

# **SOUTHWEST COLORADO**

## **Birding the Mesa Verde Country**

**May 9-16, 2026**

*A birding tour organized by Seven Ponds Nature Center and Rocky Mountain Birding*

Colorado is a state of great scenic beauty and geographic diversity throughout. For this tour, we will be exploring the vast Mesa Verde Country of the southwest part of the state. This region is known for beautiful landscapes, rich history, cultural heritage, and an abundance of outdoor activities, and may be the best place in the state to experience a true natural quiet. We will be on the hunt for the unique birds that call this amazing region home.



**Join us for a small group trip to scenic southwest Colorado.  
Come for the birds, enjoy the vistas!**

## **TOUR ITINERARY**

Our daily activities will be flexible based on species we've seen to date and recent bird reports, but the following daily outline provides a preliminary plan of how we will spend our days. Our plans are subject to change based on weather conditions and road closures. Note: the birds listed are not intended to be an exhaustive list – just a sampling of what may be found at each location.

**DAY 1 – Saturday, May 9 – Arrival in Durango, transfer to Cortez.** Plan your arrival at the Durango Airport (DRO) by 2:00 PM. We'll drive an hour west to Cortez, our home for the next two nights, and enjoy our first dinner together. *Night in Cortez.*



trail in the Morefield Campground that climbs to the top of the mesa (about 0.5 miles each way). After lunch, we'll do some local birding in a location where there are Petroglyphs. If there is time, we may visit Canyons of the Ancients National Monument. *Night in Cortez.*

**DAY 2 – Sunday, May 10 – Mesa Verde National Park.** After a quick breakfast, we'll load the vans for the short drive to Mesa Verde National Park. Some of our targets here include White-throated Swift, Gray Flycatcher, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Canyon Wren, Bewick's Wren, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Virginia's and Black-throated Gray warblers. We'll bird along the Point Lookout



**DAY 3 – Monday, May 11 – Lucy's Warbler.** This morning we'll visit Yellowjacket Canyon, famed for its resident population of breeding Lucy's Warblers. We'll keep our eyes and ears open for Gambel's Quail, Bushtit, Lesser Goldfinch, Black-throated Sparrow, MacGillivray's Warbler, and Blue Grosbeak, too. After lunch, we'll drive north to Norwood for an early dinner so we can get some sleep ahead of an early alarm! *Night in Norwood.*

**DAY 4 – Tuesday, May 12 – Gunnison Sage-Grouse.**

Gunnison Sage-Grouse was once found in Arizona, New Mexico, and Oklahoma, but today is found only in southwest Colorado and one county in southeast Utah. Today there are fewer than 2,000 birds remaining in the wild, making this one of the most threatened species in North America. We will wake up before dawn to visit a lekking site at sunrise where we'll witness their elaborate courtship rituals with the males strutting and shaking their head plumes that also distinguish them from their larger cousins -- Greater Sage-Grouse. The lek is on private land, but we should have good scope views. We'll return to Norwood for breakfast and check out of our lodge, then make our way to Montrose. Along the way we'll stop to bird several locations, including Ridgway State Park. *Night in Montrose.*







**DAY 5 – Wednesday, May 13 – Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.** The campground outside the South Rim entrance can be birdy. We'll make a quick stop there to see what's around, then enter the national park where the canyon views will take your breath away. White-throated Swifts are often buzzing about and we'll keep our eyes out for an early Black Swift among them. Dusky Flycatcher, Plumbeous Vireo, Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Violet-Green Swallow, both Rock and Canyon wren, Mountain Bluebird, and a variety of warblers like Orange-crowned, Virginia's, MacGillivray's, Audubon's Yellow-rumped, and Black-throated Gray are all possible. *Night in Montrose.*

**DAY 6 – Thursday, May 14 – Uncompahgre National Forest.** We'll make a few stops along Highway 90 to look for Gray Vireo and Sagebrush Sparrow in the morning. Then we'll explore Silesca Pond and the spruce/fir forest near Iron Springs Campground. Sims Mesa and Sandborn Park will often have Grace's Warbler. *Night in Montrose.*



**DAY 7 – Friday, May 15 – Back to Durango.** We will bird our way back to Durango, making stops at hotspots along the way in hopes of picking up some missing targets or adding birds to our trip list. *Night in Durango.*



**DAY 8 – Saturday, May 16 – Departure from Durango.** Plan your departure for anytime today. Enjoy breakfast at the hotel and take the hotel shuttle to the airport to catch your flight. Hotel checkout is 11:00 AM.



