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Birds of the Rocky Mountains—Species Accounts,
pages 129–141: Upland Gamebirds

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Wilson's Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*)

Identification: Phalaropes typically are seen swimming rather than wading, and this species is much the commonest of the species of the region, with a long bill (longer than the head) and a blackish stripe through the eye and extending down the side of the neck, and a whitish breast with chestnut tinting. Males are duller than females, but have the same general plumage pattern.

LATILONG STATUS

s	S	S	s
	S	s	S
S	S	s	s

S	s	S	s
S	S	S	S
S	S	M	S

S	s	S	M
s	S	S	S
s	S	S	S

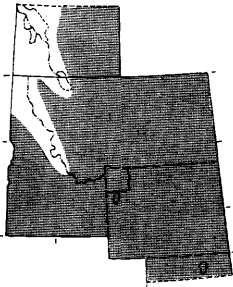
Status: A summer resident over most of the area, becoming rarer in the mountains, and a rare migrant in most of the montane parks. Breeding has been reported only from Yellowstone N.P., in some of the marshy areas. Common on the prairie marshlands.

Habitats and Ecology: Breeding habitats are typically wet meadows adjoining shallow marshes, which range from fresh to highly saline. Ditches, river edges, and shallow lakes are sometimes also used for breeding. Similar areas are used by migrating birds.

Seasonality: Wyoming records are from late April to September 27, with peaks in May and August. Montana records extend from the end of March to early September, with a spring peak the third week of May. Wyoming egg records are from May 25 to June 21; Colorado records are from May 19 to June 24.

Comments: These shorebirds are unique among North American birds in that the females are larger, more brightly colored, and more aggressive than males, establishing territories, courting males, and leaving the clutch for the male to incubate. In contrast to the other two species of phalaropes, multiple or polyandrous matings with males are still unproven for this species, although such a possibility is present, given the relatively long available breeding season in the Great Plains.

Suggested Reading: Hohn, 1967; Kangarise, 1979; Johns, 1969; Johnsgard, 1981.



Gray Partridge (*Perdix perdix*)

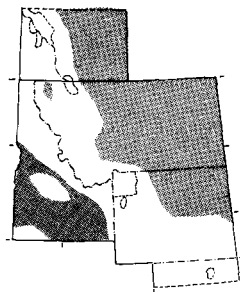
Identification: This quail-sized bird is mostly grayish, with a more brownish head, and with a dark brown blotch on the belly. When flushed, a short, rusty tail is apparent. The birds form quail-like coveys in winter, and in spring males utter a hoarse *kee-uk*, with the first note louder.

LATILONG STATUS

r	R	r	r
	R	?	r
V	R	R	R

R	R	r	R
R	V	R	r
R	R	r	R

R	V	R	R
			V



Status: Widespread in the prairies and agricultural lands of the region, but rarely entering the montane areas. Only a vagrant in the montane parks except for the Jackson Hole area, where apparently a rare resident.

Habitats and Ecology: Generally associated with grainfields and nearby edge habitats, such as shelterbelts, but also sometimes extending into sagebrush areas, especially where local water supplies are present. Nesting usually occurs in grainfields or hayfields, under grassy or herb cover.

Seasonality: A permanent resident, but limited movements occur in winter as food supplies demand. Nesting occurs over a fairly long period, with frequent reneating; from about mid-May to mid-August, with most hatching (in North Dakota) in late June and early July. Washington egg records are from May 25 to June 10.

Comments: This is an introduced species, which has adapted well to life in the northern plains of central North America, and is an important gamebird there. The largest populations occur now on the central plains of southern Canada, where small grain cultivation and native grasslands or prairie hayfields provide a combination of food and nesting cover.

Suggested Reading: Johnsgard, 1973; McKinney, 1966.

