



# Canyon Wrenderings

*The Journal of the Black Canyon Audubon Society*

Representing Delta, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Montrose, Ouray and San Miguel Counties of Western Colorado

Fall 2013

Volume XXVI Number 1

## Mark your Calendar

### September

#### **Yampa Valley Crane Festival**

›Fri. the 6<sup>th</sup> to Mon. the 9<sup>th</sup>‹

Ready for your annual pilgrimage to the Yampa River Valley? This new tradition is entering its second year and we hope that you will take part. For four days, birders from near and far will gather in the Hayden area to celebrate the fall migration of Sandhill Cranes through this beautiful pastoral region. For more information on this event, see page 2.

#### **Ouray Bird Count & Fall Bird Banding Public Day**

›Sat. the 7<sup>th</sup> to Sun. the 8<sup>th</sup>‹

This weekend, BCAS is kicking off another season of **fall banding** at Ridgway State Park. Stop by the Dallas Creek Day Use Area on Saturday between 7:15AM and 11:15AM to see live birds in the hand and learn about the importance of banding for both conservation and education. *For more information, contact Cheryl Day at: cday@paonia.com*

Once again, Brenda Wright and Coen Dexter are leading the annual **Ouray Bird Count**. This event takes place on both Saturday and Sunday. To join, meet Brenda and Coen at the Ridgway State Park visitors' center between 7:30AM and 8:00AM. The count features a full day of birding in the Ouray area during one of the birdiest seasons. Challenge yourself to "the game," a friendly competition to see how well you can predict which species you will encounter during the count!



Photo by Alecia Phillips

## Area birders visit Hotchkiss

**By Alecia Phillips**

Black Canyon Audubon members and Delta County birding enthusiasts gathered on June 9<sup>th</sup> to enjoy a morning of bird watching on privately-owned and permanently-conserved wetlands in Hotchkiss. The activity was offered by the Black Canyon Field Club, a free monthly outings program coordinated by Black Canyon Regional Land Trust, which seeks to connect community members to privately conserved lands in their area. To learn more about local land conservation and upcoming Black Canyon Field Club events, visit [www.bcr.lt.org](http://www.bcr.lt.org).

### **WANTED- Newsletter Editor**

**Required:** basic proficiency with word-processing, ability to communicate via email and phone, ability to proof-read. **Preferred:** Willingness to write occasional content, experience in basic editing. This involves a commitment of 2-3 hours per quarter. Editors are encouraged but not required to attend bi-monthly board meetings. To inquire or apply, contact Elaine Probasco at [eprobasco6@earthlink.net](mailto:eprobasco6@earthlink.net). See page 5 for a message from the departing editor.

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# Yampa crane fest fast approaching

By Evelyn Horn

It's hard to believe, but a whole year has flown past and it's festival time again in the Yampa valley. Our cranes—the Rocky Mountain Population of about 20,000—winter at the Bosque del Apache (about 90 miles south of Albuquerque).

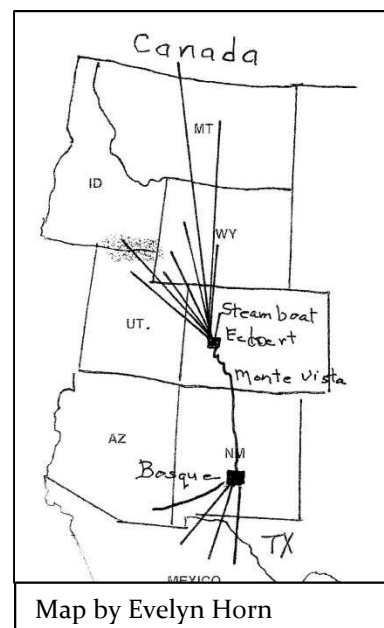
The Yampa Valley Crane festival takes place each year during the week before Thanksgiving. In the spring, our cranes begin their migration by flying up to Monte Vista area, and the festival there is in early March. Next, they cross the mountains and spend one night at Hart's Basin (Fruitgrowers Reservoir), where we have Eckert Crane Days in mid-March.

The cranes stop here in the spring because the water provides roosting, but when they begin their southward migration to the Bosque del Apache, Hart's Basin has little water. It's more like a big mud-flat!

For a number of years, we've had Crane Festivals at Monte Vista, Eckert, and the Bosque del Apache, but now we have a NEW festival! Some of our cranes nest in the Yampa Valley, and when their kin come south during the fall migration they tend to congregate with the nesters and with others from the north. This gathering of cranes is termed "staging."

This will be the second annual festival in the Yampa Valley, and it sounds exciting. It will take place September 5<sup>th</sup> through 9<sup>th</sup>, and the events include a nine-minute gondola ride to the top of the mountain and a nature walk at 9,080 feet elevation. It will be interesting to compare the flora there and the flora on Grand Mesa. There's also a birding-by-boat tour on the Stagecoach Reservoir.

