest peaks and drained by the river that carved the Black Canyon. In addition to the remarkable chest-heaving display of the grouse, you can find a remarkable diversity of birds in the area, from rosy-finches in winter to Lewis's Woodpeckers and Least Flycatchers in summer. Some call Gunnison the recreation capital of Colorado – and if you visit, you will see.



Sites on the Gunnison Sage Grouse Trail

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Kebler Pass (CR 12) | 6. Dome Lakes State Wildlife Area |
| 2. Crested Butte | 7. Cebolla Trail |
| 3. Roaring Judy Fish Hatchery | 8. Cumberland Pass |
| 4. Mill Creek | 9. Gunnison Sage-Grouse Lek |
| 5. Moss Lake | 10. Marshall Pass Road |



1. Kebler Pass (CR 12)

Description:

Kebler Pass contains an excellent sampling of montane habitats, but is perhaps best known for some of the most awe-inspiring aspen groves in Colorado. Not surprisingly, the species typical of this habitat, such as Red-naped Sapsucker, Warbling Vireo, Dusky Flycatcher, and Violet-green Swallow are common.

Directions:

From Gunnison, go north on CO 135 to Crested Butte. Turn left on Whiterock and go west. This turns into CR 12. You can also take Ohio Creek Road (CR 730) to Kebler Pass and turn left on Kebler Pass Road.

Access:

Summer



2. Crested Butte

Description:

This is a picturesque old mining town that makes a good base when exploring the area during the summer. The main avian draw here is the large flock of rosy-finches, usually of all three species, that frequent the area during the winter. The best strategy to find them is to drive around town watching for both the flock and for feeders.

Directions:

Crested Butte is 40 miles north of Gunnison on CO 135.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk



3. Roaring Judy Fish Hatchery

Description:

At 840 acres, the grounds of this fish hatchery are essentially a large riverside park full of mature cottonwood trees, riparian brush and water. It's a terrific area to wander around in during spring and fall migration and also in the summer, when birds like Wilson's Snipe, Yellow Warbler, Red-naped Sapsucker, Fox Sparrow, and Willow Flycatcher can be found breeding.

Directions:

From Gunnison, head north on CO 135. Just past mile post 14, turn left (west) off the highway, cross the bridge, and park in the public parking area. Walk the road to ponds and/or trails by the river.

Access:

Open all year



4. Mill Creek

Description:

Mill Creek Road runs through private property on its way to the Mill-Castle Trailhead in the West Elk Wilderness. The road passes through mountain meadows and agricultural fields, following a stream where you might find American Goldfinch, Dusky Flycatcher, and warblers. There is excellent birding up the trail, where the habitat changes to mixed conifers and aspens.

Directions:

From Gunnison go north on CO 135 for approximately 3.4 miles. Turn left on Ohio Creek Road (CR 730). Go about 9 miles and turn left on Mill Creek Road (CR 727). After about 4 miles, park in an open meadow area before the wilderness boundary gate.

Access:

Winter access by ski or snowshoe only



5. Moss Lake

Description:

This is a small private lake that can be scanned from the side of the county road. Large numbers of ducks sometimes congregate here in spring and (especially) fall, and you might see shorebirds, too. The wet meadows both north and south of the lake can host White-faced Ibis in migration and blackbirds and Savannah Sparrows in summer.

Directions:

From Gunnison, go east on US 50. Turn south on CO 114. After 19 miles turn right (west) on CR NN-14. Follow CR NN-14 for about a mile. The lake is on the right (west) side of the road.

Access:

Open all year

6. Dome Lakes State Wildlife Area

Description:

The two medium-sized lakes here are definitely worth a check if you are in the area. They can have breeding ducks including Green-winged and Cinnamon Teal, Gadwall, Lesser Scaup and Ring-necked Duck, and phalaropes and possibly other shorebirds in migration. Watch for coyotes hunting in nearby fields. When the rabbitbrush is in bloom, it can attract swarms of nectaring butterflies.

Directions:

From Gunnison, go east on US 50. Turn south on CO 114. After 19 miles turn right (west) on CR NN-14. Follow CR NN-14 for about 5 1/2 miles. The lakes are on the right (west) side of the road.

Access:

Open all year



7. Cebolla Trail

Description:

This is a remote and little-visited area that will reward the visitor with some rarely-seen vistas and lots of wildlife viewing opportunities. Roadside willow carrs hold breeding Fox Sparrows, among many other birds. From the Cebolla Trailhead, you can hike to the alpine tundra where you will find breeding American Pipit, Brown-capped Rosy-Finch, and (if you are lucky) White-tailed Ptarmigan.

Directions:

FR 790 is a remote 25-mile loop road. To drive this loop from the north, from Gunnison, go east on US 50. Turn south on CO 114. After 19 miles turn right (west) on CR NN-14. Follow CR NN-14 about 3 1/2 miles, then turn right (west) onto CR KK-14. Follow CR KK-14 about 9 miles to FR 790 and turn left (southeast).

Access:

Summer and early fall



8. Cumberland Pass

Description:

This high pass provides some of the best and easily accessible tundra in this part of Colorado, and a walk in the area during the summer should produce American Pipit, Brown-capped Rosy-Finch (in rocky areas), White-tailed Ptarmigan and White-crowned Sparrow. The wildflowers in late June and July can be truly spectacular.