Chukar (*Alectoris chukar*)

Identification: This species is the size of a large quail, but has strongly barred black and white flanks and a white throat and face, surrounded by a black band. The repeated *chuck* or *chuck-or* call is a good field-mark. Normally limited to rocky slopes and canyons.

Status: A local permanent resident in arid lands of southern Idaho and Wyoming; reported in the montane parks only as a vagrant; reportedly once casual in Rocky Mountain N.P., but apparently not reported since 1957. Probably a rare resident in the Jackson Hole area.

Habitats and Ecology: Primarily associated with sagebrush habitats during the breeding season, extending into grassland and sometimes also riparian habitats at other times. Nearly always found in hilly, rocky areas.

Seasonality: A permanent resident in the region. Nesting records are few for the region, but broods have been seen as late as August 15. In Washington the nesting begins in early April, and hatching begins in late May and June, with the latest nests not hatching until mid-August.

Comments: This species competes little if at all with any North American grouse or quails, and has thus seemingly occupied a vacant ecological niche. In Nevada the populations are especially high, and over most of its best Nevada range the chukar is associated with sagebrush vegetation. The species' common and scientific name reflects its most typical call, which serves to reassemble scattered coveys and may also help to disperse breeding pairs.

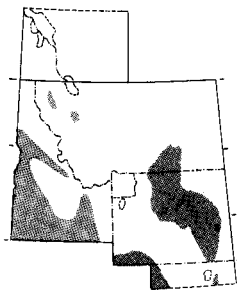
Suggested Reading: Johnsgard, 1973; Christensen, 1952, 1970; Galbraith & Moreland, 1953.

LATILONG STATUS

	r		
	R		

r		?	R
		R	R
	r	R	R

R	r	R	R
			R
R			r



Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*)

Identification: The familiar "ring-necked" male hardly needs description; females may be confused with sharp-tailed grouse if their long tails and more generally mottled brownish plumage isn't noted. Males utter a distinct crowing call, a double-noted *caw-cawk* during late winter and spring, that can be heard for more than a half-mile.

LATILONG STATUS

r	R	r	R
	R		R
R	R	R	R

R	R	R	R
		R	R
		R	R

R		R	R
			r
R	R	s	R

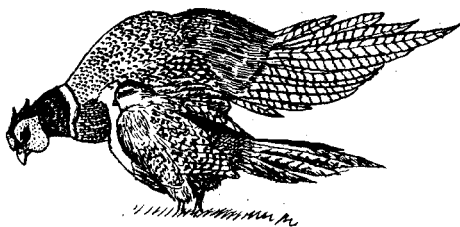
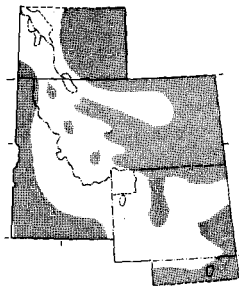
Status: A widespread resident throughout the general region, but rare or accidental in the montane parks, and mostly limited to low-altitude grasslands, croplands, and similar non-wooded environments.

Habitats and Ecology: Breeding occurs mainly in native grasslands and grain croplands or their edges, but sometimes also in marsh edges, hayfields, or shelterbelts, as well as roadside ditches.

Seasonality: Present throughout the year, with almost no movements. The breeding season is fairly long, with eggs (in North Dakota) from late April to the end of July; the hatching peak is usually in early June.

Comments: The most widespread and successful of the introduced gamebirds, and harvested in the millions every year. During winter, males gather small groups of females, or "harems," within their home ranges, and advertise their location by wing-whirring and crowing calls. Like grouse, males do not participate in nesting or brood-rearing activities, although females typically nest within their mate's home range.

Suggested Reading: Baxter & Wolfe, 1973; Allen, 1956; Baskett, 1947.



Spruce Grouse (*Dendragapus canadensis*)

Identification: This species is associated with coniferous forests, and usually is very tame. Males are mostly gray to black, with black and white patterning on the breast, and with white-tipped tail coverts. Females are heavily barred on the underparts, unlike the otherwise similar blue grouse females.

