



Canyon Wrenderings

The Journal of the Black Canyon Audubon Society

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

Summer 2020

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Important Program Notes

Due to the evolving COVID-19 restrictions, all field trips, programs, and annual banquet planning is in flux.

Stay abreast of new dates by visiting

www.blackcanyonaudubon.org.

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The Amazing Gunnison Sage-grouse

By Sallie Thoreson

You've heard the expression, "you are what you eat." Well what if you are a two- to five-pound grouse living in the sagebrush ecosystem? It's not hard to imagine that the Gunnison sage-grouse (*Centrocercus minimus*) eats primarily sagebrush. During brooding and raising young, the females eat more insects, and the chicks follow their mother's lead in finding insects to eat. Both male and female Gunnison sage-grouse feed on sagebrush, other leafy vegetation, and insects all summer and into the fall. But it's an all-sagebrush diet in winter. Gunnison sage-grouse feed on the leaves of several subspecies of big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), black sagebrush (*A. nova*), and little sagebrush (*A. arbuscula*) in its seven small, localized populations in central and western Colorado and eastern Utah.

In addition to the mating dance that male sage grouse do in the spring, the birds and their main food source do a "nutrition dance" of sorts. Plants, in order to survive, often produce chemicals to ward off herbivores and to signal to other plants that "enemies" are near. Plant-eaters, like the Gunnison sage-grouse, are constantly searching for the food that provides them with needed nutrition (protein, sugars, and fat), while avoiding high levels of toxins. Sagebrush has many volatile chemicals, especially coumarin, monoterpenes, and sesquiterpene lactones, which are toxic to most plant eaters. The levels are generally higher in spring and lower in fall and winter. This coincides with the sage-grouse's feeding behavior of eating a variety of plants and insects in spring but concentrating on sagebrush during fall and winter.

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President's Message

I am writing to you during trying times during COVID-19. Susan and I are self-isolating and staying "Safer At Home," but we are getting out for some birding in the area. Social distancing. Maybe things will be better by the time that you read this. Luckily, we have lots of good birds nearby.

Your Audubon board was very disappointed to cancel BCAS activities for Eckert Crane Days, Earth Day, World Migratory Bird Day, and all our field trips and meetings in March, April, and May. Hopefully, we can start those up again soon.

But spring migration is happening, with or without us! Nature goes on. The "Golden Birds," such as Yellow Warblers, Bullock's Orioles, Western Tanagers, Yellow-Breasted Chats, and Black-Headed Grosbeaks, are back in Colorado. Some of my favorites, like hummingbirds, have recently arrived back here. Early nesters already have babies in the nest. I have seen baby red-tailed hawks, golden eagles, great horned owls, and mountain bluebirds in the Montrose area.

I hope you are staying healthy. Please feel free to email me your bird sightings, maybe with a photo, and we'll post them on our website or share them in the next newsletter.

Susan and I travelled in February and March to Antarctica, Argentina, the Falkland Islands, and South Georgia Islands. It was the best trip of our lives. We saw such amazing numbers of birds and wildlife. Highlights were six species of penguins, many southern seabirds, and marine animals. We were so glad that we were able to complete our trip before everything happened. I hope to be able to give you a slideshow presentation about it sometime.

Bruce Ackerman, BCAS President

Gunnison Sage-grouse *continued from cover*

Fortunately, the Gunnison sage-grouse has coevolved adaptations (that's the nutrition dance) with sagebrush that allow them to digest sagebrush and handle a certain level of toxins. A critical set of adaptations is that sage grouse—both the Gunnison sage-grouse and the greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*)—selectively choose species and patches of sagebrush with higher nutritional value and lower toxins. Scientists can detect the levels of toxins, such as coumarins, by using UV light sensors, though the sage-grouse can probably see chemicals in this part of the light spectrum. They may also use olfactory cues as well. AMAZING!

I'll publish more on our neighbor the Gunnison sage-grouse in upcoming issues of the newsletter.

Sallie Thoreson is a BCAS board member. Her interests in native plants, gardening, ecology, and birds all come together in BCAS.

Canyon Wrenderings

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ON THE COVER

Gunnison Sage Grouse © Christopher Lazo.

