

Utah Wildlife News
March 18, 2010

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Shed Antler Gatherers and Deer on the Henrys

Deep snow causes concern

Hanksville -- The deep snow on the Henry Mountains is making it difficult for deer to flee from people who are collecting shed antlers.

To protect the deer, the Bureau of Land Management has enacted a new travel plan. The plan requires motorized vehicles to stay on designated routes.

Before your next trip to the Henry Mountains, please call or visit the BLM offices in Hanksville or Richfield to learn where the designated routes are.

Located south of Hanksville, the Henry Mountains is one of two premium limited-entry deer hunting units in Utah. The unit is renowned for growing trophy-sized buck deer. For this reason, it attracts a large number of shed antler hunters every winter and spring. These hunters hope to collect some of the large antler racks that drop off the heads of the buck deer in the winter.

"Under normal conditions, deer can escape the inflow of people by leaving the roadways and moving to heavy cover or remote locations," says Brent Stettler, regional conservation outreach manager for the Division of Wildlife Resources.

This year is different, though, because the snowfall in southern Utah has been unusually heavy. "The snow is making the deers' fight for survival much more tenuous this spring and their ability to retreat from people much more difficult," Stettler says.

"Please help the deer by learning the new travel rules and obeying them," he says.

For more information, call the BLM at (435) 896-1500 or the DWR at (435) 613-3700.

For more information about gathering shed antlers in Utah, visit the 'Want to gather shed antlers in Utah?' selection at www.wildlife.utah.gov/dwr/newsflash.

You can also listen to an interview at www.wildlife.utah.gov/radio.

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Contact: Brent Stettler, DWR Southeastern Region Conservation Outreach Manager
(435) 636-6731 or (435) 613-3700

Watch 'Em Strut!

Watch sage-grouse during free field trip

East Canyon Reservoir -- You'll have to get up early, but if you do, you'll see something few people have seen in nature—male sage-grouse strutting and vocalizing on a historic breeding ground.

And the experience is free!

The Division of Wildlife Resources and the Wild Bird Center of Layton will sponsor the free field trip on March 27. If you'd like to participate, meet at the Wild Bird Center of Layton at 5 a.m.

From the center, those participating will caravan to an area near East Canyon Reservoir. Participants should dress for the weather and bring their binoculars.

The Wild Bird Center is at 1860 N. 1000 W, in the Layton Market Center (across from Barnes & Noble) in Layton. To reach the center, exit I-15 at Exit 332 and turn east on Antelope Drive.

If you attend the field trip, you'll watch male sage-grouse fight for dominance and make elaborate displays as they vie for the attention of female grouse.

"Our bird walks are a great family activity and a wonderful way to introduce children to the world of nature," says Bill Fenimore, an expert birder who owns the center.

Fenimore and Phil Douglass, regional conservation outreach manager for the DWR, will lead the bird walk.

For more information, call (801) 525-8400 or visit www.wildbird.com/layton.

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Contact: Phil Douglass, DWR Northern Region Conservation Outreach Manager (801) 510-1406 or (801) 476-2740

See Gunnison Sage-grouse

Free trips limited to 15 people each

Monticello -- If watching the colorful strutting display of Gunnison sage-grouse sounds interesting, state wildlife biologists have an offer for you that might be hard to refuse.

During the weekends of April 2 – 3 and April 16 – 17, they'll take small groups of people to see Gunnison sage-grouse strut on leks (breeding grounds) west of Monticello.

Utah is home to two sage-grouse subspecies—the greater sage-grouse and the Gunnison sage-grouse.

Gunnison sage-grouse are the rarest of the two.

To avoid disturbing the grouse, each weekend trip is limited to no more than 15 people. There's no cost to see the grouse, but you will have to pay for lodging, food and gasoline to get to Monticello.

Monticello is about a five-hour drive southeast of Salt Lake City.

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If you'd like to attend one of the trips, call Brent Stettler at (435) 613-3707. Each trip is limited to the first 15 people who call.

Details

On the Friday evening of each weekend—April 2 and April 16—an orientation will be held at the Bureau of Land Management office at 365 N. Main in Monticello.

The orientations begin at 7 p.m. They'll include presentations by graduate students from Utah State University and biologists from the Division of Wildlife Resources and the BLM. You'll learn about the ecology, life history, geographic distribution and legal status of Gunnison sage-grouse. You'll also receive information about where and when to meet the following morning.

The best viewing always occurs before dawn or right at dawn. Within an hour after sunrise, grouse are usually done strutting.

Please prepare for winter-like conditions. You'll want to bring a camera and a pair of binoculars or a spotting scope. (DWR biologists will also have extra binoculars and spotting scopes you can use.)

To lessen the chance of disturbing the birds, you'll be encouraged to carpool to the strutting ground with other participants. Each trip will take about two hours.

For more information, call Stettler at (435) 613-3707.

