

Colorado: Spring on the Prairies

with Naturalist Journeys



May 21 – 27, 2023

866.900.1146

520.558.1146

travel@naturalistjourneys.com

www.naturalistjourneys.com

or find us on Facebook & Instagram at
Naturalist Journeys, LLC



Join us on a NEW! Naturalist Journey's adventure, designed to help you find specialty species like Mountain Plover, Chestnut-collared Longspur, and Colorado's state bird, the Lark Bunting. Burrowing Owls can be found making a home in Prairie Dog towns and Pronghorn, the fastest mammals in America, still roam the landscape. Local reservoirs and riparian corridors along the South Platte and Republican rivers attract multitudes of shorebirds, waterfowl, and songbirds each spring—we will be there on time to greet them!

Guide Peter Burke lives in Boulder and regularly explores and photographs birds to depict the extensive vistas and unique birdlife of shortgrass prairies. He shares his passion for the prairie, perhaps the least explored areas for birding in Colorado. Imagine getting a sense of the American Great Plains which once extended uninterrupted from Canada to central Texas, a vast ocean of grasses that supported millions of Bison and teemed with other wildlife including many species of birds.

Colorado's prairie is far more varied than one imagines, and the snow-capped peaks of the Rockies are always in sight. Discover how differences in elevation, soil, rainfall, and topography affect the types of grasses, yucca, cacti, and trees that grow here and the creatures that inhabit each landscape.

Tour Highlights

- Experience the prairies in spring when birds and wildflowers abound!
- Explore northeastern Colorado's special shortgrass prairie preserves, unique sandhills, rivers and lakes
- Visit the Pawnee National Grassland, one of the largest remaining tracts of shortgrass prairie in America
- Learn how critical grassland habitats survive as part of the modern American West—in coexistence with cattle pastures, wind turbines, large-scale agriculture and other human encroachments
- Gaze off to the Rockies, headwaters for several reservoirs and lush riparian corridors along the South Platte and Republican rivers that attract multitudes of migrants
- Witness Thick-billed and Chestnut-collared Longspurs skylarking at dawn, and search for Upland Sandpiper, Dickcissel, Northern Bobwhite and other classic grassland species
- Visit a Greater Prairie Chicken lek to watch for males booming and displaying
- Bird along the South Platte River for migrating waterfowl and in a local park to see resident Mississippi Kite
- Experience dynamic songbird migration with both eastern and western species drawn to cottonwoods and reservoirs: Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Red-bellied and Red-headed Woodpeckers, Northern Cardinal, and more!
- Enjoy classic, highly rated local cuisine in comfortable settings—quintessential tastes of Colorado
- End with a celebratory dinner in trendy Boulder and a morning of birding the foothills
- **Travel Tip!** We end on the eve of a holiday weekend ... choose to stay on for some fun at your leisure

Tour Summary

6-Night/7-Day Colorado Prairies Tour w/Peter Burke

\$2590 DBL / \$3090 SGL, from Denver

Airport is Denver International Airport (DIA)

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Sun., May 21 Arrival in Denver, Colorado

Welcome to Colorado! Please plan to arrive at Denver International Airport (DIA) no later than 1:30 PM today. Our expert guides are at the airport to greet you. Relax from your flight and get to know your fellow travelers on the hour and a half drive to Fort Collins. Settle in to your comfortable hotel before dinner at one of Northern Colorado's favorite dining destinations.

Accommodations at La Quinta Inn by Wyndham, Fort Collins (D)

Mon., May 22 Pawnee National Grassland

Be ready and pack your bags for a very early departure and breakfast on the road, arriving on Pawnee National Grassland, one of the largest remaining tracts of shortgrass prairie in America, for a glowing sunrise. Witness Thick-billed and Chestnut-collared Longspurs skylarking as dawn breaks.

We spend the first few hours of daylight searching for shortgrass prairie specialties including Lark Bunting, Grasshopper Sparrow, Western Meadowlark, Horned Lark, Western Kingbird and the dainty Mountain Plover. Somehow this critical habitat survives in coexistence with cattle pastures, wind turbines, large-scale agriculture, and other human encroachments. You are here to witness the burst of spring—both birds and blooms as prairie wildflowers are in their prime.

Next, we visit a nearby migrant trap where both eastern and western songbirds can be found. After a relaxing picnic lunch, we visit Jackson Lake for an easy shoreline stroll while looking for shorebirds. The adjacent Andrik Ponds State Wildlife Area offers habitat where we search for rails and, if conditions are right, for displaying Bobolink.

Settle in to our hotel in Sterling for the next two nights, and enjoy dinner at a local well-regarded Mexican restaurant.