Directions:

From Gunnison, go east on US 50 to Parlin. Turn left (north) on Quartz Creek Road (CR 76), following it through Pitkin to FR 765. Continue on FR 765 to Cumberland Pass, birding along the way.

Access:

Summer, dawn to dusk



9. Gunnison Sage-Grouse lek

Description:

If you want to see this rare and local species during the mating season, chances are you will need to come here. Mating takes place from early April through early May. Due to a precipitous population decline there are strict rules on viewing the birds. Their survival partially depends on your cooperation. Contact Sisk-a-dee to use the viewing blind; www.siskadee.org.

Directions:

From Gunnison, travel 19 miles east. Turn left (north) on Waunita Hot Springs Road (CR 887). The public viewing area is .6 miles up the road on the east side. This lek itself is located in a private field.

Access:

Lekking season



10. Marshall Pass Road

Description:

This bumpy high mountain road provides an alternative to Monarch Pass. Look in the sage flats for Sage Thrasher and Vesper Sparrow. Look in the extensive willow carrs for Lincoln's, Fox, and White-crowned Sparrows, and Wilson's and MacGillivray's Warblers. Near the top you enter spruce-fir woodland where American Three-toed Woodpecker, Pine Grosbeak, Red Crossbill, Brown Creeper, and Dusky Grouse are possible.

Directions:

The Marshall Pass Road (CR XX32 Road/FR 243) is 32 miles east of Gunnison and 21 miles west of Poncha Springs off of US 50. From the tiny hamlet of Sargents, just inside the Saguache County line, head southeast on Marshall Pass Road.

Access:

Spring through fall, weather permitting (winter closure)

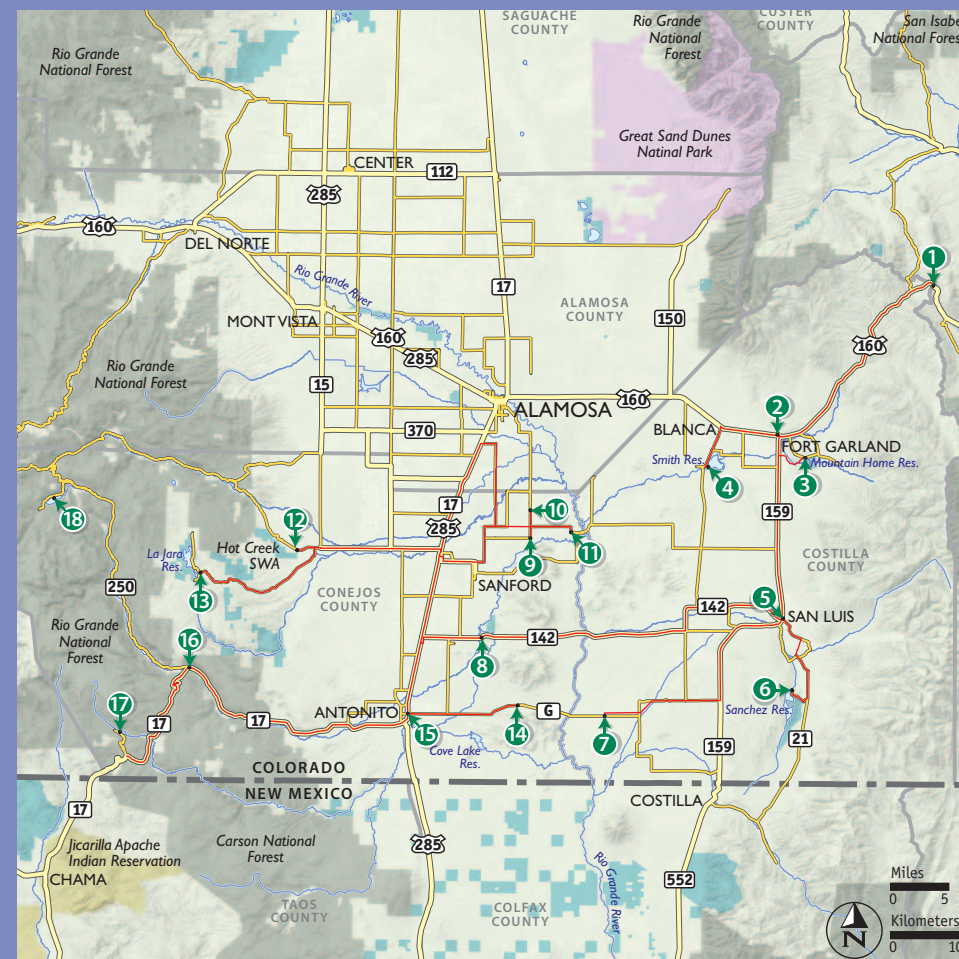




Blanca Trail

In The Shadow Of The Sacred Peak

Blanca Peak was known to the Navajo as the sacred peak of the East, one of the four holy mountains that bounded and guarded their nation. As you travel this ancient path through the high desert, you will rarely be out of sight of it. In Blanca's shadow, on the floor of the San Luis Valley, you'll find miles and miles of high desert shrublands, home to Sage and Brewer's Sparrows, jackrabbits, and wildflowers. Mixed in with the dry is the wet: flooded fields, playa lakes, and reedbeds, the natural habitat of stilts, avocets, ibises, and ducks. Where cottonwoods and willows line the water's edge, you might find the endangered western populations of Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Willow Flycatcher. If you scare an animal off the road, it could be a badger or a bear. This trail will reward even a short visit, but if you've got more time to spend, you'll find few better places to invest it.