Again I'm impressed with the high quality of the speakers. Last year we had George Archibald, co-founder of International Crane Foundation. This year we'll have Rod Drewien, the senior biologist for the cross-fostering program and the recognized authority on our cranes. His presentation is scheduled for 3 PM, Sunday September 8, 2013. On Monday evening, we'll hear Michael Forsberg's "From Cranes to Plains — a Photographer's Journey Connecting the Heart of the Continent." He's a renowned nature and crane photographer.



## Treasury Update

On June 30, 2013, the treasury had a total of \$16,226.33. Restricted funds as of that date were Eckert Crane Days, \$100; Education Fund \$160; Fruitgrowers Fund \$620; Radovich/Isler Discretionary Education Fund, \$102.14

## President's Corner

BCAS held its annual dinner meeting at Remington's Restaurant at the Bridges Golf Course in Montrose on June 13<sup>th</sup>. Thirty-four attendees enjoyed a wonderful meal and were brought up to date on the Gunnison Sage-grouse situation by Leigh Robertson, Coordinator for the San Miguel Basin Gunnison Sage-Grouse Working Group. Thank you, Leigh, for a wonderful presentation!

Jason Beason presented awards to numerous people involved in the Black Swift research project sponsored by the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory. Among those acknowledged were Sue Hirshman, who has been keeping a watchful eye on the Black Swifts at the Box Canyon in Ouray and BCAS. Congratulations, Jason, on such a successful project!

At the meeting, it was announced that five board members were stepping down, as their terms were expiring. Martha Grewal has been on the board for a number of years and served as president, secretary, Audubon Colorado representative, and in other capacities that I am not aware of. Thank you Martha for all of your years of help!

Marti Isler served four years as co-secretary and co-chair of the Education Committee. Although no longer serving on the board, Marti plans to continue her service on the Education Committee, where she has been so important in educating kids at the Ridgway bird banding and by giving programs at schools and events throughout the area. Thank you, Marti, for your service on the board and dedication to the BCAS education endeavors.

Theresa Childers served two years on the board. Thankfully, she will continue to administer our US Fish & Wildlife Service permit that allows us to maintain our collection of bird skins that are used in our educational programs.

Chris Lazo also served two years on the board. Chris was instrumental in making Eckert Crane Days a more formal event through community outreach. Although we are sorry to see Chris step down from the board, his reason for doing so is to be more involved with Audubon on a state level through participation in the Colorado Audubon Council. Alan Reed and Susan Chandler have expressed an interest in helping the Eckert Crane Days event to continue.

Lastly, Amber Carver has returned to school and has moved to the Front Range to continue her education. Amber took on the newsletter and conducted many educational programs over the past couple of years. Amber was involved with the banding at Ridgway State Park, has given public presentations, organized our fledgling speaker's programs, and wrote several of the articles that appeared in the newsletter. This will be Amber's last newsletter. Thank you, Amber, for the energy you interjected into the group and your willingness to take on so many tasks!

Continuing on the board will be Elaine Probasco as Treasurer, Sheryl Radovich as Secretary and chair of the Education Committee, Rich Stafford as chair of the Membership Committee, Geoff Tischbein in chair of the Publicity Committee, and me, as President.

Thank you to all of you for continuing your service. Evelyn Horn was elected as a board member, but has since declined for personal reasons. Since then, Barbara Hawke has agreed to become a board member and we look forward to welcoming her to the board at our next meeting in September.

We have had, and continue to have, numerous talented people involved in BCAS. As you can see, we have had several wonderful people step down from the board recently and we need a new influx of volunteers to step in and fill their shoes! Please consider volunteering to participate on the board. It is fun, and your participation can fit whatever schedule and time you would like to allow.

We are particularly in need of someone who might be interested in working on the newsletter and someone who has some basic knowledge of websites so that we might do a better job of keeping our website up to date. However, if field trips, speakers, or educational programs are things you might be able to help us with, please let us know. So, if you are interested in a fun and satisfying volunteer opportunity, we would love to hear from you.

***Jon Horn***

BCAS President

### **Thank You, Donors**

Many friends and allies donated items to the general meeting silent auction. Here is a list of all those who contributed:

Bill Aitken  
Theresa Childers  
The Fentons (Betty & Bob)  
Sonja Horn  
Sandi Lundburg  
Don Radovich  
Geoff Tischbein  
Barnes & Noble Bookstore  
The Bridges Golfcourse  
Camp Robber Restaurant  
Home Depot  
Russell Stover  
Wild Birds Unlimited





Jason Beason—BCAS member and a biologist with the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory—sets up a Western Tanager decoy. *Photo by Amber Carver*

# West slope birders forward front range research

By Amber Carver

Not everyone gets the opportunity to work in a national park, or to handle a charismatic species like the Western Tanager. I did both this summer, helping Jason Beason recover geolocators from Western Tanagers in Rocky Mountain National Park.

