



Canyon Wrenderings

The Journal of the Black Canyon Audubon Society

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

Spring 2016

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Join Us on 2016 BCAS Upcoming Trips



Sandhill crane parents flank last year's juvenile "colt" (center) as they return north to their summer breeding grounds. Photo by Carole Scott

March 18-20

Eckert Crane Days the Black Canyon Audubon Society will host the annual Eckert Crane Days on March 18, 19, and 20 at Fruitgrower's Reservoir in Delta County. Sandhill cranes use the reservoir as a stopover point on their spring migration northward to the general vicinity of Idaho. The focus of the public event will be the daily mid-morning crane liftoff from the fields around the reservoir. BCAS volunteers will be on hand to provide information and opportunities to use spotting scopes from 9 to 11 a.m. each morning. Daniel Neubaum will be the featured speaker on March 19. See event schedule on page 4.

April 16 – 27

Arizona Field trip led by Coen Dexter and Brenda Wright. There are still a few spaces available. If interested, contact Geoff Tischbein immediately: geofftischbein@gmail.com. For a description of the trip and expected bird species to be observed, see article in the last newsletter posted on our website: www.blackcanyonaudubon.org.

(Trip schedule is continued on page 3)

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Comings and Goings

With the coldest part of winter hopefully behind us, we have some exciting things planned for the remainder of the year. See descriptions of upcoming trips for the next several months on pages 1 and 3 of this newsletter.

In addition to field trips, progress is being made in developing the Marine Road property into a park managed for wildlife. The City of Montrose has received a grant for two weeks of habitat improvement by the Youth Conservation Corps beginning on April 11. This will result in removal of invasive white top, tamarisk, and small Russian olive and the planting of some desired trees and shrub species. The project is hoped to be the first in a staged, multi-year program of habitat improvement.

For the second year, we will be working with the Montrose Area Woodworkers Guild, who will be building birdhouses to be judged and sold at a silent auction during the Montrose County Fair. This was wildly successful last year with ribbons given to three categories of birdhouses and over \$1,000 being realized from the silent auction at the end of the fair. If you have a yen to build a birdhouse and would like to enter it into the fair, you can do so. The birdhouse category is not limited to the Woodworkers Guild, but to anyone who is interested. You can also decide if you want your birdhouse included in the silent auction and can, if you desire, designate BCAS as the recipient of the proceeds of the sale. The displays of the Woodworkers Guild's projects and the birdhouses were the most spectacular at the fair and drew great attention from fair goers. The fair this year will be July 22-31, and we will be looking for volunteers to help with the birdhouse display, talk to visitors, and to help with the silent auction. Proceeds from last year's auction were largely used to purchase nine pairs of binoculars for the backpacks used during our educational programs (See article page 6).

I recently provided a letter of support for a purple martin nest box project on the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forest (GMUG)). Dennis Garrison plans to place nest boxes in the Muddy Creek area of the GMUG. The nest boxes are principally for the unusual purple martin population in the area, but will benefit many other cavity-nesting birds. BCAS members will have a wonderful volunteer opportunity to help install the boxes and monitor bird use. Also, Bill Day, the chairman of the Conservation Committee, wrote a letter on behalf of BCAS to the BLM regarding making a change to the Colorado Roadless Rule in the case of coal lease expansions in the North Fork Valley. Of main concern are impacts related to venting methane gas, which ideally should be captured instead of being allowed to escape into the atmosphere.

We hope you have visited the website (<http://www.blackcanyonaudubon.org/>) recently and have noticed that we have a calendar installed! This not only provides the dates and times of fieldtrips, speakers, and other events, but has descriptions of the events, maps of meeting places, and contact information. Please, visit it often.

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(Upcoming trips continued from page 1)

April 25

Waunita Lek. Black Canyon Audubon has reserved the trailer that is set up for viewing the Gunnison sage grouse lek, east of Gunnison, CO. The trailer will hold 15 people comfortably. It is strongly recommended that participants spend the night before in Gunnison because the lek-viewing protocol stipulates that viewers must arrive at least 1 hour before sunrise. Sunrise on April 25th will be at 6:18 a.m. Lek-viewing protocol is strictly enforced to prevent disturbing the grouse. The Water Wheel Inn, just west of Gunnison has catered to Audubon members in the past. Call 970-641-1650 to make a reservation – tell them you are with Audubon. Bring scopes and binoculars. (Waunita lek) Participants are limited to 15. Cost \$10/person. Lek-viewing information will be emailed to all participants. Sign up by emailing Elaine Probasco at eprobasco6@earthlink.net. See article on the Gunnison Sage-grouse summit and lek viewing on page 6.

