

Sage Grouse Research Video

There are nine species of grouse in Colorado, and some species are in better shape than others. Both the greater sage grouse and its close cousin the Gunnison sage grouse are species of special concern, although the Gunnison variety has been declining rapidly. As a result, biologists have been experimenting with captive rearing efforts.

Technicians' radio track greater sage grouse hens to a nest and collect eggs, the eggs are incubated and hatched, then raised and fed to fourteen days. To keep chicks from imprinting on humans, techs go so far as to wear sniper or gilly suits. The chicks are then returned to a hen, not necessarily the original mother hen, but they are nonetheless readily accepted and protected. The youngsters are also electronically marked and re-marked as they grow.

(Sound clip: avian researcher Tony Apa)

The reason that we're developing the captive rearing techniques for greater sage grouse is for Gunnison sage grouse, and God forbid that we should have to ever develop captive rearing techniques for Gunnison sage grouse to ensure their existence and persistence as a species, because the numbers are low, and we don't want to see them disappear as a species. So we're using greater as a surrogate to help us save the Gunnison sage grouse. (End clip)

The Gunnison birds that live in isolated populations no longer communicate genetically, so the Division of Wildlife is attempting to do what Mother Nature used to do. Rather than transplanting adults, the idea is to move chicks.

This research effort is supported by private landowners, as well as agricultural and mining interests.

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