## TOUR LEADERS



**Peter Burke** is a lifelong birder raised in central New Jersey. Currently based in Boulder, Colorado, he is editor of *Colorado Birds* and a long-serving board member of Colorado Field Ornithologists. Peter is the owner and lead guide for **Rocky Mountain Birding**, leading customized birding adventures to domestic and international destinations. In 2019 he formed a partnership with a Quito-based birding tour company to help indigenous Ecuadorian communities participate in, and benefit from, ecotourism on their lands. An accomplished photographer, Peter's images have been published in numerous magazines and field guides including *Birding*, *The Peterson Field Guide of Bird Sounds in Western North America*, *Cotingas and Manakins* and a forthcoming Field Identification app. Peter guided the Seven Ponds birding field tour to South Dakota in 2024.

**Daryl Bernard** is a long-time birder and amateur naturalist who loves being outdoors and embraces every opportunity to share nature with others. He enjoys organizing and leading trips and tours and strives to ensure that every participant has a thoroughly memorable experience. Daryl has organized and led numerous birding field tours throughout North America, many local birding trips in Michigan, and bird walks for Seven Ponds as well as birding festivals. Daryl is the Birding Field Tour Leader for Seven Ponds Nature Center in southeast Michigan.



## ACCOMMODATIONS

Lodging for this tour will be in a few different locations:

- Cortez
- Norwood
- Montrose
- Durango

## LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

We will travel in a single 15-passenger van. Keeping the group together in one van allows everybody to get on the same birds while on the road and develops group camaraderie. Since we will be packing up a few times throughout the tour, we ask that you travel as lightly as is practical, as this will help maximize space in the van.

## FEE and REGISTRATION INFORMATION

- Tour Fee: \$2750 per person in double occupancy from Durango, Colorado
- Single Supplement: \$500 (upon request, subject to availability)
- Deposit: \$300 (due at registration)
- Final Payment Due: April 1, 2026
- Small group size is limited to **8 individuals** and early registration is encouraged



### **WHAT THE TOUR FEE INCLUDES:**

- expert guide service – Peter will be with us every step of the way
- hotel accommodations for seven nights
- all meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 8 of the tour
- ground transportation in a single 15-passenger van
- all park entrance fees, parking fees, bridge tolls, highway tolls
- pre-tour information and a post-tour trip report
- eBird checklist sharing (for those using eBird)

### **WHAT THE TOUR FEE DOES NOT INCLUDE:**

- Your airfare to and from Durango
- Alcoholic beverages
- Laundry
- Other items of a personal nature
- Gratuity for birding guide services (optional)

**ONLINE REGISTRATION WILL OPEN FOR SEVEN PONDS MEMBERS ON  
TUESDAY, JANUARY 6, 2026 at 9:00 AM**

**ONLINE REGISTRATION WILL OPEN FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC ON  
TUESDAY, JANUARY 13, 2026 at 9:00 AM (if space remains)**

Registration for this tour will take place online at [www.sevenponds.org](http://www.sevenponds.org) with a \$300 deposit due at the time of registration. At the Seven Ponds home page, go to Programs then Seven Ponds Field Tours and select the Southwest Colorado Birding Field Tour registration button. Upon successfully completing your online registration you should receive an email confirmation immediately. Participants will be sent a registration form to complete and return.

For more information, contact  
Daryl Bernard at  
989-513-5195 (cell)  
or via e-mail at  
[dbernard@sevenponds.org](mailto:dbernard@sevenponds.org)