Sites on the Blanca Trail

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. La Veta Pass area | 10. Small pond along CR 24 |
| 2. Blanca and Fort Garland | 11. Pond along CR Z near Costilla County line |
| 3. Mountain Home Reservoir State Wildlife Area | 12. Hot Creek State Wildlife Area |
| 4. Smith Reservoir State Wildlife Area | 13. La Jara Reservoir State Wildlife Area |
| 5. San Luis | 14. San Luis Hills |
| 6. Sanchez Reservoir State Wildlife Area | 15. Antonito area |
| 7. Costilla CR G | 16. Conejos Canyon |
| 8. Segos Springs State Wildlife Area | 17. Trujillo Meadows State Wildlife Area |
| 9. Pike's Stockade | 18. Platoro Reservoir |



1. La Veta Pass area

Description:

La Veta Pass, North La Veta Pass and Pass Creek Pass provide the only road-accessible montane habitat in Costilla County. Look for typical montane woodland species such as Hermit Thrush, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Dusky Flycatcher, etc. The aspen mixed into the forest here looks of sufficient quality to host Flammulated and Northern Saw-whet Owls.

Directions:

From Walsenburg, head west 25 miles on US 160 to the pass area. To get to Pass Creek Pass, continue west on US 160 from North La Veta Pass about 2 miles to CR 29 and turn right (north).

Access:

Open all year

2. Blanca and Fort Garland

Description:

Birding in the small towns of Blanca and Fort Garland may be worth the effort, especially if you can find some feeders. Roadside birding along US 160, the main route through the county, can be surprisingly productive. In the evening or early morning look for Great Horned Owl; Northern Shrike is seen surprisingly often in the winter.

Directions:

Blanca and Fort Garland are 4 miles apart on US 160 between Walsenburg and Alamosa.

Access:

Open all year



3. Mountain Home Reservoir State Wildlife Area

Description:

A small reservoir surrounded by pinyon-juniper covered hills, this lake is typically not the most productive but sometimes hosts decent numbers of ducks, gulls, and the occasional loon. Keep an eye out for the species typical of pinyon-juniper habitat, including Pinyon Jay.

Directions:

From Fort Garland, head east on US 160 about 2 miles. Turn right (south) onto Trinchera Ranch Road. Continue about 2 miles south to Icehouse Road. Head a mile west to the north entrance, or a mile south to the south entrance.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk



4. Smith Reservoir State Wildlife Area

Description:

Nearly every species of waterfowl that occurs in the state has been seen here. When the water level is low enough, the shorebirds can be out of this world. Terns and gulls of varying species can also be seen - keep an eye out especially for Black Tern, which breeds in the valley.

Directions:

From US 160 on the west end of Blanca, head south on CR 12 (Airport Road) approximately 3 miles to the State Wildlife Area on the left.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk



5. San Luis

Description:

This small, somewhat rustic town is the oldest continually inhabited place in Colorado, founded in 1851, when this area was still part of Mexico. Drive around town looking for city birds and feeders. As many as four species of hummingbirds are possible in the late summer/early fall. The small wastewater ponds south of town sometimes have a few ducks.

Directions:

From US 160 in the town of Fort Garland, head south on CO 159 about 15 miles to San Luis.

Access:

Open all year



6. Sanchez Reservoir State Wildlife Area

Description:

Sanchez Reservoir is among the most productive in Colorado. Most birds are usually on the north end. Look for just about any regular duck species during migration, shorebirds when the water level is sufficiently low, gulls and sometimes loons and grebes. Check nearby riparian areas for passerines, and the sage flats for Sage Sparrow and Sage Thrasher.

Directions:

From the intersection of CO 159 and CO 142 in San Luis, head east on the continuation of CO 142 (CR P.6) about 3 miles to CR 21 and turn right (south). From here it is about 5 miles south to the SWA.

Access:

Open all year



7. Costilla CR G

Description:

Sage Sparrow is downright common in this area, as is Sage Thrasher. A few Mountain Plovers breed in the area, though they can be rather hard to find. This road crosses the Rio Grande River on the historic Lobato Bridge, built in 1892 and, thankfully, restored in 2006.

Directions:

From CO 159 about 10 miles south of San Luis, head west on CR H. At 7 miles, turn left (south) on CR 7. You can then turn right (west) on CR G in a little over a mile.

Access:

Open all year

8. Sego Springs State Wildlife Area

Description:

An oasis of riparian woodland and ponds, mixed with some excellent sage habitat and small cattail marshes. During fall migration keep an eye out for passerine migrants in the cottonwoods, Marsh Wren and rails in the marsh, various duck species in the ponds, and Sage Sparrows in the sage along the entrance road. During the winter, sparrows and Northern Shrike are possible.

Directions:

From CO 142 and US 285 south of La Jara, go east 6.5 miles on CO 142 through Manassa, over a river crossing and past the point where the route bends slightly north to a small dirt road on the left. Follow this road about 3/4 mile, staying right, until you reach a small parking lot overlooking two small ponds.

