



# Sage-Grouse

## WHAT ARE THEY?

The greater sage-grouse are ground dwelling birds. They have large, rounded wings, with a long pointed tail and feathers that go to the base of their feet. They get up to 2-2 ½ feet tall, and weigh from 2-7 pounds.

The females are a mottled brown, black, and white. The males are larger and have a large white ruff around their neck and bright yellow air sacks on their breasts, which they inflate during their mating display.



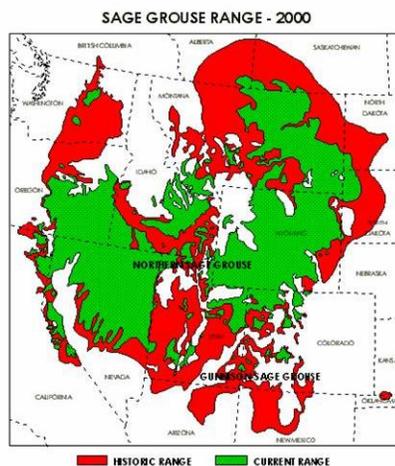
Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, South & North Dakota, Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, New Mexico, Arizona, and the Canadian provinces of British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

The greater sage-grouse are no longer present in Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona British Columbia and Saskatchewan.

## WHERE ARE THEY FOUND?

The birds are found at elevations ranging from 4,000 to over 9,000 feet and are highly dependent on sagebrush for cover and food.

Historically the birds were found in Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada,



Dr. M. Schroeder- Washington Dept. of Wildlife

## LIFESPAN:

4 to 5 years; however, they have been found to survive up to 10 years in the wild.

## WHAT THEY EAT:

During the summer their diet consists of insects and forbs. During the winter, 99% of their diet is sagebrush leaves and buds. Sage-grouse must eat soft foods because of their unique digestive system.

## LIFE CYCLE & HABITAT

Throughout the year the sage-grouses habitat changes due to its needs.

**BREEDING & NESTING SEASON:** From March to May the greater sage-grouse congregate at **leks** for a courtship strutting display to find their mate. Leks are generally in open areas adjacent to sagebrush; such as meadows, openings created by fires or roads, areas of low sagebrush, dry lake beds, or areas that are heavily used by livestock. Most leks become traditional and are used year after year.



Sage-grouse have a polygynous mating system. Which means one male will mate with multiple females. The females choose their mate at the leks. The male sage-grouse attracts females by strutting and making a “plopping” sound with their inflatable chest air sacs.

### **NESTING & BROODING** (May-June)

After mating, the hen leaves the leks in search of a nesting site. Typically hens nest 2-3 miles from the leks, but they have been known to go 11 miles away to nest. The nest is a bowl-shaped depression on the ground made of dead grasses. The nest is usually located under a sagebrush shrub, but can be under other common steppe shrubs such as bitterbrush, yellow rabbit brush, or rubber rabbit brush. Eggs are an olive green to pale green color with small dots of brown.



The hens & chicks will stay in the vicinity of the nest for up to 3 three weeks after hatching.

### **HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS-**

During this time of nesting & brooding, sagebrush and a substantial understory of grasses and forbs are critical for the survival of the chicks. This provides them not only with shelter from predators, but food without having to leave the nest and risk being seen.

### **LATE BROOD-REARING** (July- Sept.)

As the summer months get hotter and the grasses and forbs on the rangeland start drying out, the hen and brood will then move out of their nesting habitat to follow forbs and insects. They often go to a higher elevated spot that is moister or to an area where water collects. They are often seen in agriculture fields, wet meadows and riparian areas adjacent to sagebrush cover.

### **FALL & WINTER**

The Greater Sage-Grouse will continue to use wet meadows, riparian areas and irrigated fields until their food dries up or is killed by frost, and then they will return to a sagebrush dominated habitat where they primarily eat sagebrush leaves and buds.

Some populations of sage-grouse migrate during the winter. Some, however, are seen to not make a change of range at all. Idaho’s sage-grouse tend to be migratory.

Brought to you by the Idaho Rangeland Resource Commission with information from: Sage-Grouse Habitat in Idaho by Jeffrey K Gillan and Eva K. Strand and the Fish and Wildlife Service website.

**Learn More at [www.idrange.org](http://www.idrange.org)**