

Ptarmigan Survey Script

Colorado is home to nine different species of grouse. Probably the most unusual is the white-tailed ptarmigan. These small birds spend the majority of their time above timberline, even during the winter months. Ptarmigan are known for their feathered feet and snow white plumage, which makes it more difficult for predators to find them. Likewise, the birds' feathers turn a brownish color in summer to help them fade into the tundra.

Through March the Division of Wildlife is conducting surveys of ptarmigan wintering grounds above Georgetown near the Guanella pass scenic and historic byway. The byway (really road 381) runs between Georgetown to Grant and runs through the Pike and Arapaho national forests.

Once a month, wildlife biologists systematically snowshoe across three square miles of habitat. The surveys are being conducted in part because biologists are concerned about the potential impacts of a road improvement project near the pass. Guanella pass supports one of the largest wintering populations of white-tailed ptarmigan in Colorado.

The Division has been tracking ptarmigan since 1966. During these surveys, biologists will count as many birds as possible. The counting is actually the easy part. What isn't so simple is the seven to eight hours of snowshoeing needed to get the job done.

With the Colorado Division of Wildlife, Jeff Butler, News Four.