Access:

July 16 to Feb 14



9. Pike's Stockade

Description:

The entrance road behind the gate happens to pass through a remarkable willow swamp that has a good population of Southwest Willow Flycatchers, and the riparian forest that abuts the state property is fantastic. Everything off the state property is off-limits, but this is a must-stop visit for birders in summer. Mosquitoes can be abundant so bring repellent.

Directions:

From La Jara, head east on CO 136, to and through the nearby town of Sanford. A mile east of Sanford on CR V, turn left (north) onto CR 21, go north 3

miles and turn right (east) onto CR Y. In 3 miles CR Y ends in a T intersection with CR 24. Pike's Stockade is on the left (south).

Access:

Summer, dawn to dusk



10. Small pond along CR 24

Description:

When it has water, this small intermittent pond can be among the best in the San Luis Valley, with good concentrations of dabblers, divers and shorebirds, as well as the occasional American Bittern. The land here is private, so bird from the road.

Directions:

From the intersection of the Conejos/Alamosa county line and US route 285, go east on Alamosa CR 15 S/Conejos CR CC for 6 miles to Conejos CR 24. Take a right on CR 24 and go 1.5 miles to the pond, on the left.

Access:

Open all year

11. Pond along CR Z near Costilla County line

Description:

Though hard to see from the road, this pond should be checked for waders, ducks and dabblers. White-faced Ibis have been seen here. In normal springs and wet summers the fields all along this road can flood, creating great habitat for ducks, waders, phalaropes and the like. The land around here is private, so please stay on the roads.

Directions:

From the intersection of the Conejos/Alamosa county line and US 285, go east on Alamosa CR 15 S/Conejos CR CC for 6 miles to Conejos CR 24. Turn right on CR 24, Turn right on CR Z and follow for 3.5 miles to where it bends south, continue another 1/2 mile to where it bends back east. The pond is just NE of this point.

Access:

Open all year

12. Hot Creek State Wildlife Area

Description:

This remote State Wildlife Area has an enormous spring system with extensive marshy areas that are good for rails, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Savannah Sparrow and other species typical of this habitat. Pinyon Jays can usually be found in the surrounding pinyon-juniper forest. The road in requires high clearance, mostly due to a stream crossing with 2-3



feet of water.

Directions:

From the junction of US 285 and CO 15, about 13 miles south of Alamosa, turn right (west) onto CO 15 and travel for 10.5 miles. Turn left onto FR 255. Go 2.8 miles and take a left onto an unmarked rough road. A parking lot is visible .3 miles in at the property boundary. The best habitat is from one to two miles in.

Access:

Open May 1 to Nov. 30



13. La Jara Reservoir State Wildlife Area

Description:

Depending on the water level, you could see a large variety of waterbirds, or nearly nothing. Check for dabblers and divers, and possibly shorebirds during migration. The entrance road could yield Pinyon Jay, Gray Flycatcher, Bushtit, and Black-throated Gray Warbler in the pinyon-juniper habitat and Pygmy Nuthatch, Red Crossbill and sapsuckers in the mixed ponderosa/aspen forest.

Directions:

From the junction of US 285 and CO 15, south of Alamosa, turn right (west) onto CO 15 and travel for 10.5 miles. Turn left (west) onto FR 255. Turn left (south) onto FR 240. Follow FR 240 for 12 miles and take a left (west) onto FR 259. Follow FR 259 for a mile to the reservoir.

Access:

Open all year



14. San Luis Hills

Description:

The main draw of the San Luis Hills is Black-throated Sparrow, which can usually be found near the parking area and along the trail. Also keep an eye out for Bewick's Wren, Sage Sparrow, Virginia's Warbler, and pinyon-juniper species such as Pinyon Jay. This remote area supports populations of coyote, pronghorn, and black-tailed jackrabbit.

Directions:

From Antonito at the junction of Main Street and 8th Ave. travel east on G Road. At 9.7 miles, there is a cattle guard (grate) across the road. About 100 feet east of the cattle guard, there are two primitive jeep roads that head to the north. Take the east jeep road until you see the fence and entrance to John James Canyon.

Access:

Open all year



15. Antonito area

Description:

A good place to base yourself when birding the southern valley. The roads nearby (especially to the east) can be good for raptors and shrikes. Tiny Conejos to the north hosts not only the county seat but also Colorado's oldest church, completed in 1866 and a sight worth seeing. Bird wetter areas from the road in most any direction.

Directions:

Antonito is along US 285 about 5 miles north of the New Mexico border. The best raptor roads include CR G and offshoots within the first 5 miles east of Antonito.

Access:

Open all year



16. Conejos Canyon

Description:

The Mogote Recreation Area at the entrance to the canyon is a good place to access various habitats: ponderosa pines around the campground, pinyon-juniper woodland on the south-facing slope across the highway, and mid-elevation riparian woods along the stream. Look for typical ponderosa birds as well as dipper and riparian species. Many mammals utilize the area as well.

Directions:

From Antonito, take CO 17 west. CO 17 passes through Upper Conejos Canyon starting at FR 250. The Mogote Recreation Area is about 12 miles west of Antonito on the south side of CO 17.

