



Canyon Wrenderings

The Journal of the Black Canyon Audubon Society

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

Fall 2015

Volume XXVII Number 3

Mark Your Calendar

October

- *October 3*

Field trip to Buzzard/Muddy Divide, see page 7 for more information.

November

- *November 17-22*

Bosque del Apache

Head south to New Mexico for the Festival of Cranes at the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. Multiple programs are available. Check out their schedule:

<http://www.festivalofthecranes.com/>

December

- *Annual Christmas Bird Count*

Annual bird counts in Montrose, Delta, and Gunnison Counties. Schedule to be announced on BCAS website:

www.blackcanyonaudubon.org

For national birding festivals, go to

<http://www.allaboutbirds.org/birdingfestivals>

For more upcoming events:

www.blackcanyonaudubon.org

Stop the Swap- Update on the Proposed Gas Lease Swap

By Bill Day

The proposal to trade about 50 square miles of existing gas leases in Garfield and Pitkin Counties for new leases in Mesa, Delta, and Gunnison Counties continues to be our top conservation priority. This area, which would be leased through an act of congress, includes what we have always considered to be the best aspen and open park habitat in the Colorado. Our position at BCAS continues to be that we are totally opposed to any lease swap that does not protect this area through legislative withdrawal of lands from leasing, or at least through legislative No Surface Occupancy stipulations for Mule, Hayrack, and Hubbard Parks in Delta County, and parts of upper Buzzard Creek in Mesa County. Because the lease holder, SG Interests, states that they will not agree to this, we believe it is best to just oppose the swap.

To comment to Senator Bennet (who is working on this), go to <http://www.bennet.senate.gov/?p=contact> . Senator Gardner can be contacted at <http://www.gardner.senate.gov/contact-cory/email-cory>. Congressman Tipton can be reached at <https://tipton.house.gov/contact-me/email-me>. If you live in Delta County, information on emailing the County Commissioners can be found at Deltacounty.com.

Reasons that we oppose the proposed swap-and that you can mention in comments- include the following:

- It is not good for the area economically. Damage to existing ranching, traditional and organic farming, hunting, and other tourism seem to greatly outweigh possible temporary benefits of short-term jobs for people who don't live here.
- This is the most unique and irreplaceable climax aspen and open park habitat in the state. It supports the densest population of Western Purple Martins anywhere outside of the Pacific Northwest coast. And it is great habitat for many other species of cavity nesting birds. Other species that would be impacted by gas development include mule deer, elk, moose, Northern Goshawk, Canada lynx, and leopard frog.
- We don't believe it is right for one out of state billionaire to be able to get his own act of congress to do this, rather than going through the same leasing process anyone else would have to do.

(Continued on page 3)

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Comings and Goings

Fall is upon us once again, with the promise of cooler temperatures, fall colors, and colorful migrant birds passing through. It is a wonderful time to get out into nature and enjoy the wonderful place that we live.

Our annual participation in the bird banding project at Ridgway State Park will take place again this year. This will include visitation to local 4th grade classes and busloads of kids coming to the park to learn hands-on about birds and their habitats. In conjunction with the bird banding will be Coen Dexter's annual Ouray County bird count, which is two days of field trips to nearby hotspots that we hope you will be able to take part in.

The annual dinner at the Bridges was an unparalleled success. Over 50 members enjoyed Norm Erthal's wonderful talk on birding in Bhutan after sharing another delicious dinner prepared by the Remington's Restaurant staff, enjoying the view of the San Juans, and bidding on the varied silent auction offerings. Of course, there was a brief business meeting where officers and board members were elected. Marilyn Westerdahl, Carole Scott, Robin Nicholoff, and Bill Harris were elected to two-year terms on the board; Alan Reed and Susan Chandler-Reed were elected for one-year terms. Bill will continue organizing field trips, Marilyn will continue as the Membership chair, and Alan and Susan will continue with organizing Eckert Crane Days. Chris Lazo was elected Vice President, Sheryl Radovich was elected Secretary, and I was elected as President, all for two-year terms.

We also honored Elaine Probasco for her many years as Treasurer. Elaine has served sufficiently long to be term limited under the bylaws. As a result, it is very important that someone step into that position. If there is a single thing that you can do to help BCAS, it is to step into the Treasurer's role. Elaine is willing to train and assist. It is vital for the health of our organization to have a Treasurer. We do not have complicated accounting needs, but we do need excellent record keeping, which Elaine has been able to provide to the present time. Please consider volunteering for the position. You will find it an enjoyable and gratifying thing to do. Elaine can be reached at 252-0918 or you can call me at 209-5404.

