



# WGFD

*Conserving Wildlife, Serving People*

Cody Regional Office  
2820 State Highway 120  
Cody, WY 82414

Phone: (307) 527-7322 ext. \*817 • Fax: (307) 587-5430  
<http://gf.state.wy.us>

## News Release

March 22, 2011

Contact: Lucy Wold

[Lucy.Diggins@wgf.state.wy.us](mailto:Lucy.Diggins@wgf.state.wy.us)

## DANCE OF THE GROUSE - VIEW FROM A DISTANCE

GREEN RIVER— Spring is the time to observe Wyoming's native sage-grouse on their leks, or courtship areas. During this annual ritual, which occurs from late March through early May, males are competing for mates.

The sage-grouse, also known as the sage chicken, is so called because its winter diet is almost exclusively sagebrush. Sage-grouse leks can attract from 10 to more than 200 males. The dominant males are usually in the center of the lek. They are the ones who do most of the breeding. Spotting the males is quite easy because the front of the bird is white.

Hens come to the lek when they are ready to mate. They are camouflaged so well that they can be difficult to see, but this feature makes nesting safer. After breeding at the lek the hens go off and lay about seven or eight eggs in a scrape on the ground, usually near some protective vegetation like sagebrush. The hens incubate their eggs for 22-24 days. Young hatch downy and are ready to leave the nest as soon as the down is dry. Females guard the broods for about 10 weeks. During this time the chicks' diet is composed of insects, especially grasshoppers. As they mature their diet shifts to more vegetable matter, mostly forbs in the spring and early summer shifting to sagebrush as herbaceous vegetation cures. The birds can be found in winter in large flocks in areas of extensive sagebrush.

Observing these birds perform their courtship ritual is both fascinating and enjoyable for wildlife enthusiasts. However, breeding activity on leks is easily disrupted so the department has developed the following guidelines for observers:

- ✓ Arrive at the lek at least one hour before sunrise.
- ✓ Don't drive on or near the lek and park away from the edge of the lek.
- ✓ Turn off the engine and lights and stay in your vehicle.

- ✓ Use binoculars and spotting scopes to observe birds.
- ✓ Don't make loud noises or sudden movements.
- ✓ Do not leave the lek site until the birds do.
- ✓ Keep your pets in the vehicle or better yet leave them at home.
- ✓ Do not trespass on private land.
- ✓ Postpone your visit if roads are muddy.
- ✓ Late April is the best time to visit because most breeding is complete by then but the males are still actively strutting.

It's exciting to see the grouse, but what people may fail to realize is that getting too close stresses the birds. By following these simple steps you help to conserve our local sage grouse populations so that they will be enjoyed by future generations. For more information about sage grouse and sage grouse viewing in Wyoming see the department web page at

[http://gf.state.wy.us/wildlife/wildlife\\_management/sagegrouse/index.asp](http://gf.state.wy.us/wildlife/wildlife_management/sagegrouse/index.asp)

Enjoy Wyoming's great outdoors.

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