



### **ASGD Kansas May 2019 Itinerary**

**May 4 to 9, 2019**

**May 11 to 16, 2019**

## **Kansas Prairie-Chickens and Spring Migration; Wetlands and Grasslands**

### **Day 1: AM Birding Chico Basin Ranch; and then PM Scott City**

The group will meet early in the morning in South Denver for a two-hour drive to Chico Basin Ranch, a very large cattle ranch run on environmentally friendly grounds.

Located seventeen miles southeast of Colorado Springs, near the community of Hanover, Chico Basin has recorded at least 330 species of birds—some rarely seen in Colorado. The Chico is an oasis/refuge for migrating birds. Here we will be looking for an assortment of flycatchers, vireos, thrushes, warblers and sparrows, all attracted to cattail-lined ponds, thickets of willow and cottonwood, and short-grass prairie with cholla cactus. Some of the species that are seen in May include Virginia Rail, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Loggerhead Shrike, Cassin's Kingbird, Say's Phoebe, Rock Wren, Marsh Wren, Swainson's Thrush, Hermit Thrush, Curve-billed Thrasher, Brown Thrasher, Sage Thrasher, Lark Bunting, Cassin's Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Brewer's Sparrow, Canyon Towhee, Black-headed Grosbeak, Blue Grosbeak, Lazuli Bunting and Indigo Bunting. A variety of waterfowl and shorebirds are also present at the ranch in May.

Other birds that are present but may be a bit more difficult to find include Sora, Scaled Quail, Mountain Plover, Red-headed Woodpecker, Swainson's Hawk, Ferruginous Hawk and Golden Eagle.

There is a regular bird banding station on the ranch, run by the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, and we will stop to watch the banding during our visit.

After lunch we will begin the four-hour drive to Scott City, Kansas, possibly with a birding stop or two if time allows. As we drive, we will scan the area for Chihuahuan Ravens.

Upon arrival in Scott City, we will check in to our hotel and then meet in the hotel lobby at about 6:00 PM. Before going to dinner, we will review our bird checklist. Then we will go to dinner with a representative of the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism. During dinner, the Kansas wildlife official will review the procedures for prairie-chicken viewing. We will also learn about the conservation practices being used to protect these vulnerable species (Lesser Prairie-Chickens).

Overnight in Scott City, Kansas.



## **Day 2: AM Both Prairie Chickens; PM Birding at Cheyenne Bottoms**

Note: It is very important that we do as little as possible to disturb the prairie-chickens on their lek site this morning. Because of this, we need to be at the lek by at least one hour before sunrise, so that we arrive while it is still dark, before the birds begin arriving at the lek. Be prepared to leave the hotel by 5:00 AM at the latest. Note that once we are on the site of the lek, we cannot leave until the last bird departs (in order to protect their breeding rituals). This could be as late as 8:30 AM.

As dawn breaks, we will need to listen quietly for the first calls of the prairie-chickens. Our location will include a mix of both Lesser Prairie-Chickens and a few Greater Prairie-Chickens, offering the opportunity to study the differences in plumage, sounds and mating dance styles. While watching these birds, we may also see Burrowing Owls. Ferruginous Hawks and Golden Eagles sometimes are sighted from the area as well. If really lucky, we may get a look at a Swift Fox or a Black-footed Ferret.

After we are finished at the prairie-chicken lek site, we will return to the hotel for breakfast, then check out of our rooms.

Before driving two hours east to Great Bend, we may decide to do some birding in the Scott City area, if anything interesting has been reported. Nearby Lake Scott State Park often produces three species of orioles (Bullock's, Baltimore and Orchard), Yellow-breasted Chat and assorted warblers. If the lake is a bit low, there can be good shorebird numbers, including the possibility of American Avocet and Black-necked Stilt. If the playas are holding water, which only comes from recent rains, they can be alive with assorted waterfowl and shorebirds.

More than likely, we will choose to drive east so that we can make our first visit to Cheyenne Bottoms, arriving in the early afternoon.

Cheyenne Bottoms, the largest marsh in the interior of the United States, is the most important shorebird spring migration point in the western hemisphere. Quivira hosts half a million birds in spring migration, and habitat types include saltwater marshes and sand dunes covered in prairie grasses.