Status: A permanent resident from southwestern Montana northward, mainly in montane forests. Although reported earlier for Yellowstone Park, there have been no records for at least a decade, and any sightings are likely to be of vagrants.

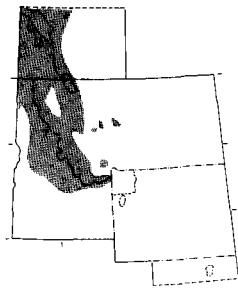
LATILONG STATUS

R	R	R	?
R	R	R	R
R	R	R	R

Habitats and Ecology: Largely limited to coniferous forests throughout the year. Conifer needles are their primary food source, supplemented by insects and berries in late summer.

Seasonality: A year-round resident, with no significant seasonal movements. In Montana chicks have been reported during July, with fledged broods typical by the end of that month, and in Banff N.P. young have been seen from mid-July to early August. Egg records from Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Montana are from May 18 to July 19.

Comments: The tameness of this species, resulting in its common name "fool hen," along with destruction of coniferous forest habitats, has been responsible for its decline in many areas. During late winter and spring males perform "strutting" displays, and utter extremely low-pitched hooting calls, which apparently serve to attract females to them. The males are polygynous, attracting as many females to them as they can, and play no role in breeding after fertilization has occurred.



Suggested Reading: Johnsgard, 1983b; Robinson, 1980; Stoneberg, 1967.

Blue Grouse (*Dendragapus obscurus*)

Identification: Very similar to the spruce grouse, but males are more uniformly grayish throughout, without white on the breast or tail coverts, while females are more uniformly brownish below, lacking the strong breast and underpart barring found on the spruce grouse. In spring, males produce "hooting" calls that carry for some distance.

LATILONG STATUS

R	R	R	?
R	R	R	R
R	R	R	R

R	R	R	R
R	R	R	R
r	R	R	R

R	R	R	R
R	R	R	R
R	R	R	R

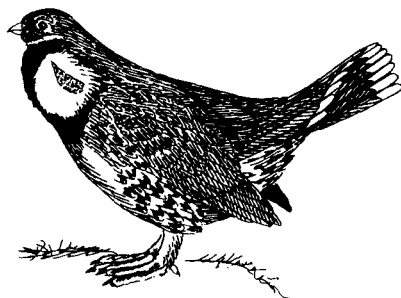
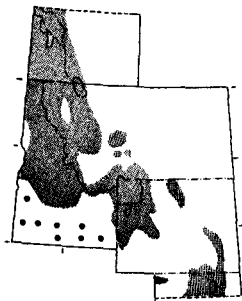
Status: Relatively widespread in coniferous forests throughout the region, from Colorado to Alberta, breeding in all the montane parks.

Habitats and Ecology: Like the spruce grouse, closely associated with coniferous forests, but also reaching alpine timberline during the breeding season, and as low as the ponderosa pine zone. Extends in late spring and summer into the sagebrush zone as nonbreeders.

Seasonality: A permanent resident throughout its range. Hatching of 120 broods in Montana ranged from May 25 to July 14, with a peak the third week of June. Broods in Alberta have been reported from July 7 to August 10. Egg records from British Columbia, Alberta, and Montana are from May 19 to July 29.

Comments: Hooting behavior by males begins in late winter, and extends to early June. While hooting, the males expose bare reddish neck skin surrounded by a white rosette of feathers, and engorge yellow to reddish eye-combs. Like the other forest grouse, males are polygynous, and attempt to fertilize several females.

Suggested Reading: Johnsgard, 1983b; Blackford, 1958; Mussehl, 1960; Bendell & Elliott, 1967.



Willow Ptarmigan (*Lagopus lagopus*)

Identification: In any plumage, this is the only ptarmigan of the region having a brownish to black tail. It is also larger than the white-tailed ptarmigan, and in spring or summer plumage males are much more rusty brown.