Access:

Open all year



17. Trujillo Meadows State Wildlife Area

Description:

The large wet meadow adjacent to CO 17 near Cumbres Pass can be good for willow specialists such as Fox and Lincoln's Sparrows and Wilson's Warblers. Pine Grosbeaks permeate the surrounding trees. The spruce-fir forest along the road to the lake is good for high mountain specialties. The lake may have diving ducks including Lesser Scaup,

Ring-necked Duck and Common Merganser.

Directions:

From Antonito, travel 35 miles on CO 17 to Cumbres Pass and turn right (north) onto FR 118. Follow 2 miles to the reservoir boat ramp, which is the best place to scan the lake.

Access:

Roads not maintained in winter



18. Platoro Reservoir

Description:

Although you are not likely to see many birds on Platoro Reservoir itself, the surrounding forest can be good for high-elevation species. The best spruce-fir woodland in the area is along FR 380 north of the reservoir; Boreal Owl occurs in the area. Day or night, you might have to wait for herds of elk to cross the road in front of you from one meadow to the next. Although Platoro Reservoir itself has no facilities, there are several lodges with cabins, restaurants, and general stores nearby.

Directions:

From Antonito, travel 22.5 miles west on State Route 17 to FR 250. Take a right onto FR 250 and follow it for 24 miles to FR 247. Go left onto FR 247. A smaller lake is .4 miles along FR 247, and the actual reservoir starts at .6 miles from FR 250.

Access:

Roads not maintained in winter



Did You KNOW?

Looking For Migrants? Chickadees



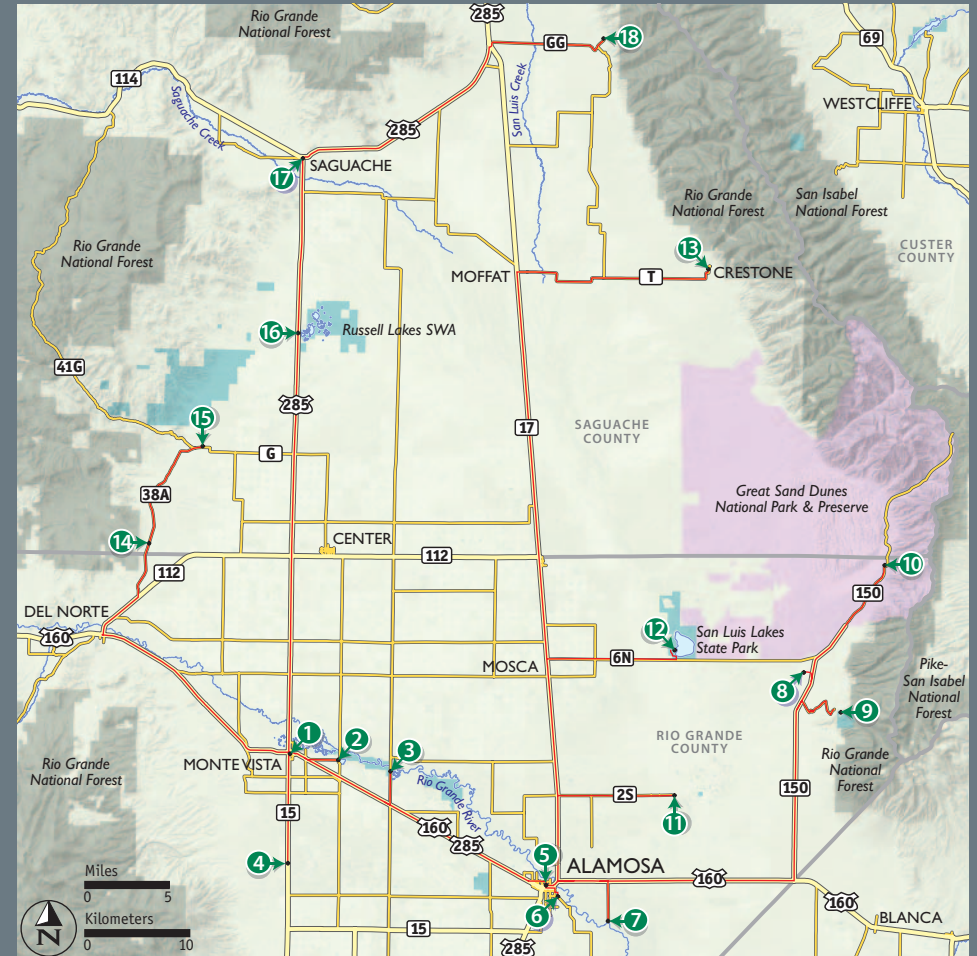
Many of the best places for witnessing migration are along coastlines and bluffs. Watch for hawks and other birds that ride on thermal air currents. Warblers, thrushes and other songbirds that cover long distances by night are more likely to be down in the vegetation feeding and resting. You can often find them by listening for chickadees, because when warblers and vireos are passing through an unfamiliar area anywhere in North America, chickadees allow them to join their feeding flocks. Chickadees, year round residents with a varied diet, know where the best food is and where predators are most likely to be lurking.

From The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's "The Bird Watching Answer Book" by Laura Erickson. Used with permission of Storey Publishing, LLC.