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AD HOC COMMITTEES (ANNUAL EVENTS)

Montrose County Fair—OPEN

Bird Banding—Carrie Krickbaum (see above)

Christmas Bird Count Team—Arden

Anderson, Adam Petry, Amy Seglund,
and Missy Siders

Eckert Crane Days—Dian Torphy

A note about email addresses in this newsletter: All emails have an extra space before the @ sign to discourage webcrawlers from spam activities.

Chapter Events

Annual Banquet Postponed

Instead: Reduce, Re-use & Recycle for a Good Cause

By Kristal Cooper

Well, folks, we're sad to say that the annual BCAS banquet and meeting that's usually held in June is being rescheduled for later in the year. Your chapter leaders are busy brainstorming ideas to include a new format, location, and date that will both comply with group gathering recommendations and make all of us comfortable enough to attend.

Meanwhile, we're thinking positively and planning for the associated fundraiser. We are unsure how many businesses will be able or willing to donate gift cards during these lean times, so we're talking about doing raffles for a whole bunch of smaller items.



If your family (like mine) has spent some recent downtime cleaning out your storage, maybe you found some bird-related items (birding supplies, books, art, knickknacks, for example) that you're no longer using, yet know someone else will love? I've set aside five Christmas ornaments, a pair of earrings, and a Rite in the Rain notebook (all new and unused) for just this purpose (see photo above).

Please consider donating anything you think another BCAS member would value, and we'll include it in the auction or drawing. Contact me at NationalParkFan1 @yahoo.com or (580) 919-5987, and I'll happily arrange to pick up your donation. Also, if you are involved with a local business or service that would be willing to donate a gift card, please let me know.

Bluebird Boxes Tracked by Members



In memory of Terry Ryan, who established the blue bird box monitoring program at Ridgway State Park, several BCAS members have stepped up to monitor the 31 bluebird nest boxes that Terry monitored for several years.

Carrie Krickbaum, Bruce Ackerman, Kristal Cooper, Laura Mah, and Don Marsh are monitoring 31 bluebird nest boxes at the park. They report that the first baby bluebirds started hatching the week of May 10 with several active nests of both Western and Mountain Bluebirds.

First Tuesday Bird Walks

Join us on the first Tuesday of each month as we visit local areas to bird and share birding experiences. We meet at 9 AM at the northeast corner of the Gold's Gym parking lot in Montrose (corner of Hillcrest and East Main St). All skill levels are welcome.

Bring a snack and water, binoculars, and field guides. Trips generally last until NOON. Contact Don at (209) 256-5744 or at ridgwaybrdr@gmail.com for more information.

Mark your Calendars!

July 7

August 4

September 1

October 6

November 3

December 1

Check the website for new events, restrictions, or cancellations

www.blackcanyonaudubon.com

Chapter News

BCAS member Arden Anderson and others spearheaded a COVID-19 relief campaign and have been organizing volunteers to take care of the elderly and immunocompromised in Gunnison. Said member Marcella Fremgen Tarantino of Gunnison, “Arden has really drummed up a staggering amount of support from the community and it definitely makes me happy to live here with such a fantastic group of people who are so strongly community oriented!”

COVID-19 Relief Efforts in Gunnison

By Arden Anderson

Gunnison County was one of the early winners in the Coronavirus lottery. It looks like skiers brought the virus into the county, and it didn't take long for the outbreak to spread. Soon, we had one of the highest per capita infection rates in the country. We formed an incident management team in early March, and I was asked to coordinate volunteers for the team. In other emergencies, like a wildfire that exceeds our ability to manage alone, we can usually call in outside help through mutual-aid agreements. But—in a situation like a pandemic—where many counties are challenged, there aren't many extra resources to go around. We knew we were going to have to use volunteers to bolster our response capabilities.

The folks in Gunnison County have a strong tradition of volunteering for a variety of causes. Before long, I had built a database of over 600 folks willing to help out. We have put them to work doing a variety of tasks including:

- Operating a call center to answer questions from the public and help people evaluate their symptoms;
- A delivery assistance hotline helping folks order groceries online;
- Delivery drivers deliver groceries, meals, and prescriptions to folks isolating at home;
- Helping staff the alternative-screening site to test those with COVID-19 symptoms;
- Tracing contacts and conducting patient follow-up;
- Producing more than 1,200 reusable cloth masks for folks from first responders to preschoolers with assistance from the Sewing Circle;
- Assisting with incident management, including planning, logistics, operations, research, safety, and public information; and
- Delivering school supplies to facilitate remote learning.