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Contact: Brent Stettler, DWR Southeastern Region Conservation Outreach Manager
(435) 613-3707 or (435) 613-3700

View Strutting Sage-grouse on April 10

Price -- The "bloop, bloop" sound that male sage-grouse make, as they strut on their breeding grounds, is one of the most unique sounds you'll ever hear in nature.

And the sight of the grouse strutting is pretty unique too!

You can hear and watch this ritual yourself at a free wildlife-viewing event in east-central Utah. The event will happen April 10 at Emma Park, about 13 miles north of Price.

The Division of Wildlife Resources is sponsoring the event.

To see and hear the spectacle, you need to be at the viewing site early. Viewing is best before the sun comes up and just after the sun has risen. Grouse leave their strutting ground within an hour after sun-up.

Before making the trip, please remember that several things can force the grouse to leave the viewing site early or to not visit the site at all. Those factors include eagles or coyotes near the site. Wind, rain or snow can also keep the grouse under cover and out of sight.

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After the birds leave their breeding ground, the grouse spend the day feeding and resting in stands of sagebrush. They remain mostly out-of-sight until the following morning at first light, when they congregate at their strutting ground again.

DWR biologists will be on-hand with spotting scopes and binoculars. They'll help you find the grouse and answer any questions you have.

Directions:

- From the Wasatch Front, travel east on US-6 from Spanish Fork. At the top of Price Canyon, look for the Emma Park sign, and turn left onto the Emma Park Road. Travel east until you see vehicles with the state of Utah seal on their doors.

- To get to Emma Park from Price, travel north on US-6 to the Castle Gate power plant. Turn right onto US-191, and travel northeast about six miles to the Bamberger Monument. From there, turn left onto the Emma Park Road, and travel west until you see the state vehicles.

For more information, call Brent Stettler at (435) 613-3707 or (435) 613-3700.

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Contact: Brent Stettler, DWR Southeastern Region Conservation Outreach Manager
(435) 613-3707 or (435) 613-3700

Bear Raises Both Cubs

Entering dens part of statewide study

Vernal -- Wildlife biologists found an encouraging sight when they visited a bear den near Vernal recently: two bears that were just cubs the year before were alive and doing well.

"When Kevin Bunnell first entered the den, we thought there was only one [yearling in the cave with its mother]," says Dax Mangus, wildlife biologist with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources.

"But then Kevin whispered an urgent, 'get another dose ready. There's a second [one].'"

The sow and her two one-year-old bears (called yearlings) were nestled in the back of a cave that was about 20 feet long. The biologists used a tracking device to find the cave. The device picked signals up from a radio collar the biologists placed on the female in August 2008.

"When we found her den in early March 2009, she had two newborn cubs—a male and female," Mangus says. "A year later, both are still alive and in good shape. We only got a good look at one, though. The den was extremely narrow. If we pulled the other bears out, we weren't sure we could get them back in again!"

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Statewide survey

The survey these biologists conducted in the Ashley National Forest north of Vernal is part of a larger statewide project. Biologists in each of the UDWR's five regions have placed radio collars on bears to determine their reproductive success and how many of their cubs survive.

The biologists find and enter the dens in late February and early March. They tranquilize the female and any yearlings she has. Then they check the bears' health and gather biological data.

They do not tranquilize newborn cubs.

"We've been monitoring four collared bears in this region and one that was originally collared in another region," Mangus says. "Checking on the bears might sound easy, since we know where they are. But it isn't. The bear we checked last week looked easy on paper, but I think it was the [toughest] hike I've ever been on.

"And [checking] that one is nothing compared to its closest neighbor," Mangus says. "This year, one of our collared bears is down in Ashley Gorge. We took a look from the air at its radio location. Reaching its den site would require a long trip by snowmobile, a hike of a mile or so on snowshoes to the edge [of the gorge], then roping up and rappelling down the cliff face before hiking through a boulder field [filled] with thick brush."

Because of the risks involved, biologists will not check the Ashley Gorge den this year.

Good results across the state

Justin Dolling, game mammals coordinator for the UDWR, says other biologists are also finding good bear survival this winter in other parts of the state.

"Cub survival is running about 90 percent so far this winter," Dolling said on March 16. "We still have another week or so [before this year's survey is done]. But so far, the biologists I've heard from [have told] me that 10 out of 11 cubs they checked last year have survived. And about 80 percent of the cubs Hal Black has checked on the Book Cliffs have also survived."

Black is a long-time bear researcher at Brigham Young University.

Dolling says their successful birth and making it through their first year of life means the yearlings north of Vernal are about two-thirds of the way to becoming healthy, independent adults.

"This spring, the sow will 'kick the yearlings' off so she can prepare for the upcoming breeding season," Dolling says. "The habitat conditions the yearlings find as they venture out on their own for the first time will be a big factor in whether they survive and become adults."

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