Sandhill Crane Trail

A Land of Natural Spectacles

The northern San Luis Valley is a land of natural spectacles. Some are aerial, like the talon-locking tumble of a pair of Golden Eagles in mid-air courtship, or the high-flying spirals of a flock of Black Swifts above a canyon cascade at dusk. Some are auditory: the gurgling trumpet of thousands of Sandhill Cranes wheeling in spring flocks over the Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge, or the air-gulping, head-tossing display of an American Bittern suspended in golden reeds at sunset. And some are famously sublime, like the luminous landscape of the Great Sand Dunes, so bright and unexpected that from a distance it doesn't look real. You'll find plenty to marvel at if you travel this trail at any time of year.



Sites on the Sandhill Crane Trail

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Monte Vista | 10. Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve |
| 2. Home Lake State Wildlife Area | 11. Blanca Wetlands |
| 3. Rio Grande State Wildlife Area | 12. San Luis Lakes |
| 4. Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge | 13. Crestone area |
| 5. Alamosa | 14. Elephant Rocks |
| 6. South River Road (CR S-112) | 15. La Garita area |
| 7. Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge | 16. Russell Lakes State Wildlife Area |
| 8. Medano-Zapata Ranch | 17. Saguache |
| 9. Zapata Falls | 18. Orient Mine |



1. Monte Vista

Description:

Monte Vista is a good-sized town with all the amenities. Birders might want to cruise the neighborhood streets looking for feeders, which can attract finches including Evening Grosbeaks and Cassin's Finches. The cemetery just west of town has many mature evergreens where you might find warblers in migration, crossbills in winter, and Great Horned Owls at any season.

Directions:

Monte Vista is along US 160 at its junction with US 285. The cemetery is just west of town on the north side of US 160.

Access:

Open all year



2. Home Lake State Wildlife Area

Description:

This is a good place to look for waterfowl. In addition to all the common duck species, this lake has hosted surprises including Eurasian Wigeon and Tundra Swan. In migration, the trees around the lake can attract migrant warblers, flycatchers, vireos, grosbeaks, and the like. In winter, the lake and surrounding cottonwoods host both Golden and Bald Eagles.

Directions:

East of downtown Monte Vista on US 160, turn north (right) on CR 3E. Home Lake is about 1 mile.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk



3. Rio Grande State Wildlife Area

Description:

As you might expect, the Rio Grande flows through this 940-acre state wildlife area, and the riparian trees and brush along the river support many birds in the breeding season and many more in migration. Look for Bald Eagles, especially in the colder months. Some wetlands south of the river can have herons and ducks. Mule deer are fairly common.

Directions:

From east Monte Vista on US 160, turn right (north) on County Line Road (Rio Grande CR 6E/Alamosa CR S-100). There are a total of six parking area entrances to this wildlife area, both along CR 6E and near Home Lake State Wildlife Area off of CR 3E.

Access:

Open all year, sometimes closed in nesting season



4. Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge

Description:

Sandhill Crane migrate through the San Luis Valley each spring and fall, and a large percentage of those birds spend much of their time in and around the Refuge. Crane sightings are virtually guaranteed in spring and fall. On the wildlife auto tour you might see birds from Buffleheads to bitterns and wildlife from elk to badger to muskrat.

Directions:

Take CO 15 south from Monte Vista to the Refuge auto tour route on the east (signed). Also drive CR 8S along the Refuge's southern border, CR 3E on the east, and other county roads in the area.

Access:

Open all year



5. Alamosa

Description:

Alamosa is a good base for your visit to the area. The best birding is along the riverwalk that follows the Rio Grande through town. Look over the water for Barn, Cliff, Tree, and Bank Swallows, and in areas of cattails for Pied-billed Grebe, Sora, Yellow-headed Blackbird, and Great-tailed Grackle.

Directions:

Alamosa is located at the junctions of US 160, US 285 and CO 17.

Access:

Open all year



6. South River Road (CR S-112)

Description:

This road heads south from Alamosa through wet meadows and fields that can produce large numbers of wetlands birds, especially in spring. Look for waterfowl, Wilson's Snipe, White-faced Ibis, and American Bittern. Deer and occasionally pronghorn, feed in some of the fields. If you stop, be careful to do so in a place where you can pull entirely off the road.

Directions:

From US 160 and State Avenue in downtown Alamosa, head south on State Avenue 5 blocks. Turn left

(east) on 10th Street. Follow 10th 5 blocks and turn right (south) on Old Airport Road. Stay left to follow South River Road out of town.

Access:

Open all year, best viewing in spring

7. Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge

Description:

The auto-tour loop provides some of the best and most extensive cattail marshes in Colorado. Birds found here include Sora, Virginia Rail, American Bittern, Great-tailed Grackle, and Marsh Wren (abundant). CR S-116, which runs north-south along the east side of the Refuge, can provide some excellent birding opportunities as well, especially for those willing to scan distant ponds with a spotting scope.

Directions:

From Alamosa, head east on US 160 2.9 miles to El Rancho Lane (CR S-113) and turn right (south). The NWR visitor center is 2.3 miles south on El Rancho Lane.

Access:

Open all year



8. Medano-Zapata Ranch

Description:

This Nature Conservancy preserve offers a one-mile trail through cottonwoods and wetland habitats that is open to visitors March to October. Other parts of the enormous property can be visited by joining a guided ranch tour. The nature trail leads through a very pleasant park-like woodland where you are quite likely to find breeding Black-headed Grosbeaks, Bullock's Orioles, and Western Tanagers.