Because of the large number of birds likely to be at both Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, we have scheduled two full days plus this afternoon for birding here. There is a lot of ground to cover, and some places are better early, some places better later in the day. Since we will be here during spring migration, new birds could arrive overnight. Your guide will know when and where to go to provide the best birding opportunities.

This afternoon, we will either concentrate on anything rare that has been reported, or spend time scanning the large groups of birds, quickly growing our trip list.

Overnight in Great Bend, Kansas.



### **Day 3: AM Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, and PM Cheyenne Bottoms**

This morning we will make our first visit to Quivira National Wildlife Refuge. Here we will drive the five-mile auto tour that passes some of the best bird-viewing areas, including an observation tower, photo blinds, and roadside parking areas at productive spots. Many other roads in and around the refuge offer good roadside birding. Among the walking paths is the Migrants Mile Trail, which passes through marsh, prairie, grassland, and woodland.

Quivira is well-known as a shorebird migration site, and some of the target birds we will look for here include Black-bellied Plover, Semipalmated Plover, White-rumped Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, Hudsonian Godwit, Stilt Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher (rare), and a chance for Snowy Plover, Piping Plover and Red-necked Phalarope.

Other than shorebirds, we will also be looking for Northern Bobwhite, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Black Rail (nests here, but difficult to see), Dickcissel, both Eastern and Western Meadowlarks, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher and Grasshopper Sparrow. Most years, there are at least a few King Rails, Least Flycatchers, Sedge Wrens and Bobolinks in the area. We even have a slight chance to find a Painted Bunting.

We plan to return to Cheyenne Bottoms in the afternoon. Many of the same birds are possible there, but some are easier to see. From fall through spring there are large flocks of waterfowl present. Ten or

so species remain to nest. We have a chance of seeing one or two Snow Geese, Greater White-fronted Geese and a few Redhead. Nesting waders include American Bittern, Least Bittern, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron and White-faced Ibis. Neotropic Cormorant is regular from spring to fall. Least Terns, Black Terns and Forster's Terns all nest here. Bonaparte's Gulls and Franklin's Gulls should be present as well.

Shorebird numbers generally peak in early May, but the migration period stretches well beyond that. Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet and Snowy Plover nest, Upland Sandpipers are often found at several locations. We have an excellent chance to see Whimbrel, Hudsonian Godwit, Marbled Godwit, a few Ruddy Turnstones, Stilt Sandpiper, Sanderling, Dunlin, White-rumped Sandpiper and Pectoral Sandpiper.

Additional species for which we will be looking include Green Heron, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, Great Crested Flycatcher, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Bell's Vireo, Brown Thrasher, Grasshopper Sparrow, Clay-colored Sparrow, Harris's Sparrow, Baltimore Oriole and Dickcissel.

Overnight in Great Bend, Kansas



#### **Day 4: AM Cheyenne Bottoms/Quivira Full Day**

The plan for today is to visit both of the sites we were at the day before, but in the opposite order. We will try Cheyenne Bottoms in the morning, and Quivira in the afternoon. Since we are still in the migration period, there is a good chance that some new and interesting species have flown in overnight. Plus, the lighting will be different at both places and it may be easier to identify some of the birds that might have been hidden the day before. Your guide will review the species list and make a plan to try to find anything new to the trip list or get better looks at some species already seen.

Overnight in Great Bend, Kansas

#### **Day 5: AM Anything Left, and Bird to Lamar**

If there are any good birds left to look for in the area, we will spend a little time to search for them. Otherwise we will make an early start to drive back to Lamar in southeast Colorado to allow us sufficient time to bird the many migrant hotspots around Lamar. The exact locations will depend upon the latest e-Bird sightings but could include Lamar Community Woods, Melody Temple Grove, Two Buttes, Thurston Reservoir, Neegrande Reservoir etc.

Overnight in Lamar, CO

### **Day 6: Bird AM Lamar, and Eastern Plains to Denver**

This morning will be spent birding at Lamar Community College Woods, a migrant hotspot. We can't predict most species that will be here, but we will be looking for an assortment of flycatchers, vireos, thrushes, sparrows and warblers.

Some likely targets here include Mississippi Kite, Broad-winged Hawk, Dusky Flycatcher, Least Flycatcher and Lesser Goldfinch.

Before lunch, we will begin the drive back to Denver, planning to arrive there by 3:00 PM.