Elsewhere in the newsletter you will find information on the perils of backyard bird feeding, progress at the proposed Marine Road Park (which we hope you will participate in), field trips, festivals, and other interesting bird news. We wish you an enjoyable fall with good birding!

Jon Horn

BCAS President

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BCAS Celebrates 10 Years of Ridgway Bird Banding

By Geoff Tischbein

2015 marks the 10th season of our educational banding station at Ridgway State Park. We are expecting more than 500 third grade through high school students to visit the banding station this year. The kids get to see migrating birds being identified, aged, sexed, measured, and banded, and learn the science behind bird banding and migration.

The star of the first week was a juvenile Hooded Warbler, a species we had never caught at Ridgway before. Hooded Warblers are close relatives to our most commonly captured bird at Ridgway, Wilson's Warbler. These Wilson's Warblers could be from our local high elevation willows or from much farther north.

New research from analysis of isotopes from feathers of Wilson's Warblers caught at banding stations can tell us where the birds lived when they grew those feathers. This is explained in an interesting article at

<https://birdsnews.com/2013/1276/#.VfWKekuG5uZ> . The study explains why Wilson's from the west coast are declining, while those from the interior are faring better.



Above right is Amanda Zieglbauer showing Northside Elementary Students a newly banded bird. To left is the Hooded Warbler, a species last seen in our area in 2006. Thanks to Cheryl Day for providing the photo of the Hooded Warbler.

Thanks to Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies (formerly RMBO), and participating schools from Delta, Montrose, and Ouray Counties. And special thanks to BCAS volunteers including Sheryl Radovich, Marti Isler, Nancy Kelso, and Cheryl Day.

Finding any Rare Birds?

Ever wonder who to contact, who to tell, when you find an exciting but unexpected bird at your bird feeder? Report your finding to the Colorado Bird Records at: <http://coloradobirdrecords.org/>. Records are available for each county in Colorado. You'll find surprising results – Roseate Spoonbill in Montrose County? The Magnificent Frigatebird?

(Gas Lease Swap, Concluded from page 1)

- Although the Thompson Divide area of Pitkin and Garfield Counties is very nice, and we support protecting this area, it is no more important for wildlife than the large parks of northern Delta and eastern Mesa Counties. The poorer counties shouldn't have to take the undesirable industrialization in our National Forests that the more wealthy counties can avoid.
- We continue to oppose the idea that only undeveloped higher-elevation spruce-fir and tundra should be protected, rather than more accessible aspen, which is often more important wildlife habitat.
- The approximately 50 square miles that SG wants to trade for is nearly the only unleased land remaining in the area. It is almost surrounded by nice places that are already leased. Giving energy development everything they want in every place, at the expense of all other users groups, is not multiple use.
- Considering the large amount of currently leased, but not drilled National Forest land in the area, it is not appropriate to continue leasing until the outdated GMUG Forest Plan has been updated.

For more info on the area, please visit mulepark.wordpress.com.

Marine Road Update

By Sandy Beranich

A short recap: Montrose City purchased approximately 18 acres of undeveloped property along the Uncompahgre River just west of Montrose. BCAS president, Jon Horn, was approached by City officials about 18 months ago with a request for BCAS to provide assistance in developing a management plan for the property to focus on wildlife values. Word went out to BCAS membership for assistance in developing a plan and ecologists, a hydrologist, a forester, a botanist, GPS expert, experienced birders, etc. met and discussed an approach. Fast forward: A decision was made to spend a year (or more) collecting baseline data for the site in general, but specifically at 11 identified locations. The idea was to photo-document and collect bird-species information that would show changes over a one year period. BCAS members Janet Haw and Sandy Beranich have been returning to the property monthly since last January to take the photos and collect bird observations.

Current site conditions: The abundance of rain has resulted in *extreme* stimulation of invasive weeds. A native reed, Phragmites, provides a dense and virtually impenetrable curtain of 8-foot-high vegetation near the south ponds. Earlier, white top, was present in prodigious amounts throughout the property. Over the summer, a red fox with 3-4 kits was observed, as well as at least one skunk. Currently, the Russian olive trees are hosting a variety of song birds but in general there is not a great variety of birds present. It is expected that migrating ducks will be returning soon to use the ponds. Get on to eBird to find out who is recording what species and how many, and, consider starting your own page.