Directions:

From US 160 go 14 miles east of Alamosa, turn north on CO 150 and proceed about 12 miles north to the ranch entrance on the left (west).

Access:

Nature trail open Mar - Oct; other visits may be possible by appointment



9. Zapata Falls

Description:

It is a moderate half-mile hike to Zapata Falls, home to a sizeable nesting colony of Black Swifts, although you need luck to see them zooming into and out of the nest sites at dawn and dusk. American Dippers are easily seen near the falls. The trail to the falls runs

through excellent pinyon-juniper woodlands.

Directions:

From Alamosa, travel east on US 160 for 14 miles. Turn north on CO 150 and proceed about 11 miles. Turn right (east) on the road signed for Zapata Falls. The steeply winding gravel road rises about 3.5 miles to the parking lot for the falls.

Access:

Open all year, dawn to dusk



10. Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve

Description:

The park and preserve stretches from the saltbush deserts of the valley floor to alpine tundra above treeline; the biodiversity is tremendous. Habitats include grassland, semidesert shrubland, pinyon-juniper woodland, deciduous riparian woodland, and mixed-conifer woodland—all easily accessible from the main roads and trails! Almost any mountain bird species can probably be found somewhere in the park.

Directions:

From Alamosa travel east on US 160 14 miles. Turn north on CO 150 and proceed about 16 miles north to the park entrance.

Access:

Open all year



11. Blanca Wetlands

Description:

Blanca Wetlands is a premier birding site. In late summer, you should still be able to find some of the Snowy Plovers that nest here -- one of their strongholds in Colorado. Almost every other wetland bird from the area can be found here, from bitterns to harriers. A BLM map is recommended. Blanca is closed February 15 through July 15.

Directions:

From the intersection of US 160 and CO 17 in Alamosa, head 5 miles north on CO 17 and turn right (east) on CR 2S. Proceed 7 miles east to the entrance gate.

Access:

Open July 16 to Feb 14





12. San Luis Lakes

Description:

San Luis Lakes State Park can be a mecca for shorebirds, gulls, and ducks in spring and fall. Through the state park, past the campground, is the gate to San Luis Lakes State Wildlife Area. These smaller ponds can be great for waterbirds of all kinds. The SWA is closed during spring and summer to protect nests.

Directions:

From Alamosa, drive north on CO 17 until just north of the tiny town of Mosca. Turn right (east) onto Six Mile Lane (CR 6N). The entrance to the park is in about 8 miles on the left (north).

Access:

Open all year, campground closed in winter



13. Crestone area

Description:

The town of Crestone is covered in large cottonwoods, both dead and alive, and surrounded by pinyon-juniper woodlands on the east and wetlands on the west. The result is a town full of birds, from woodpeckers (including Lewis's) to Pinyon Jays and Broad-tailed and Black-chinned Hummingbirds. The wetlands along the entrance road to town provide breeding places for Black-crowned Night-heron.

Directions:

From Alamosa, travel north on CO 17. At the tiny town of Moffat, head east on CRT about 13 miles to the town of Crestone. The main road that zig zags north and west through town will take you to the campground.

Access:

Open all year, weather permitting; some roads are closed in winter



14. Elephant Rocks

Description:

This fascinating area is full of amazing scenery as well as great pinyon-juniper and shrubland birds. It is good for Rock Wren, Green-tailed Towhee, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Bushtit and Pinyon Jay, and Cassin's Kingbird (a rare bird in the San Luis Valley) has been seen here too. Poorwills call from the rocks at night.

Directions:

From the intersection of US 160 and CO 112 in the center of Del Norte, head north on CO 112 about 3 miles and turn left (north) on Rio Grande CR 33. The Elephant Rocks begin almost immediately to the west

of this road.

Access:

Roads not maintained in winter



15. La Garita area

Description:

Heading west from La Garita about twelve miles you will come to a fork in the road. To the left are Poso Campground, and Moon Pass. To the right are Storm King Campground and Carnero Pass. There are a nice mix of habitats along these routes. White-winged Crossbill has been seen near Moon Pass in summer.

Directions:

From Monte Vista head north on US 285 about 17.5 miles to Saguache CR G and turn left (west). You will reach the town of La Garita in about 5 miles. To get to the areas described just keep heading west through town.

Access:

Open all year; higher roads not maintained in winter



16. Russell Lakes State Wildlife Area

Description:

The Johnson Lake nature trail along US 285 includes a boardwalk with good views of ponds and wet meadows. In the colder months, the ponds can be full of ducks of many species. In the breeding season, the area is full of Cinnamon Teal, Western and Clark's Grebes, American Bittern, Sora, Virginia Rail, White-faced Ibis, Marsh Wren, Common Yellowthroat and Savannah Sparrow.

Directions:

From the town of Saguache, go 9 miles south on US 285 to the beginning of the State Wildlife Area. The SWA stretches along the east side of US 285.