At the height of operations, we used 250 volunteers in a week to cover a similar number of shifts and put in 1,350 hours in direct and coordinated support of incident priorities. By the end of this week (May 15), my volunteers will have contributed over 10,000 hours of work!

It has been a challenge keeping this many people trained, coordinated, equipped, and pointed in the right direction. I have a fantastic group helping me with all of this, including Dr. Jessica Young, but my work weeks are still 65 to 80 hours. We are 68 days into this, and I have yet to get a day off, but one may come along sometime. If it is still daylight when I get home, I try to get out for a 3- or 4-mile hike and catch a glimpse of a bird or two. I am incredibly grateful for the willingness of folks to contribute their time, effort, and expertise to help our communities get through these challenging times.

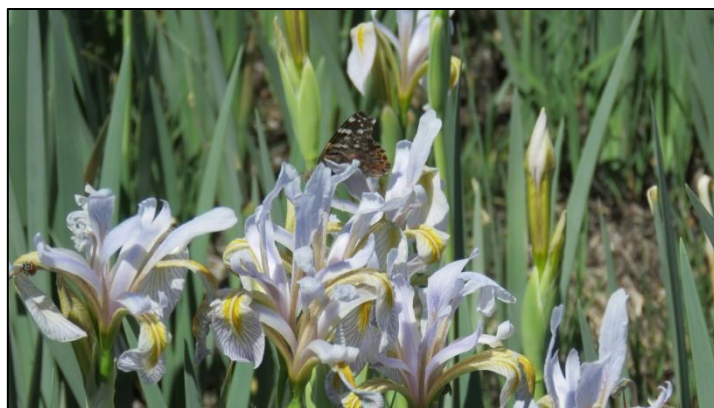
Marine Road Wetlands Update

By Kristal Cooper

For those who haven't heard, our partnership with City of Montrose to develop the property at 14600 Marine Rd as a birding preserve met with some drama recently.

On March 7, a burn pit on an adjacent property ran out of control during high winds. Tall flames whipped through the entire park, with the exception of the triangle designated as a potential parking lot. A recent visit to the site indicates that the result was mostly positive.

Overgrown grasses and weeds, along with the shrub blinds near the north pond, are totally gone. The natural topography of the land is now much more obvious, which will make planning the boardwalk and trail system easier.



Irises in bloom with visiting pollinator. © Kristal Cooper.

All of the mature trees burned. This is a shame, because they often held local and migrating songbirds. During my visit, I saw only the usual suspects there—a dozen red-winged blackbirds, a few flyover swallows and herons, and a single pair of mallards on the pond. Half a dozen mammal skeletons were observed on the property, in various sizes and states of array. Some bones were evidently from before the fire, because they were burned. I was worried for the resident foxes, especially when the first den opening I came

Continued on page 6

CPW Changes Regulation for State Wildlife Areas

By Bruce Ackerman

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) manages 350 State Wildlife Areas (SWAs) across Colorado, about 700,000 acres total. These state-owned properties were originally purchased using dollars raised through the sale of hunting and fishing licenses. The primary purpose for these properties is to provide high-quality wildlife habitat, for hunting and fishing and for watching birds and wildlife. Unlike other public lands, which are managed for multiple uses, state wildlife areas are focused only on fish and wildlife. There are dozens of sites in our area. Two areas that I visit often are Billy Creek and Escalante State Wildlife Areas.

On April 30, the CPW Wildlife Commission voted to change the regulations for use of the SWAs. Starting July 1, 2020, all users of the SWAs will need to have a valid Colorado hunting or fishing license (each member of a group, 18 years or older). This regulation change will help reduce improper uses of these areas, such as trash dumping, illegal camping, and other activities that degrade habitat or are detrimental to wildlife. Additional funds raised from non-consumptive users will help to maintain roads, bathrooms, fences, and signs and will help fund habitat improvement projects, such as controlled burns, stream-bank stabilization, and weed control.

SWAs are funded almost entirely by sales of hunting and fishing licenses and receive no state general fund tax dollars. CPW does receive federal excise taxes from sales of hunting and fishing equipment, and the amount is based, in part, on the number of licenses sold.

No one really wants to start paying for something that previously was free, but we OFTEN do have to pay to use places we like—even public lands. For example, we currently pay to use Colorado state parks, national parks and monuments, and US Forest Service campgrounds. It costs money to maintain all public lands!