In August, Jon Horn and Sandy Beranich met with John Malloy, Montrose City Recreation and Special Projects Director, and Janet Freed, City grant writer, to discuss potential grant possibilities related to management of the property. Montrose City is interested in using Youth Corps volunteers to work on invasive weed control and trash removal; funding would be provided by a GOCO grant. The youth group would camp on the property and work on the site four days a week for two or more weeks. Subsequently, BCAS members Amanda Clements, Seth Frame, Elaine Probasco, Jon Horn, Loretta Banner, and Sandy Beranich met on the property to identify areas with large invasive weed infestations as well as areas that should be avoided because they contain resources we would want to save and encourage (e.g., native Rocky Mountain Iris and milkweed). Tamarisk and Russian

Olive trees are present on the property and will be considered for removal in a phased approach and will be replaced with native shrubs that provide bird habitat. Photo above left: Jon Horn and Seth Frame mapping invasive weeds.

In September, Jon Horn met with John Malloy and representatives of the youth corps to show them the property and discuss how the volunteers would be used. Positive feedback was received from the Youth Corps and the City will move forward with a grant application. Due to the large extent of invasive weeds, it is expected that restoration will occur over a period of years. Read the article on Kevin Parks, next page, as an example of what the future might be like on Marine Road!

A Side Excursion of Interest

BCAS members Chris Lazo and Carole Scott provided the following brief description of a recent outdoor adventure. Reprinted below from an e-mail.

We took a day trip up onto Black Mesa a couple of days ago and saw a Black Bear, Porcupine, Swainson's Thrush and.... The really neat item: lots of Swainson's Hawks. They were in family groups of two's and threes and were calling and doing the raptor aerial jousting.

Kevin Parks – A Success Story of Restoration of a Wetland

In June, several BCAS members joined with the Black Canyon Regional Land Trust to view Kevin Parks, an example of a successful wetland/riparian property restoration. The property has been in the Kevin Parks family for one century and is located along the North Fork of the Gunnison River between Hotchkiss and Paonia. Towering cottonwoods, ponds, and riparian vegetation are present and healthy. Did I mention that invasive weeds were virtually not present?



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to conduct surveys for the Yellow-billed cuckoo.

Photo above is of typical wetland pond on the Kevin Parks property. Photo to right is of BCAS members viewing a possible immature Red-Tailed Hawk in a tree. Both photographs were taken by Alecia Phillips of the Black Canyon Regional Land Trust during the field trip.



Gunnison Sage Grouse - Or Not?

By Carole Scott

A few days ago, Chris and I were hiking in an area known to accommodate the Crawford population of Gunnison Sage



Grouse. We had been birding for several hours and stopped by a pond to take a break and enjoy some refreshment. Walking through the sagebrush, fortunately, with my camera in hand, we disturbed some grouse. I immediately stopped and prepared to take some snapshots. They did not flush but walked away from us and I was able to count fifteen birds, all females and young. We backed away and took a long-way-around to the other side of the pond and patiently waited for an hour or more to see if they were coming to drink and might return. When it seemed they were not returning, we checked out the edge of the pond and sure enough there were numerous recent footprints by the water indicating they had already had their drink and were, in fact, moving out when we arrived. Chris and I believe these to be Gunnison Sage Grouse based mostly upon Chris's knowledge and familiarity with them, and the location in which we discovered them, but if anyone can correct us, please let us know. It was exciting to see so many, especially youngsters, considering their current status. Photo above by Carole Scott.

Woodworkers Guild Birdhouse Donation and Sale is a Huge Success

By Jon Horn (photos by Sandy Beranich and Carole Scott)

The Montrose Woodworkers Guild does an annual charitable benefit project each year. This year, they asked the Black Canyon Audubon Society if it would like to be the recipient of their hard work. Their idea was to have their membership build birdhouses that would be judged at the Montrose County Fair. At first, they planned to give BCAS the birdhouses to sell, but, fortuitously, the County Fair organizers decided to try having a silent auction for people who had entered items at the fair and wanted to sell them to the public. This proved to be an ideal venue to sell the birdhouses. The silent auction



was held on the same day as the livestock auction, so there were plenty of participants.

The Woodworkers Guild is a delightful group to work with. We attended several of their meetings where they shared good humor, enthusiasm, and wonderful comradery. Rusty Olson was the spearhead for getting the project organized, and he, President Darryl Sackmann, and Jim Norfleet were incredibly dedicated in making sure that the event was a success by attending to every detail in the planning and execution, besides making several wonderful birdhouses themselves.