Access:

Johnson Lake trail always open; the rest is open from July 16 to Feb 14



17. Saguache

Description:

The trees in Saguache can host migrant birds. Cruising the neighborhoods in search of feeders could result in sightings of Evening Grosbeaks, Cassin's Finches, or goldfinches, especially in winter. The wet meadows along the highway south of town should

be scanned for Wilson's Snipe, ducks, and Great-tailed Grackle.

Directions:

Saguache is along US 285, 38 miles south of Poncha Springs and 37 miles north of Monte Vista.

Access:

Open all year



18. Orient Mine

Description:

The Orient Mine near Valley View Hot Springs is home to a summer colony of an estimated 250,000 Mexican free-tailed bats, which stage an impressive out-flight from the mine entrance every evening. You are likely to hear poorwills and Canyon Wrens calling during the bats' daily exodus. A moderate 1.5-mile hike to the bat cave takes about an hour.

Directions:

Valley View Hot Springs and the Orient Mine is located 4 1/2 miles south of Villa Grove and 7 miles east of the junction of U.S. Highway 285 and Colorado Highway 17 on Saguache County Road GG, a 7-mile-long gravel road.

Access:

Summer



Did You KNOW?

Bad-Tasting Medicine American pipit



Some strong tastes elicit interesting responses in birds. Items not good to eat may be good for other uses. Many birds engage in "anting." Ant bodies are covered with a bitter chemical called formic acid, which may afford birds some protection from mites and lice. One European researcher studying a population of pipits that were suffering from a heavy infestation of feather mites learned that mites on birds that had been anting suffered much higher mortality than the mites on non-anting birds. People have reported birds anting with other items, including mothballs, cigarette butts and onions.

From The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's "The Bird Watching Answer Book" by Laura Erickson. Used with permission of Storey Publishing, LLC.

Colorado's Scenic Byways Unaweep/Tabeguache

Unaweep Canyon knifes through the soft red sandstone of the Uncompahgre Plateau all the way to Precambrian times. Ancient rivers silted the rock away, exposing hundreds of millions of years of the geologic record. Other secrets of the earth were ferreted out by miners with picks and shovels. The canyon witnessed a copper boom around the turn of the century; decades later, the U.S. Army processed ore from nearby Uravan to produce the uranium used in the first atomic bombs.

The Tabeguache section runs south from Gateway to Nucla and Naturita, cutting a dramatic path through sandstone, sometimes 100's of feet above the river. Here you'll find remnants of the world famous Hanging Flume, which delivered 23 million gallons of water per day to operate the hydraulic mining equipment at the Bancroft Placer site.

The Lone Cone section, from Naturita to Placerville, travels atop the wind-swept Write Mesa before dropping down to meet the San Miguel River. The San Miguel is one of the few remaining naturally functioning rivers in the West. As you head south, you can't miss the prominent peak of Lone Cone. A now extinct volcano, Lone Cone is a wondrous recreation and ranching area.

Wildlife abounds in this little traveled region. Watch for eagles, deer, coyote and desert bighorn sheep. The streams and rivers are home to rainbow and brown trout and countless aquatic insects. Above all, this ageless desert region offers sheer scenic wonder - striated cliffs towering a thousand feet overhead, raging streams, and boundless skies.

Length: 133 miles. Driving time: 3 hours



Understanding the signs and routes along the Colorado Birding Trail

As you travel the backroads and byways of the Colorado Birding Trail, watch for the brown on white Birding Trail Logo on the site ID signs. These signs will help you locate the public birding trail sites all along the trail. Some private sites may have ID signs to assist you in locating them, but some will require you to call prior to visiting to get directions from the landowner.

Additionally, Colorado Birding Trail Interpretive Kiosks and signs will be located along some of the trails as you travel through the state. These large, full color signs will provide roadside information to assist you in selecting trails and sites to visit along your route. Look for them at Colorado Welcome Centers, National Parks sites and other locations along the Colorado Birding Trail.

Look for the brown binocular signs that designate other great wildlife viewing areas along our roadsides.

If you are traveling on one of Colorado's 24 Scenic and Historic Byways, you will be following the blue "Columbine" signs that designate our state Byways. These Byways promise interesting heritage, culture, and historic sites throughout the state, as well as some of our most scenic driving routes. Visit www.coloradobyways.org for more information.

Colorado Division of Wildlife Service Centers www.wildlife.state.co.us

Northeast Region
303-291-7227
6060 Broadway
Denver, 80216

Northwest Region
970-255-6100
711 Independent Ave
Grand Junction, 81501

Southeast Region
719-227-5200
4255 Sinton Rd.
Colorado Springs, 80907

Southwest Region
970-247-0855
415 Turner Drive
Durango, 81301

Brush: 970-842-6300
Fort Collins: 970-472-4300
Glenwood Springs: 970-947-2920
Gunnison: 970-641-7060
Hot Sulphur Springs: 970-725-6200
Lamar: 719-336-6600

Meeker: 970-878-6090
Monte Vista: 719-587-6900
Montrose: 970-252-6000
Pueblo: 719-561-5300
Salida: 719-530-5520
Steamboat Springs: 970-870-2197



www.wildlife.state.co.us

The Colorado Division of Wildlife is the state agency responsible for protecting and managing wildlife and habitat, and providing wildlife related recreation. The Division is funded by hunting and fishing license fees, federal grants, and Colorado Lottery proceeds through Great Outdoors Colorado.