Accommodations at Holiday Inn Express or Best Western Sundowner, Sterling (B,L,D)

Tues., May 23 Prairie Chicken, Shorebirds & Migrants

It is worth getting up early once more to visit a nearby Greater Prairie Chicken lek. Once abundant, Greater Prairie Chicken are now found only on managed prairie land. These territorial birds do not migrate and this small corner of Colorado is one of the few places they can be found in the state. Although the spring lekking season is winding down, it's not uncommon for males to visit the lek first thing in the morning on the off chance that a female might arrive.

A short drive away, we bird Prewitt Reservoir for migrants where three species of oriole are possible as well as Red-bellied and Red-headed Woodpecker, Northern Cardinal, Brown Thrasher, and others.

Enjoy a nice lunch back in Sterling followed by a relaxing afternoon with a few stops to scope for migrating birds along the South Platte and a visit to Columbine Park to look for the resident Mississippi Kite.

Dinner is at a local grill in Sterling, and after dinner we tally up the checklist.

Accommodations at Holiday Inn Express or Best Western Sundowner, Sterling (B,L,D)

Wed., May 24 Tamarack Ranch State Wildlife Area

Relax over breakfast and pack your bags before we depart on a short drive to the Tamarack Ranch State Wildlife Area. Nestled along the South Platte River, this unassuming location can be dynamic during migration with both eastern and western species drawn to the water. We scan the cottonwoods for Yellow-billed Cuckoo, five species of woodpecker, seven species of flycatcher, four species of vireo, and more!

Explore nearby county roads for some new prairie species such as Upland Sandpiper, Dickcissel, Northern Bobwhite and possibly Field Sparrow on our way to lunch in Sedgwick, at a local American café that sits on a hill overlooking the South Platte River Valley. The owner's family raises Bison and locally grown beef, which you are welcome to try from the menu!

After lunch we make a stop at one of the reservoirs along the road to Wray, on the far eastern edge of Colorado and our stopping place for two nights.

Accommodations at the Cobblestone Inn, Wray (B,L,D)

Thurs., May 25 Colorado's Sandhills & the Republican River

Sandhills are a unique inland habitat, characterized by mixed-grass prairie grass-stabilized sand dunes. This morning we have another chance to view Greater Prairie Chicken in the sandhills outside of Wray, and then explore several riparian areas as well as Stalker Lake on the Colorado/Kansas border.

Returning to Wray for lunch, we next visit Hale Ponds, located on the South Fork of the Republican River, another legendary migrant trap!

Accommodations at Cobblestone Inn, Wray (B,L,D)

Fri., May 26 Rocky Mountain Foothills

After breakfast we pack our bags, turn the vans west and leisurely make our way to Boulder with a few special stops along the way.

Stop for lunch in Golden, located along with Front Range and home to the Colorado School of Mines, Coors Brewing Company, and the birthplace of Jolly Rancher candy!

We arrive in Boulder in time to bird and walk at Chautauqua Park, a National Historic Landmark and one of Boulder's earliest park lands, or nearby. Bird for Front Range species and enjoy the gardens, trails, and stunning views.

After settling into our historic hotel in central Boulder, we celebrate our great week together by walking to a lovely dinner on Boulder's Pearl Street.

Accommodations at the Hotel Boulderado, Boulder (B,L,D)

Sat., May 27 Departures

This morning we visit a very special location, the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge. Formerly a chemical weapons development area operated by the Army, the Arsenal was closed in the 1980s and declared a superfund site. After discovering large numbers of wintering Bald Eagles, a multi-agency cleanup ensued and today the refuge is home to a small bison herd and over 250 bird species.

We end our tour with a short drive to Denver International Airport at noon. (B)

Tour Details

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Please note, starting in January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is **\$2590 DBL / \$3090 SGL**, from Denver, Colorado. Cost includes: all accommodations; all meals as stated in the itinerary; group airport transfers; ground transportation; professional guide services; park, preserve, and other activity fees; and miscellaneous program expenses.

Tour price does not include: round trip airfare to and from Denver, Colorado, or items of a personal nature such as laundry, portage, telephone charges, or alcoholic beverages. Gratuities for your guides and other staff are not included; these are at your discretion, but highly appreciated and recommended.

Travel Details

Please plan to arrive in Denver no later than 1:30 PM on May 21. Please plan on departures after 3:00 PM on May 27.

Photo Credits

Burrowing Owl, Greg Smith (GS); Yellow-headed Blackbird, Ed Pembleton (EP); Badgers, EP; Red-headed Woodpecker, EP; Western Meadowlark, EP; Pawnee National Grasslands, UnSplash; Greater Prairie Chicken, GS; Horned Lark, GS.

Naturalist Journeys, LLC is an equal opportunity service provider and committed to the goal of ensuring equal opportunity for all in employment and program delivery.