Colorado's human population is growing steadily, and habitat for wildlife is becoming more limited. SWAs are receiving more and more use. Now you will be contributing to maintaining the high-quality habitat on these SWAs.

If you already have a fishing or hunting license, you are set. If you don't, the least expensive way to legally access state wildlife areas is to buy a fishing license. If you are 65+ and a legal resident of Colorado, you can purchase an annual resident license for \$10. If you are under 65, it is \$35. The license is good for one year from date of purchase. You might already have an annual pass for Colorado state parks or federal lands, but those passes do not allow you to use SWAs.

Some, upset by this new regulation, have said that CPW should provide a “wildlife watchers” license. Because the framework for such a license does not currently exist, action by the Colorado state legislature would be needed. Over-use of state wildlife areas is such an imminent threat to wildlife and wildlife habitat that the CPW Commission acted in the only way it could.

Resources

CPW Map of SWA's statewide
<https://cpw.state.co.us/placestogo/parks/Pages/WildlifeAreaMap.aspx>

CPW State Recreation Lands brochure, 9/2019
<https://cpw.state.co.us/aboutus/Pages/RegulationsBrochures.aspx>

Why Be a Member of BCAS?

By Missy Siders

Currently, half of members have not renewed their membership this year. This impacts funding available to achieve chapter goals. Please help to support your local chapter and the activities we provide.

Dues paid directly to BCAS remain local and help to support BCAS chapter goals, including:

- Promoting conservation of natural resources through informative public programs, the newsletter, and website;
- Providing opportunities for observing and studying birds and other wildlife through field trips;
- Offering youth and adult education programs;
- Empowering members and the public with knowledge to be effective environmental advocates; and
- Contributing to the recovery of the Gunnison Sage-grouse through joint efforts with working groups and federal and state agencies.

All memberships are for the calendar year and expire each year on December 31. Individual membership is \$20, Family membership is \$30. Renew your membership online <http://www.blackcanyonaudubon.org/join-bcas>, or by mail by downloading the printable enrollment form at http://www.blackcanyonaudubon.org/images/Membership_Form.pdf

If you have questions on your status, please email black.canyon.audubon.society@gmail.com. Also, if you have not heard from us via e-mail for a while, please verify your e-mail by sending us a note at the same e-mail address.

BCAS does not share e-mail address and only contacts members by e-mail to inform them of upcoming trips, programs, or special events.

Attract Hummingbirds to Your Yard

By Dian Torphy

I am not the sort of person who is going to clean a hummingbird feeder every couple of days. At least I know that about myself. The feeder would get used for a week, maybe a month, and then be relegated to the garage, or worse, used in an unsanitary fashion. Yet, being a novice birder, I really wanted to attract hummingbirds to my home, learn to ID them, and watch their antics and behaviors. Luckily, I love plants, and I have big windows looking out onto a deck. The solution for me was obvious: Plant a hummingbird garden.

Well-chosen plants not only give the hummers a treat, but they add beauty to your deck or yard, are fairly easy to maintain, and give a little bit of habitat to bugs and other birds as well. Although bugs may not be on your favorites list, they do make up about 80% of a hummingbird's diet and supply necessary protein. In addition, you support your local garden center by purchasing some plants and pots or soil amendments. Although hummingbirds tend to be attracted to red and purple flowers, mix it up. A diverse selection of species and colors is nice for hummingbirds and human appeal. Try some perennials in pots along with annuals. Many varieties overwinter just fine and will save you from replanting every year. Or, plant them in the ground in an area that is suitable for viewing and safe from cats and other predators. The following is a list of plants that are commonly considered hummingbird favorites. Underlined species are naturally high in nectar.

Annuals

Cleome, Geranium, Nicotiana, Petunia, Salvia, and Zinnia

Perennials

Agastache, Columbine, Coral Bells (*Heuchera* sp.), and red flower types, such as Honeysuckle (vines and shrubs), Lupines, Bee Balm (*Monarda*), Penstemon, Salvia, Trumpet vine

Choosing native plants is a nice consideration to keep the hummingbirds' diet wild, and they are great for other pollinators as well. However, native plants can be hard to find and are not a must. Plants that bloom a long time or bloom at different times are good to increase the amount of time hummingbirds will visit your yard. Diversity is always good! Last year, I had hummingbirds feeding from the many bright blue lobelia flowers I always include in my pots, although I have never seen lobelia on hummingbird plant lists.

