

WILDLIFE WATCHING IN COLORADO



Tourism is an important income generator for many regions, but some localities, which otherwise have the potential to draw in tourists, have not sufficiently exploited this. In Colorado, wildlife-watching has become an important attraction for tourists. Many visitors come to the town of Walden to watch the strutting, chest-puffing male sage grouse in the last throes of the mating season. Here, they offer sage grouse tours. This chicken-like bird is therefore very important for local tourism-related businesses. There is the March celebration, in south central Colorado, when thousands of sandhill cranes drop by the San Luis Valley on their northern migration. Another part of Colorado, Wray, draws visitors from across the country in late March to watch prairie chickens go through their mating ritual. Communities often cooperate with state and federal wildlife agencies and prepare festivals. In Wray it is possible to enter local ranchers' lands to watch the prairie chickens.

In Walden, grouse tours and birdwatchers alone provide up to 70 percent of the revenue in a "dead, slow month" for local restaurants and motels. Bobbie Scott, owner of the Roundup Motel says: "This time of year we have almost no business, so this gives us some weekends where there are people coming in." But birds are not the only animal worth seeing in this destination. Walden is well known for moose-watching; in fact the town's welcome signs read: "Walden, moose viewing capital of Colorado."

According to Ted Eubanks of Texas-based Fermata Inc, marketing local wildlife "is becoming more mainstream as a rural economic development tool as the Great Plains in particular have undergone significant social and economic change." Fermata Inc. works with communities nationwide to promote their natural resources, wildlife and cultural history. Ted Eubanks says: "What I've found is that most communities do have something, but most can't see it because they grew up with it."

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