During the week of the fair, all 47 of the birdhouses built by the Guild, including two constructed by young girls who are budding woodworkers, were put on display for all to see. We think that it was among the most eye-catching displays at the fair! (Well, we really think it was the best!) The craftsmanship, creativity, and whimsy demonstrated by the birdhouses were fun to see. Some of the birdhouses were round from being turned on a lathe; others were highly decorated with shells, wooden decorations, or intricate paintings; a few were hollowed bark-covered logs with slab roofs; and still others were variations on the house theme, being log cabins, a multi-room adobe-style house, and a colorful Toon Town-type house like you would see at Disneyland. All of the houses had to be made so that they could be cleaned out, and the solutions to that requirement were quite ingenious. Thanks to the many BCAS members who tended the booth during the fair week, spending many hours of their time interacting with the public who came by to look in awe at the birdhouse creations.

When it came time for judging, the birdhouses were divided into four categories: a junior division that included the birdhouses made by the two young ladies, a turned division for those made on a lathe, a gabled roof division, and a flat roof division. From these, a Grand Champion

was chosen, which was a very precisely constructed multi-colored wood creation that vividly showed off its excellent dovetail joinery. Many thanks to Alpine Lumber, who donated lumber and provided cash prizes to the overall winners. On the final day of the fair, the birdhouses went to the auction tables, where hundreds bid and bid again on the wonderful selection that was offered for sale. When all was said and done, every single birdhouse was sold, some for very handsome prices that reflected well on the hard work and skill of the Guild members. The auction brought the BCAS \$1,059.85! This far exceeded our expectations and will enable us to do many good things through our educational programs. We cannot thank the Woodworkers Guild enough.



Annual Ouray Bird Count

Every year, local birder, Coen Dexter, leads a two-day count of birds in Ouray County. All are invited and Coen mixes up traditional counts with adding in games to see who can identify the most species, etc. The count date is tied with the annual September bird-banding event at Ridgway (see article page 3) and occurs the first weekend after Labor Day – add it to your calendar today for next year! This year, the group included Audubon members from Grand Junction, Montrose, and Ridgway. After birding around the visitor center at Ridgway State Park and down to the reservoir overlook, the group of about a dozen car-pooled to bird up Buckhorn Lakes Road, Billy Creek Road, then back to Ridgway for a lunch stop, and continued on to look for Hummingbirds within Ridgway. The word was that the Calliopes had already left for the year. A side road was followed to search for other species. The rest of the day was spent in and around Ouray and the nearby Crystal Lake. An estimated 90 different species were observed. The second day was a repeat of the first day.



More happy kids during the Ridgway Banding Days

Can You be a Habitat Hero?

Habitat heroes create landscapes (or wildscapes) to attract and benefit birds, pollinators, and other wildlife. A wildscape supports wildlife by including shelter and nesting opportunities for wildlife, provides natural food (based on plants that provide food for wildlife in different seasons and that are best native to your area); offers water for drinking and bathing; are water-wise; energy-saving; and do not rely on the regular use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides - and do not spread invasive species.

No landscape is too small or too large! The one qualification is that Habitat Hero's believe in growing a healthy community.

Apply to be considered a winner that will be featured in the High Country Gardens 2016 Catalog, and if selected, receive a beautiful sign to display in your yard, a gift card to High Country Gardens, bragging rights in your

neighborhood, and knowing that you are a part of helping to restore fragmented landscapes.

How to apply? Go to: <http://habhero.org/apply/> to download a brief application.

Questions? Contact Jamie Weiss, Habitat Heroes Coordinator, at Audubon.habitathero@gmail.com no later than October 15, 2015.

Opportunity Oct 3
Buzzard/Muddy Divide Field Trip

Join with Grand Valley Audubon Society members on a field trip to the lease areas on October 3. GVAS will include birding for fall migrants and a search for shorebirds at Vega Lake.

Meet at the BLM parking lot near Horizon Drive 2815 H Road at 8 a.m. and plan to carpool. This will be an all-day trip. Bring your lunch, water, and snacks.

Registration is not required but is desirable so they can plan the trip accordingly. Please contact Nic Korte to register or ask questions:
nkorte1@hotmail.com. 970 242-3779.

BCAS Crane Days are coming up March 18-20, 2016.

Black Canyon Audubon Society
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<http://www.blackcanyonaudubon.org>



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To help reduce our use of paper and postage and to receive photos in color, send an e-mail 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 Wrenderings* 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) _____
New Member _____

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

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Enc: _____ \$10 for email newsletter.
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Mail your renewal to:
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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, Inc., 225 Varick Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10014, Attn: Chance Mueleck. Please use this form and list Black Canyon Audubon Society/C2ZD140Z on your check so that BCAS can receive membership recruitment funds.