Other considerations

Do not spray garden chemicals in your yard. Instead, look for natural alternatives. As I mentioned earlier, insects are important to hummingbirds and all birds. Spiders are also important both as food for birds and for their webs, which

hummingbirds use for nest material. What could be better than finding a hummingbird has chosen your shrub or balcony in which to raise its young?!



Black-chinned hummingbird © Laura Mah.

If you do prefer to use a feeder, please be sure to keep it clean and safe. Change or refill the feeder every 2-3 days and place it in at least partial shade. If placed in a location that gets hot, change nectar solution more frequently. Only use white granulated sugar—cane sugar is best, beet sugar is OK. Clean the feeder with a mild detergent and rinse thoroughly. Once monthly, bleach the feeder and again rinse it thoroughly. Do not use red dyes!! And be sure to place feeders where cats cannot reach them.

Dian is a retired nursery owner living in Cedaredge. She stays involved with plant classes and projects on the western slope and with BCAS as treasurer and board member.

Marine Road *continued from page 4*

across had cobwebs across the hole. However, the back side of that mound revealed a very active den.

The butterflies and other insects will be happy, because there's plenty of milkweed close to blooming, and large drifts of wild iris are showing off in the middle of the field.

Our planning committee believes now is the time to start managing the vegetation. We have repeatedly reached out to the City, attempting to set up a walk through; however, all meetings have been postponed indefinitely due to Coronavirus and turnover in the City's parks department supervisor position.

Be assured that we remain resolved to keep this project moving forward and we'll continue to keep you updated.

Planting Natives for the Birds

By Laura Mah

When Don and I built our house in Ridgway, we needed a certain number of trees and bushes to be planted before we could get our certificate of occupancy (CO). I thought this requirement was very odd. Since then, I have taken native plant workshops from Colorado State University Extension and have learned how non-native plants upset the balance of the food chain. In hindsight, I'd like to see the building code changed to ensure a certain number of NATIVE trees and bushes be planted before earning a CO.

Why native plants for my garden? The food chain is a sequence of transfers of matter and energy (*food*) from organism to organism. Planting non-native plants instead of native plants causes an imbalance in the food chain. Because native insects did not evolve with non-native plants, they cannot recognize non-native plants as food, and they cannot overcome the non-native plants' chemical defenses. For these reasons, many native insects do not feed on non-native plants. In the long run, the loss of native plants causes a loss of native insects. In the food chain, native insects are the primary food source for native birds, especially their young. **(Ninety-six percent of terrestrial birds rear their young on insects.)** A decline in native insects means a decline in native birds.



American robin with a native toyo berry (California). © Don Marsh. Robins love Colorado's native berries, too, such as chokecherries (*Prunus virginiana*).

Researchers at the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute performed a study to determine how plants in human-managed landscapes affect the reproductive success of the resident bird population. The only distinction they found that determined if a spot was a boom or bust for the bird population was whether the plants were native to the area.

Learning Curve of Going Native



Choose your plants based on the scientific name and not the common name. There are 25-30 species of *Gaillardia* (Blanket Flower). Each has a different color palette and pattern. For example, this Colorado native blanket flower

(*Gaillardia* sp.), provides camouflage for the native *Schinia volupia* moth while it pollinates the flowers. Other blanket flowers, including cultivars and nativars do not provide camouflage and make them easy meals for predators.

The Colorado State University Extension Native Plant Master program provides education about native plants, sustainable landscaping, and invasive weeds. Coming home from native plant class, I was suddenly aware that the display of red poppies in my front yard was not native. They were in a deer resistant wildflower seed mix, and I had not checked the seed mix to see if the wildflowers were native. My only consolation was that the red poppies provided food for my neighbor's honey bee colony and were part of the bee and human food chain.

Laura Faye Mah is an award-winning photographer, an extremely patient birding tag-along, and wife of BCAS board member Don Marsh.

Resources

Chelsea Nursery 33 47 G Rd. Clifton, CO. 81520. Specialty Growers of Native, Xeric Plants, and Hardy Cacti.
<http://chelseanursery.com/>

Western Native Seed Company. Specializes in seeds of plants which are native to the Rocky Mountains, western Great Plains, and adjacent areas.