May 13-14

West End Spring Migration. Coen Dexter and Brenda Wright will lead the field trip. Reservations for overnight accommodations can be made at the Rim Rock Hotel in Naturita – 970-864-2500. Campers can use the Old Ball Park Campground along highway 141 near the old Uravan town site. The field trip will visit Dry Creek Basin, Miramonte Reservoir, and the canyons of the lower San Miguel River. We anticipate seeing close to 90 bird species. We will have a potluck dinner at the Rim Rock Hotel the evening of the 13th. Participants limited to 12. Those wishing to attend for 1 day will be put on a waiting list until May 8th. Numerous short walks planned to access birding areas. Sign up by calling Bill Harris – 970-249-8055, or emailing him at trlgpa@skybeam.com.

May 15

Gunnison Gorge NCA. Birding field trip along the Gunnison River east of Delta. This will be a birding/hiking field trip in search of migrating birds, which may include golden eagles, phoebes, prairie falcons, yellow warblers, and others. Sign up information TBA through the Colorado Canyons Association after April 1, 2016 – contact: bryanna@canyonsassociation.org 970-244-3000 to RSVP and for directions.

May 25

Montrose Spring Migration Field Trip. Audubon will be visiting Cerro Summit and the Marine Road future city park in search of spring migrants in a variety of habitats. Meet at Montrose downtown City Market at 8 a.m. Hiking on uneven terrain is anticipated. Limited to 15 participants. Sign up by calling Bill Harris – 970-249-8055, or emailing him at trlgpa@skybeam.com.

ECKERT CRANE DAYS SCHEDULE

Friday, March 18, 2016

9-11 a.m. Viewing at Fruitgrower's Reservoir along North Road to watch liftoff.

Saturday, March 19, 2016

9-11 a.m. Viewing at Fruitgrower's Reservoir along North Road to watch liftoff.

1 to 2:30 p.m. Free public lecture and pie social: "Big Cliffs and Little Pools: Their Importance to Bats." 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m., Eckert Presbyterian Church, 13025 Highway 65, Eckert. Daniel Neubaum, a wildlife biologist from Colorado Parks and Wildlife, will be speaking about the diverse species of bats that live in western Colorado and the challenges they face. See article page 4.

Sunday, March 20, 2016

9-11 a.m. Viewing at Fruitgrower's Reservoir along North Road to watch liftoff.

"Big Cliffs and Little Pools: Their Importance to Bats"

2016 Crane Days Lecture and Pie Social

The Black Canyon Audubon Society's 2016 Eckert Crane Days features a free public lecture at the Eckert Presbyterian Church at 1 p.m. on Saturday, March 19. This year's program focuses on the diverse species of bats that live in western Colorado and the challenges they face.

Dan Neubaum received his undergraduate and masters degrees from Colorado State University in Wildlife Biology and spent eight years at the USGS Fort Collins Science Center. He has worked as a wildlife biologist with Colorado Parks and Wildlife for the last seven years with a focus on conservation species such as river otter, sage-grouse, and bats. He has worked with bats specifically for over 17 years across Colorado and the Western U.S., including as a part of his graduate degree. Currently, he is heading into the final season of a three-year bat inventory and roost study for Colorado National Monument and the McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area.

Mr. Neubaum's talk is titled "Big Cliffs and Little Pools: Their Importance to Bats." The talk will begin at 1 p.m. on Saturday, March 19, 2016. It will be held in the basement of the Eckert Presbyterian Church at 13025 Highway 65, at the northwest corner of Highway 65 and North Road. Please park behind the church and enter through the back door at the lower level. Pie and coffee will be provided by church members, with donations earmarked for restoration of the historic stone church.



Volunteers Needed for Crane Days

Causeway Clean-Up, Saturday, March 12

Meet at the Fruitgrowers Reservoir parking area on North Road on the west side of the causeway at 10:00 a.m. to help clean up the area in advance of Eckert Crane Days the following weekend. With enough people, it should only take a couple of hours. This should also be an excellent time to see birds on the Reservoir, perhaps even migrating Sandhill Cranes. Please contact Jon Horn to let him know if you can help: 970-249-5404 or jon_horn@alpinearchaeology.com -- or just show up that morning!



Public Viewing, Friday-Sunday, March 18-20, 2016. The Black Canyon Audubon Society (BCAS) will serve as the "hosts" for Eckert Crane Days. Please join us for Friday, Saturday, and/or Sunday mornings (March 18-20, 2016) to share your spotting scope, to talk about birds with visitors, or to take a shift at the BCAS information table, where we will have information available about sandhill cranes, about BCAS, and about the Crane Days programs. Volunteer for just one morning or for the entire event

We need you! – it's easy and it's fun, and it's a great opportunity to share your enthusiasm for birding. Please contact Alan Reed or Susan Chandler-

Reed at 970-249-1076 or susan.chandler.reed@gmail.com to volunteer.