Status: An accidental vagrant in the region, with a single winter record for Glacier Park (Skaar, 1980). The nearest breeding area is in northern Jasper Park, south to the Tonquin River and Cairn Pass.

Habitats and Ecology: Associated with low arctic and alpine tundra, especially that rich in shrubby willow vegetation. Widespread through the arctic tundra zones of northern Canada, south along the west coast of Hudson Bay.

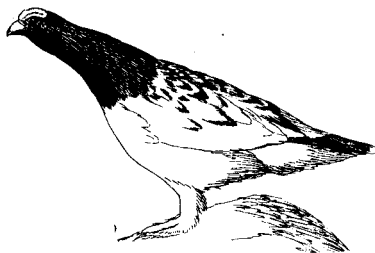
Seasonality: A permanent resident, but with some winter movement southward in some areas, accounting for vagrant birds appearing south of the breeding range. Nesting in Jasper Park has been observed in July, and broods have been observed as late as early September.

Comments: This is the largest of the ptarmigans, and is the same species known as the "red grouse" in Britain, where the birds do not turn white in winter. However, in North America all the races turn completely white in winter, except for the black tail feathers. Like many other grouse, snow-burrowing is common in these birds; temperatures beneath the snow are usually much warmer than at the surface.

Suggested Reading: Weeden, 1960; Johnsgard, 1983b.

LATILONG STATUS

		V	



White-tailed Ptarmigan (*Lagopus leucurus*)

Identification: This alpine grouse is totally white in winter, including the tail, and in summer is variably grayish to brownish, but retaining a white tail. It is about the size of a pigeon, and is usually overlooked by the casual observer, because of its remarkably concealing coloration.

LATILONG STATUS

	R	R	
		R	R
R	?	?	

	?	?	
	V	?	
	?	?	

		r	
	R	R	R

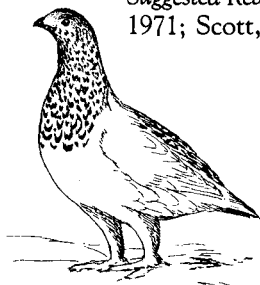
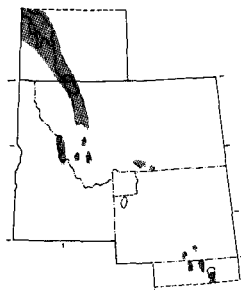
Status: Occurs in alpine areas from Alberta southward more or less continuously to western Montana, and on scattered alpine areas farther south throughout the region.

Habitats and Ecology: Limited to the alpine and timberline zones, moving slightly lower during winter, especially where willows remain exposed above the snow. In Alberta the birds sometimes descend to mountain valleys in hard winters, where they may feed on seeds and waste grain.

Seasonality: A permanent resident where found, usually breeding in June. Hatching in Montana has been reported from July 18 to 28, with fledging occurring between July 27 and August 8. Broods in Jasper N.P. have been reported between mid-July and mid-August. Nesting in Rocky Mountain N.P. occurs from early June until late July.

Comments: This is the smallest and most southerly ranging of the ptarmigan, and the only one breeding in this region. Unlike most grouse, the birds are normally monogamous, although at times males have two mates. Male ptarmigans of all species are highly territorial, and advertise by loud calls and by making long display flights over their territories.

Suggested Reading: Choate, 1963; Braun & Rogers, 1971; Scott, 1982



Ruffed Grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*)

Identification: Ruffed grouse have relatively long, fanlike tails, with a black terminal band, and which (in this region) are mostly grayish. The flanks tend to be barred, but unlike the spruce grouse the underparts are mostly white. Drumming by males, sounding like a muffled drum, is performed from late winter until early June.

Status: Widespread and relatively common in wooded areas from south-central Wyoming northward; absent from Colorado.

