



Sage Grouse

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FACT SHEET: About Sage Grouse

Scientific and Common Names:

Centrocercus urophasianus- Greater Sage Grouse

Centrocercus minimus- Gunnison Sage Grouse

Note: in 2000 the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) agreed that two species of Sage grouse exist, the newly discovered "Gunnison" Sage Grouse of southern Colorado and Utah, and the "Greater" Sage Grouse found elsewhere. However many experts continue to advocate the latter species being named the "Northern" Sage Grouse, so in current literature you'll see "Greater" and "Northern" used interchangeably to identify the same species.



(Photo: W. Steve Sherman) Sage grouse.

Habitat:

Found on prairies and mountain foothills from southern Saskatchewan to southern Colorado, primarily in areas dominated by sagebrush (*Artemisia spp.*), forbs, and grasses, in habitat known as "sage-steppe."

Diet:

Herbivorous and insectivorous: chicks eat primarily insects and forbs (small flowering plants), while adults eat sagebrush during winter and forbs during other seasons. Unlike many other birds, Sage grouse are not adapted to digest seeds, so do not eat or benefit from wheat, corn, or other agricultural grains. They will however eat alfalfa, dandelion, and other introduced forbs.

Description:

The Greater Sage Grouse is North America's largest grouse, with males weighing up to 8 pounds. A striking brown, black and white bird, with sharply pointed tail feathers. Males have large mustard-colored throat sacs that are inflated with air during mating displays, surrounded by a collar of bright white feathers. Females are a mottled brown color, perfectly camouflaged for sage grasslands. The Gunnison Sage Grouse is about 25 percent smaller, with slightly different plumage and distinctly different courtship displays and calls.

Profile:

There are two species of Sage grouse, the newly recognized Gunnison Sage Grouse of Colorado and Utah, and the Greater Sage Grouse found in parts of eleven western states: California, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado and Utah. In 2000 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designated the Gunnison Sage Grouse as a "candidate" for the Endangered Species list, having disappeared from most of its historic habitat. The Greater Sage Grouse has also experienced significant range and population reductions in many areas.

Facts:

Sage grouse gather to breed at "leks," traditional locations where several males display to visiting females during ornate and competitive springtime mating rituals. After mating, females nest and raise up to a dozen precocious chicks without further help from the male.

Sage grouse reproduce slowly for an upland bird, often not breeding until they are two years old, and seldom reneesting the same year if they lose eggs or chicks to predators or bad weather.

Some populations of Sage grouse are migratory, flying and walking 100 miles or more between breeding and wintering grounds.

Sage grouse are sage-steppe grassland "obligates," nesting under sagebrush, surviving the winter eating almost nothing but sagebrush, and taking shelter from inclement weather and predators among old sage stands.

Managing sage-steppe grassland habitats to support sage grouse enhances the habitat of several other species including pronghorn antelope, mule deer, sage thrashers, sage sparrows, and pygmy rabbits that also depend heavily on sagebrush and associated grasses and forbs for forage and shelter.