<https://www.westernnativeseed.com/>

Colorado Plant Database. Sponsored by the Colorado Native Plant Master Program® and Colorado Natural Heritage Program® The database provides researched-based information on the identification, ecology, and human connections for more than 1,000 Colorado native plants as well as non-native invasive weeds.

<https://coloradoplants.jeffco.us/plantSearch>

Generating Conservation Conversations

By Sallie Thoreson, Conservation Chair

The Black Canyon Audubon Society board is interested in examining land use and planning issues in Delta and Montrose counties. With pressures to develop land, especially river corridors, for home sites and more intense recreation, the wildlife and habitat may suffer. We are looking for volunteers to help us get more involved with city and county planning and land-use issues. Contact Bruce Ackerman or me (see masthead on page 2 for contact information).

BCAS Comments on Federal Actions

The National Environment Policy Act, or NEPA, established a framework for protecting our environment by requiring federal agencies to submit Environmental Impact Statements and include the public in decision making. The White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) is proposing revisions that will weaken NEPA. Sallie Thoreson, as a BCAS member, submitted comments asking CEQ to clarify some wording changes and to continue to include the consideration of indirect or cumulative environmental effects in documents.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act has protected and benefitted birds for over 100 years. The BCAS board submitted comments to the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in opposition to the proposed regulatory change that companies that accidentally kill migratory birds will not face criminal prosecution. BCAS also signed on with letters of opposition from Audubon Rockies and the American Bird Conservancy.

Revised Designation of Critical Habitat for the Western Distinct Population Segment of the Yellow-Billed Cuckoo is up for review. There are two proposed areas in Colorado: one in Mesa County on the Colorado River and one on the North Fork of the Gunnison River in Delta County. The BCAS board, with assistance from member Robin Nicholoff, submitted comments to USFWS asking for clarification on why earlier proposed sites in our region were dropped from designation and for designating smaller habitat units in Colorado that provide breeding habitat in an important ecological setting and migration stopovers in the spring.

BLM has quarterly oil and gas lease sales across many of the western states. In Colorado, the next two lease sales are in June and September 2020. The BCAS board signed on with National Audubon Society to a 27-page letter regarding scoping requirements for the September 2020 leases. Audubon Rockies will probably contact BCAS to sign on with their letter regarding the June 2020 lease sale.

Federal issues in the news

Due to lawsuits brought by environmental groups, the BLM has re-opened its public comment opportunity around their federal resource management plans for the greater sage-grouse. There is a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the greater sage-grouse population in northwestern Colorado. BCAS signed on with other conservation groups to tell BLM to reconsider the stronger 2015 conservation plans.

E-bikes on BLM land. The BLM is considering allowing e-bikes in areas where any bikes are currently allowed. The BLM announcement contains the wording "...intended to make it easier for more Americans to recreate on and experience their public lands." This effort is in line with Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt's call for the BLM and other Interior agencies to expand access on public lands to e-bikes. More information is available at <https://www.blm.gov/press-release/blm-seeks-public-comment-proposed-e-bike-regulations> Comments are due by June 9. BCAS is considering submitting comments.

The High Country News reported May 12, 2020, that the **"Trump administration is diligently weakening U.S. environment protections."** In the midst of the COVID 19 pandemic, federal agencies have eased fuel efficiency standards for new cars and frozen or loosened pollution and review rules on industries, energy development, and power plants. However, some states are still advancing their environmental agendas, and the use of renewable power is increasing. <https://www.hcn.org/articles/climate-desk-trump-admin-sprints-to-weaken-environment-protections-during-the-pandemic>

Some good news

The New York Times reported May 13, 2020, that "the United States is on track to produce more electricity this year from renewable power than from coal for the first time on record."

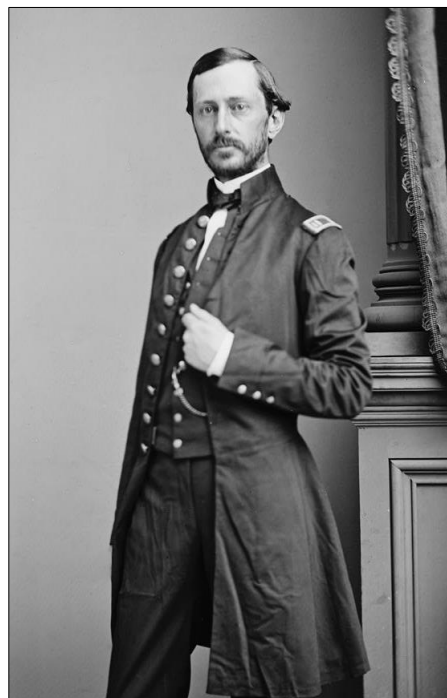
The Xerces Society reports that the "U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently finalized listing the island marble butterfly (*Euchloe ausonides insulanus*) as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act and designated critical habitat. The Xerces Society and other conservation groups first petitioned the USFWS to protect the island marble butterfly as an endangered species in 2002."