Habitats and Ecology: Especially associated with aspen woodlands, the buds and catkins of which provide a major food source. However, also up to the spruce-fir zone of coniferous forest. Nesting is often in or near aspen clumps.

Seasonality: A permanent resident in the area. In Wyoming hatching occurs from mid-June to mid-July, and in Jasper N.P. broods have been observed from June 13 to September 6.

Comments: This widespread species of grouse is best known for the drumming behavior of males in spring, which typically is done on dead logs in fairly heavy forest. The sound is produced by changes in air pressure rather than direct striking of the wings against one another, and serves as territorial advertisement signals by males. Males usually display from a primary log, but often have secondary display sites within their territory as well. Ruffed grouse of this region are all "gray-phase" birds, but farther east in their range "red-phase" types, with a rusty brown tail, are fairly common.

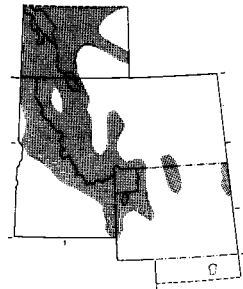
Suggested Reading: Johnsgard, 1983b.

LATILONG STATUS

R	R	R	?
R	R	R	R
R	R	R	R

R	R	R	R
R	R	R	
R	R	R	r

R		R	



Sage Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*)

Identification: The largest of the grouse, and the only one restricted to the sagebrush habitat. Both sexes have rather long, pointed tails, and blackish underparts, while being rather uniformly grayish brown above.

LATILONG STATUS

	?		?

R	R	R	R
R	R	R	R
r	R	R	R

R	R	R	R
R	R	R	R
R	R	R	R

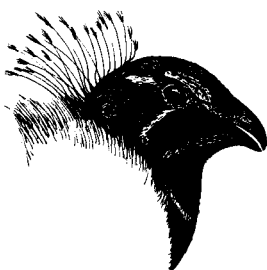
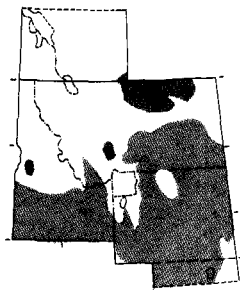
Status: Relatively common on sage habitats in the plains and foothills; rare or absent in the montane parks except for the Jackson Hole area of Grand Teton N.P.

Habitats and Ecology: Closely associated with sagebrush, which is the primary food and which also is used for nesting cover. Occurs locally in sage to 9000 feet elevation.

Seasonality: A permanent resident, but exhibiting considerable seasonal movements associated with snow cover and food availability. Wyoming egg records extend from April 18 to July 27.

Comments: The range of this species is slowly decreasing, as sagebrush areas are being cleared and converted to irrigated cultivation. However, Wyoming still supports the nation's largest sage grouse population. Sage grouse display socially in spring, with as many as 50 or more males "strutting" in local display grounds, or "leks." Grand Teton Park has one such display ground, near the Jackson Airport, where display can be watched during spring.

Suggested Reading: Johnsgard, 1983b; Patterson, 1955.



Sage Grouse

Sharp-tailed Grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*)

Identification: This "prairie grouse" is found on grasslands and other open habitats, and is mostly buffy white below, with a short, pointed tail. It is lighter in color than the sage grouse or any of the forest grouse, and has a shorter tail than do female ring-necked pheasants.

Status: Widespread on plains and foothills, but rare or absent in the montane parks except at Watertown Lakes N.P., where local on grassland areas.

Habitats and Ecology: Associated with grasslands and grassy sagebrush areas, and sometimes also mountain meadows during the breeding season, and extending into cultivated fields during fall and winter. Brushy foothills and similar edge habitats are often used in Alberta.

Seasonality: A permanent resident, with only limited seasonal movements. Nesting in Montana occurs from mid-May to mid-June; in southern Alberta broods are usually observed in early July.