CHECK OUT

April 21-24: Verde Valley Birding and Nature Festival (Central Arizona): www.birdingverde.org

May 11 -15: Ute Mountain Mesa Verde Birding Festival (Cortez, CO) <http://cortezculturalcenter.org>

May 20th: Endangered Species Day

May 29-June 5: Zapata Ranch San Luis Valley, birding w/David Sibley and Ted Floyd: reservations@zranch.org

Directions to Crane Days venues:

Fruitgrower's Reservoir (also known as Hart's Basin) is located east of the community of Eckert, Colorado. From Delta, drive 4 miles east on Highway 92, then turn north on Highway 65 and drive 6 miles to Eckert. Turn right on North Road at Big E Market, across from the Eckert Presbyterian Church (watch for the "Crane Days" sign), and proceed east on North Road until you reach the reservoir.

Volunteers from the Black Canyon Audubon Society will be set up either at "Crane Point"—the hill overlooking the reservoir—or along the causeway across the reservoir, depending on where the best viewing opportunity is on that particular day. Please park in the parking area near the causeway or off the road, and be careful to also watch for traffic when watching the birds. Portable toilets will be available at Crane Point and at the causeway parking lot.

Eckert Presbyterian Church is at 13025 Highway 65, at the northwest corner of Highway 65 and North Road. The talk and pie social will be held in the church meeting hall, at the lower level. The parking lot and meeting hall entrance are behind the church.

Audubon Colorado Council News

By Jane McGarry

The Audubon Colorado Council (ACC) is made up of representatives from ten local Audubon chapters across the state, and meets quarterly to exchange information and work on common projects. The ACC, a coordinated effort of Colorado Audubon Chapters, acts as an independent entity to accomplish new and already-established Audubon Rockies and National Audubon society goals in Colorado. Members from across the state report on Audubon projects in their regions.

At the September 2015 meeting in Grand Junction, BCAS members Bill Day and Jane McGarry reported on potential additional gas well development in the Buzzard Divide/Muddy Creek area of Delta and Mesa counties, and received ACC support in our opposition to any proposed 'swap' withdrawing mineral leases from Thompson Divide in the White River National Forest in exchange for leases in the GMUG forest, especially because of concerns about impacts on wildlife habitat.

Crane Etiquette

1. Sandhill Cranes tend to arrive at Fruitgrower's Reservoir in the afternoons and early evenings. They stop to feed and rest on their journey north in the spring and on their journey south in the fall. They are used to cattle and other wildlife but are shy of people and move away when people approach. The cranes need the resting and feeding opportunities that Fruitgrower's Reservoir and the surrounding lands provide.

2. The Bureau of Reclamation controls the Reservoir and its shoreline. The surrounding land is privately owned and entry is prohibited without landowner permission. These landowners enjoy the cranes and they provide and protect the land that the cranes rely on.

Generally speaking, if you cross a fence or go through a gate to look at the cranes, you have gone too far! If possible, please park in the designated parking lot. Please do not park where you will be blocking access to ranchers' gates or driveways. Please observe all signs that have been placed to help you identify the boundaries.

3. Crane-watching etiquette also includes attention to your surroundings. North Road, along which we park to view the cranes, is a county road used by local residents to commute from place to place. Park in the parking area or along the shoulder, not on the road. Don't open your car door or step out onto the road without looking. Please be attentive to the traffic while you watch the cranes!

BCAS Annual Meeting and Dinner

Save the date, June 21, to join us for our annual meeting, dinner, and speaker. Watch for more information or check out our website: www.blackcanyonaudubon.org.

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is nasty, cranes from the San Luis Valley may decide not to attempt their flight, so the numbers arriving at Fruitgrower's Reservoir that day will be low. If morning weather conditions are not right, we may see cranes on the ground in Eckert that decide to stay another day. In that case, we will be able to observe them feeding in the fields around the reservoir, but there will be no liftoff.

Gunnison Sage-grouse Summit

Join BCAS members on April 25th in the viewing trailer at the Waunita Lek, reservations required (see page 3). Sign up by emailing Elaine Probasco at eprobasco6@earthlink.net



It's the beginning of spring and the perfect time to connect students with birds in their natural habitats. By learning about identification and avian adaptations, children develop a greater understanding of the miracle of migration. The season kicks off with our new board member, Marcella Fremgen, on March 15th in Grand Junction. She'll be participating in Colorado Parks and Wildlife's (CPW) Outdoor Learning Environments and guiding students through a ducks and flyways activity. Next is the April 21st and 22nd Paonia Conservation Days sponsored by Western Slope Conservation Center. This is the fifth year BCAS will be setting up a bird identification station along the North Fork River where over 400 children from Delta County learn the basics of bird guides and binoculars. On May 4th Black Canyon teams with CPW to present a program at Natural Resource Festival Day for all fourth graders in Montrose County.

