

RANGER RICK RACCOON, SCARLETT FOX, AND BOOMER BADGER ARE HIKING IN THE SAGEBRUSH COUNTRY OF WYOMING, LOOKING FOR A RARE BIRD CALLED THE GREATER SAGE GROUSE. SCARLETT IS HAVING FUN MAKING UP HER OWN WORDS FOR "POP GOES THE WEASEL."

My friends and I went to the West. We saw a lot of creatures. We had a great adventure there. POP! goes the sage grouse.

Scarlett, what about nursery RHYME don't you understand?



Besides, no birds go "pop."

I don't care if it rhymes or not—and you'll pop your top when you learn more about sage grouse!



Ahhh, these sagebrush leaves smell great! Take a sniff.



Sage grouse love to eat this stuff.

And they hide and make their nests under it. They can't live without it!



A BIT LATER...

Wow!

What do you see, Rick?

It's not a popping grouse, is it? Ha-ha!



Pronghorns! And look at 'em go!

Beautiful, aren't they? They're the fastest runners in North America!



Come on, let's keep going.



AFTER A FEW MINUTES...

Look!

Sage grouse!

Hey there!

Hi—I'm Ranger Rick. And here are Scarlett and Boomer. Looks like you're in a hurry.

Oh—hi. I'm Sara Sage Grouse, and we're movin' out!

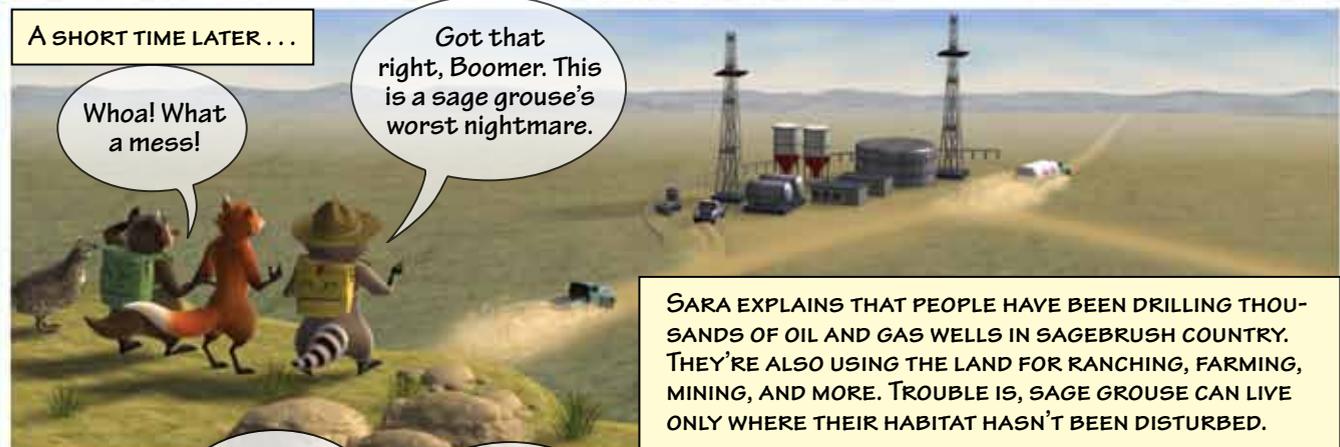


Why? What's going on?

Come with me, and you'll see.



It's OK. You go on ahead. I'll catch up later.



A SHORT TIME LATER...

Whoa! What a mess!

Got that right, Boomer. This is a sage grouse's worst nightmare.

SARA EXPLAINS THAT PEOPLE HAVE BEEN DRILLING THOUSANDS OF OIL AND GAS WELLS IN SAGEBRUSH COUNTRY. THEY'RE ALSO USING THE LAND FOR RANCHING, FARMING, MINING, AND MORE. TROUBLE IS, SAGE GROUSE CAN LIVE ONLY WHERE THEIR HABITAT HASN'T BEEN DISTURBED.



That's really bad news, Sara.

And that's why you grouse are on the move?

Right. So come on, let's catch up with the others.



AFTER A FEW MILES OF HIKING...

We should be getting close to them, so keep an eye out.

MEANWHILE, SITTING ON A WIRE, HIGH OVERHEAD . . .



Yum—a nice, plump sage grouse.



Hey, where is everybody?



Sara—look out!



Eeee-yaahh! Get out of here, you!



Whew, that was close. Thanks, Boomer!

Yeah—that hawk seemed to come out of nowhere!



Those electric wires should have been a warning to me!

SARA EXPLAINS THAT ELECTRIC WIRES AND POLES MAKE GREAT PERCHES FOR HAWKS AND EAGLES. FROM THOSE PERCHES, THE PREDATORS CAN EASILY SPOT GROUSE BELOW AND AMBUSH THEM.



Just one more problem for you, caused by people. Right, Sara?

Afraid so, Rick. Come on—let's go before that hawk returns!

LATER . . .

Do you hear that?

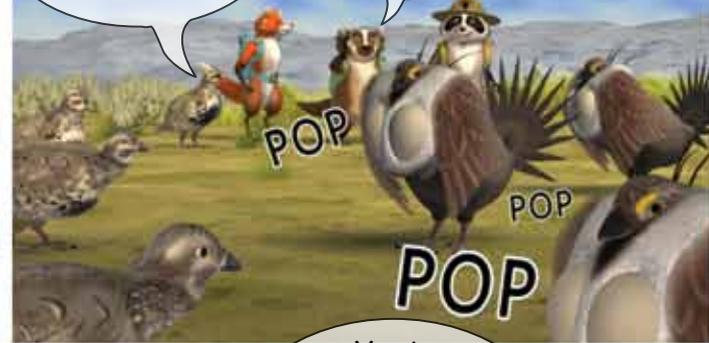
Yeah—sounds like someone making popcorn. Yum!

Let's get closer!



It's a lek. And look over there: My friends have found it, too!

What's a LEK?



A lek is a place where male grouse come each spring to attract mates.

Wow—look at them dance and strut!

And that popping sound they make—it's amazing!



Yes, it happens when a male blows up those sacs on his neck and then suddenly lets the air out. We females just love it!



I love it, too, but not for the same reason.

OK, smarty, so there ARE birds that "pop." You win.

"Win?" No one really wins until people do more to help grouse survive!

That's already happening! I'll tell you more, but first let's watch the show.



Sounds good to me, Sara.

Me, too! And while we watch, we can sing along with this:

Well, what do you know? Scarlett finally made a RHYME!

All around the grouses' lek
The males, they are so proud.
The females, they just love those necks.
POP! go the sage grouse.

MORE FACTS

Once, millions of sage grouse lived in Wyoming and other parts of the West. Now there may be only about 250,000, and their numbers are still falling. The good news is that people are helping save greater sage grouse in ways such as these:

- Asking the U.S. government to do a better job of protecting sage grouse habitat.
- Helping ranchers make their land better places for sage grouse to find food and shelter.
- Getting oil and gas companies to drill in ways that are less harmful to grouse.

Ranger Rick