Comments: In spring, male sharp-tails "dance" on traditional display areas in groups of from a few to 20 or more males, during which dominance is determined and the relative access of males to females for fertilization is established. These activities begin in late winter, and may continue until May. In this species the displays consist of active "dancing," cooing sounds, and actual or ritualized fighting activities among the competing males.

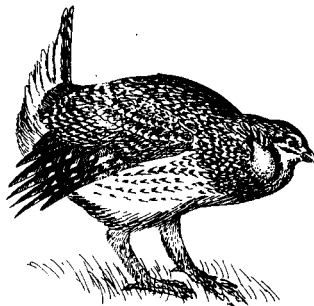
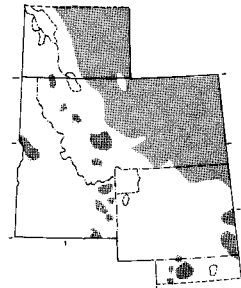
Suggested Reading: Johnsgard, 1983b.

LATILONG STATUS

r	r	r	R
	r	r	R
R	r	r	r

R	R	R	R
r	r		r
r	r		

		r	r
	R		r
	R	R	



Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*)

Identification: Virtually identical to the "bronze-type" domestic turkey, with iridescent bronze plumage, a large fan-like tail, and naked head skin. In spring the gobbling call of males is a good fieldmark.

LATILONG STATUS

R	R	r	
r	r		
	R	R	r
	R	?	R
	V	R	R
		R	M
			R

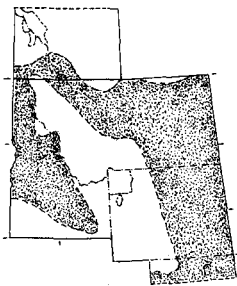
Status: Locally present in the region as a result of fairly recent introduction efforts, mainly in open forests of ponderosa pines or mixed woods, especially those with oaks or other mast-bearing trees. Virtually absent from the montane parks, but there was a Yellowstone sighting in October of 1954, probably from birds planted near Cody in the early 1950s.

Habitats and Ecology: In this area, wild turkeys are typically associated with ponderosa pines and red cedars, running water, and fairly rugged topography. The birds nest on the ground in forested areas, often under a log or at the base of a large tree.

Seasonality: Permanent resident wherever found, with only limited movements. There are no regional nesting records, but in most areas the nesting season is quite extended.

Comments: Turkeys spend much of the year in small flocks typically dominated by one or more adult males. Males are polygynous, and display singly or gathered in small groups on "gobbling grounds," where they call and attempt to attract females for fertilization.

Suggested Reading: Watts & Stokes, 1971; Lewis, 1973; Sanderson & Schulz, 1973.



Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*)

Identification: This widespread and familiar quail is similar to a gray partridge, but has a black and white head pattern (in males) and a grayish rather than rust-colored tail. Females have a dark brown and tawny head pattern, but otherwise are similar to males. The "bob-white" call of males in spring is a useful fieldmark.

Status: Highly local in the region, as a result of introductions, and absent from the montane parks at present. Once introduced in the Flathead Valley, and reported from Swan Lake and the North Fork of the Flathead River (Bailey, 1918).

Habitats and Ecology: Generally associated with brushy edge areas, where a combination of grassy, shrubby, and woody cover all occur in close proximity, and where water can usually be found nearby. Eastern Colorado and Wyoming represent the nearest natural range of this species.

Seasonality: Permanent residents where found, with only very limited seasonal movements. Nesting seasons are usually greatly prolonged through spring and summer, as a result of persistent re-nesting by unsuccessful pairs.

Comments: Unlike the grouse, pheasants, and turkeys, quail are strongly monogamous, with the male participating in brood care, although not normally assisting in incubation. Sometimes the male will take over the care of the brood entirely, freeing the female to begin a second clutch, at least in captivity.

Suggested Reading: Johnsgard, 1973.

LATILONG STATUS

	X		
	X		
	?		?