<https://xerces.org/press/after-18-years-island-marble-butterfly-finally-receives-federal-protection>

Who was that Bird Named For?

Williamson's sapsucker

By Susan Chandler-Reed



Robert Stockton Williamson was born in Oxford, New York, in 1825. At age 18, he joined the U.S. Navy, serving under his family friend Commodore Robert F. Stockton, after whom he was named. Stockton subsequently obtained an appointment for Williamson to the United States Military Academy. Upon graduation, Williamson was inducted into the Army Corps of

Engineers and assigned to conduct surveys of the proposed routes for the transcontinental railroad in California and Oregon.

John Strong Newberry, an Army surgeon and geologist, was part of the survey team in northern California. Newberry collected the sapsucker, which he named *Picus williamsonii*, after Williamson. Oddly enough, Newberry's 1857 collection included only male specimens. In the 1870s, ornithologists realized that *P. williamsonii* was actually the male plumage of a species already named by John Cassin, *Sphyrapicus thyroideus*, whose collection had only included females of the species. The common name remains Williamson's, but the scientific name reflects Cassin's 1852 description.

Williamson went on to serve in the Union Army during the Civil War as a chief topographical engineer. After the war, Williamson returned to the Pacific coast, heading up the USACE San Francisco District Office until shortly before his death of tuberculosis in 1882. Mount Williamson in California is also perhaps named after Robert S. Williamson.

Williamson's sapsuckers are robin-sized birds that nest in Ponderosa pine forests in the western US. They winter at lower elevations and in the southwestern US and Mexico. As demonstrated by the initial confusion about the bird, males and females have quite distinct plumage. Males have glossy black backs with a white rump and wing patches, narrow white stripes on the head, a bright red throat, and a yellow belly. Females have a brown head, and their back, wings, and sides are barred with dark brown and white. Females

also have a white rump and some yellow on their belly, but lack a red throat or white wing patches.

Sources

Beolens, Bo, Michael Watkins, and Michael Grayson

2014 *The Eponym Dictionary of Birds*. Bloomsbury.

Williamson photograph:

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f5/Robert_S_Williamson.jpg

Williamson biographical data:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_S._Williamson



Bird images:

<https://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/default.asp?lang=En&n=393B1B10-1&peditable=true>

Susan Chandler-Reed is a retired archaeologist who finds looking up at birds a nice counterpoint to her career of looking down at the ground.

BCAS Donates to Wildlife Foundation

By Dian Torphy

BCAS member Linda Hansen has been taking injured birds and wildlife to the Pauline S. Schneegas Wildlife Foundation in Silt, Colorado. BCAS board members agreed to make a donation to help in the foundation's efforts.

PSSF has an intensive care unit, performs surgeries and physical therapy, and ensures the bird or animal is in shape to survive when released. The foundation even provides physical therapy!

For more information, visit www.psswf.org.

Black Canyon Audubon Society
P.O. Box 387
Delta, CO 81416



www.blackcanyonaudubon.org

Want to see the color photographs in this publication?

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Please remember to renew your membership

Dues paid to the Black Canyon Audubon Chapter stay in the chapter and help fund activities, public outreach, and more!



Black Canyon Audubon Society (NAS Chapter D14) Chapter Membership Form

Local Audubon chapter members may participate in all chapter activities, receive the chapter newsletter *Canyon Wrenderings*, and vote on chapter issues. Annual membership dues are \$20 for individual and \$30 for family membership. These annual dues remain local.

(Check one) Renewal ☐ New Member ☐

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone (Optional): _____

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Enclosed

☐ \$20 for individual membership

☐ \$30 for family membership

Renew online or mail your renewal to: Black Canyon Audubon Society
PO Box 387, Delta, CO 81416.