Beason works as a biologist for the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, and he is an active member of BCAS. He deployed ten geolocators on Western Tanagers at RMNP last summer. Once they are put on, the tanagers wear these tiny featherlight backpacks all the way down to their wintering grounds and back.

The devices take frequent recordings of daylength, sunrise, and sunset. Using this information, we can approximate where the bird was on a given day. Then, it's just a matter of connecting the dots to see what path the bird took during migration and where it tarried along the way.

The birds that Jason chose for the study were male Western Tanagers breeding in the national park. They are territorial and return to the same area year after year to breed. He figured our odds were good of being able to catch the individuals more than once.

The reason that we needed to catch the tanagers again was that—unlike some other devices—geolocators don't transmit any signals or information. This is good, because it means they don't need big batteries; the overall weight of the device is minimized. However, it also means that if we want to retrieve the data stored on the device, we have to get it back.

During the first year, the birds were surprisingly easy to catch. All the team had to do was set up a net inside a tanager territory, stick a decoy on a nearby branch, and play a recording of song or call. The

male tanagers were fooled into thinking that a male had invaded their territory, and they rose to the occasion by flying down to mob the decoy. This typically resulted in them getting caught in the net, afterwhich they could be equipped with a geocator.

This year, we were a little nervous that we wouldn't be able to find those original tanagers. However, we quickly found four of our target birds, and we set about catching them again.

Re-capturing the tanagers turned out to be a challenging process, and we were only able to nab two birds within the necessary window. That window is short, because it seems that male tanagers only respond to decoys during the nest-building period. Once the female has begun incubating, the male shows a lot less interest in defending his territory.

Jason and others on the team are hopeful that the target tanagers can be caught next year. We know where they breed, and catching them is a matter of patience, persistence, and a little creativity. The preliminary data are very interesting, but Jason and his colleagues are still analyzing the data. Stay tuned for details!



One of the tanagers involved in the study. Others were harder to catch. *Photo by Amber Carver*

# Letter From the Editor

Dear Black Canyon Audubon Members,

As some of you know, I have moved to the front range so that I can attend the University of Colorado—Denver. As of August 19<sup>th</sup>, I am working on a Master of Science in Biology, studying birds on the Pawnee Grassland. What a dramatic change of scenery!

The downside of this career move is that I can no longer be involved with Black Canyon Audubon. That means that the position of Newsletter Editor is now vacant, and the program and field trip committees are short-staffed. If you know anyone who would be willing to assist with these duties, please contact Jon Horn or Elaine Probasco.

I have enjoyed my time with BCAS immensely. From the first week of fall banding at Ridgway State Park, I knew that I had stumbled onto a fantastic group of people. Editing the newsletter has never felt like work, and I have also enjoyed helping the group in other ways.

My biggest regret as far as BCAS goes is that I did not have more time to devote to getting ideas—my own and those of others—off the ground. The group has a lot of potential, but it is held back by schedule conflicts and the challenges that come with accomodating volunteer work. So many ideas, so little time!

My departing message to you is this: BCAS needs you. Nothing happens without the investment of man/woman hours, and every bit helps. Even if you can only devote a few hours per year, it will make a huge difference in the realization of common goals. I wish you many years of success.

Sincerely,

*Amber Carver*



My son, Benjamin, learning to use binoculars on the Riverway Trail in Montrose last winter. It is never too soon to get young people involved in nature-watching. A cheap pair of binoculars can make all the difference in how a child comes to see the world—both literally and intellectually. *Photo by Amber Carver*



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To save paper and postage and to receive photos in color, send an email to:  
blackcanyonaudubon@gmail.com

Black Canyon Audubon Society (NAS chapter C9ZD140Z)

**Membership Renewal and Application Form**

Members may participate in all chapter activities, receive the *Canyon Wreanderings* newsletter and vote on chapter issues. Annual local membership dues are \$10 if newsletter is received electronically, \$15 if newsletter is mailed. Dues remain locally.

(Check one) Renewal (see mailing label for expiration date)\_\_\_\_\_  
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Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Enc: \_\_\_\_\_ \$10 for email newsletter.

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ \$15 for U.S. mail/print subscribers.

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Black Canyon Audubon Society, 14967 Rolling Hills Drive, Montrose, CO 81403.

If you would like to join or donate to National Audubon Society and receive Audubon magazine, please send a check for \$20 to National Audubon Society, P.O. Box 422250, Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250. Please use this form and list Black Canyon Audubon Society/C2ZD140Z on your check so that BCAS can receive membership recruitment funds.