Birding with New Binoculars

There's always a sense of excitement and discovery when students venture forth on their first Audubon field trip, but in the past that excitement has turned to frustration as the children tried to use non-adjusting toy binoculars to identify birds. Fast forward to Spring 2016 when a big change is in store for our educational programs. Using a holiday discount and donations from the Montrose Woodworkers Guild, BCAS has purchased nine pairs of heavy-duty Raptor binoculars with a 6.5x32 magnification. These binoculars have eye pieces that can be adjusted for child-sized faces and carry an unlimited repair guarantee. So, bring on the birds!

6

Barrow's Goldeneye Counts

By Jason Beason

The Bird Conservancy of the Rockies has been counting Barrow's Goldeneyes in Colorado for seventeen consecutive years beginning in 1999. In late-fall, we encourage volunteers to get out and count this species when they may be found at numerous reservoirs, lakes, and rivers across the state. The reason for this count is to monitor the wintering population in Colorado because it is possible that all Barrow's Goldeneyes in the state during this time of year represent the breeding population for Colorado. However, no one knows for certain if some Barrow's Goldeneyes migrate from Wyoming or farther north. The Flattops Wilderness Area is the primary breeding site for Barrow's Goldeneyes in Colorado. A few years ago they were also found breeding near Mount Evans but that population is very small and may consist of only one pair. The closest breeding population to Colorado is in Wyoming's Yellowstone National Park, which makes the small breeding population in Colorado very special. In 2015, there were 224 individuals counted at 25 sites over a two week period. *Photo by Dennis Garrison*



AA

Conservation News

By Bill Day, Conservation Chair BCAS

Four months after receiving official Important Bird Area (IBA) designation from Audubon Rockies, the Mule Park Purple Martin IBA, along with surrounding areas of Mesa, Delta and Gunnison counties, is still our most urgent conservation concern. The area of large climax aspens mixed with open parks makes up most of what has been referred to as the "Lease Swap" area north of Paonia. With the release of the BLM's recent draft EIS, which favors cancelling the existing illegal leases in Garfield and Pitkin counties, SG Interests has nothing to trade for new leases in the Mule Park area. But surprisingly, there is still political pressure to proceed with the deal as a giveaway.

During a recent conversation with Senator Bennet's office we were advised that the Mule Park/ Hubbard Park/ Buzzard Creek area might still be included in a bill giving away gas leases in exchange for almost nothing. This is the time when we need members to write to Senator

Bennet and tell him that you are against any leasing in the Proposed Lease Swap area. Among the reasons you can mention are that the two areas that we would receive in the "swap" are likely to be of no value-the Thompson Divide leases seem to be on their way to being canceled, and the low elevation BLM land in the North Fork is increasingly being judged to have little or no gas and to be too far from pipelines to be of value. We have mentioned to Bennet's office that we consider the habitat in the area to be as important for birds and big game as any place in Colorado. Senator Bennet can be reached from this website:

<http://www.contactsenators.com/colorado/michael-bennet> .

BCAS will have another field trip to the Mule Park IBA in July, so anyone who hasn't been there is welcome to come and see the most important Western Purple Martin habitat in the state.

In other conservation news, BCAS commented in favor of Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forest (GMUG) proposal to install and monitor artificial best boxes in several parts of the forest around the Paonia Ranger District. One purpose of this is to see if Western Purple Martins can be persuaded to use artificial cavities. The martins along the west coast, which are closely related to ours, are using them. This might become more important if the number of large aspens declines with changes in climate.

In another bit of Forest news, the Spruce Beetle Epidemic and Aspen Decline Management Response (SBEADMR) final EIS has been released. This is a ten-year plan to cut a

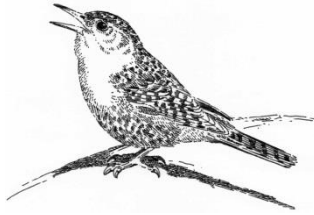


lot of dead and dying spruce and aspens across the GMUG. The final EIS at least addressed some of our

concerns regarding Western Purple Martin habitat and greatly reduced the amount of roads built. Anyone interested in being involved in planning the year to year projects going forward can contact Bill Day or Robin Nicholoff (see page 2 for contact information).

Photo of the Western Purple Martin by Bill Day

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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 D14)
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: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone (optional): _____

Enc: _____ \$10 for email newsletter.
Email address: _____
_____ \$15 for U.S. mail/print subscribers.

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