



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

Winter 2020

Volume XXXIV Number 4



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121st Annual Christmas Bird Count

By Missy Siders

The National Audubon Society's 2020 Christmas Bird Count will be conducted between Monday, December 14, and Tuesday, January 5, 2021. The Christmas Bird Count occurs during this time every year. Please note that the COVID-19 pandemic affects CBC participation. Depending on local restrictions, most counts will be done under the COVID-19 guidelines sent to compilers by National Audubon. Other counts may be cancelled altogether.

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Two Winter Feeder Visitors

By Sallie Thoreson

It's time to start the winter feeder season. Do you have your suet and sunflower feeders out?

Cornell Lab of Ornithology reported a record bird count for the October Big Day 2020. More than 32,000 people worldwide submitted nearly 78,000 checklists and set a world record for the most species reported on a single day. This should be a good bird-watching winter with COVID-19 limiting some outdoor group activities. Fortunately, birding can be done at home. Here are two birds to watch for, for different reasons.

The introduced House Sparrow is a commonly seen bird year-round. They often mob bird feeders in the winter. But this species seems to be declining,

continued on page 8

President's Message

I'm writing this mid-November. The holidays are approaching. I am thankful for all the birds that have provided endless hours of entertainment for us while we've been staying safe at home.

We are sorry that, due to COVID-19, BCAS has only been able to lead a few field trips and have a few Zoom online presentations. It's not the kind of year that we would like to see! Go out birding on your own! I guess it is a year for Do-It-Yourself birding trips, socially distanced, with people in your pod. Send me an email about the favorite trips you've done this year. Send us photos for our web site or Facebook page. Or you could ask me about my favorite places to go during any season.

We hope that we are able to pull off the Christmas Bird Counts this year (see article on cover). Expect them to have fewer participants, be socially-distanced, masked, and with no social gatherings before or after as is the usual protocol.

Winter is starting. We've had a few cold days. Have you been seeing birds migrating south? Thousands of Sandhill Cranes have been passing over—some headed south over the mountains to winter in New Mexico and some spending the winter in Delta on G50 Road west of town. Different ducks and geese are arriving from the north. Wintering hawks and bald eagles are starting to be seen.

There have been some good, uncommon birds around, too, so keep your eyes open and share your sightings—some of the best birds I have seen include the Brown Thrasher, Pacific Loon, Franklin's Gull, and Solitary Sandpiper.

Membership Renewal

Please remember to renew your membership. Local memberships expire for everyone in December. Please renew online or by check. See the membership form on the last page of this newsletter. When you renew, your membership will be paid through December 2021.

Bruce Ackerman

Watch Your Inbox for an Email Ballot

BCAS board elections are usually held at the annual meeting. Because the annual meeting was canceled, elections will be by online survey. Watch your email for an invitation to participate in the electronic survey and ballot casting.

Submit Your Ideas and Articles to *Canyon Wrenderings*

Do you have an idea for a story? Would you like to submit an article or photos to this newsletter? Please contact the managing editor below.

Canyon Wrenderings

The quarterly journal of the Black Canyon Audubon Society. Vol 34. No 4.

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ON THE COVER

Northern Shrike on a backyard bush. © Missy Siders.

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Montrose County Fair—OPEN

Bird Banding—Carrie Krickbaum (see above)

Christmas Bird Count Team—Arden

Anderson, Adam Petry, Amy Seglund,

and Missy Siders (see page 3 for contact information)

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.

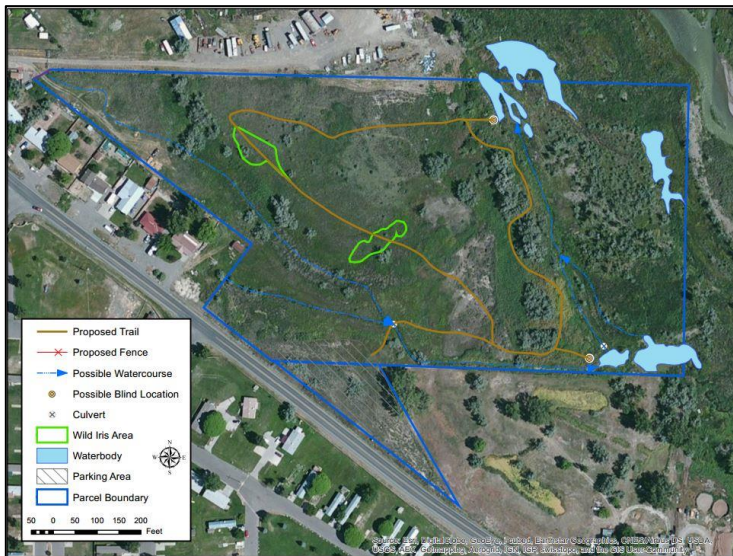
Marine Road Birding Park—Project Update & Plans Moving Forward

By Kristal Cooper

Marine Road Park is a proposed birding park on a city-owned property in Montrose along the Uncompahgre River. I am happy to report that despite events of 2020 setting us back, they have not knocked us out.

On the morning of September 25, members of the BCAS board of directors and other friends of this project met at the site to have a walk-n-talk with Jackie Bubenik, the new Parks & Rec supervisor for the city of Montrose.

During the hour-long meeting, we asked and answered lots of questions, getting him up to speed, and showing him the great potential of the property.



A map of the Marine Road parcel where the proposed bird park will be located.

Board member Jon Horn was especially helpful, suggesting minnows over chemical mosquito cakes to address the bugs. Jon also pointed out that the odor seemed more like it was coming from a malfunctioning septic tank than the ponds.

In the end, Jackie indicated that he was supportive of the BCAS plans and that he'd be happy to help if BCAS attempts to find funds for planning. He was clear that we can't expect any cash outlay from the City in 2021, as its budget had already been written and most of the parks

department money would be going to the new amphitheater in Cerise Park.

Follow up emails to Kendall Cramer, the City's grant-writing guru, yielded exciting news. He confirmed that the City is planning to partner with the University Technical Assistance (UTA) program in spring of 2021. The UTA program will provide graduate students opportunities to create conceptual designs of this project's desired amenities, which will set BCAS and the City up to apply for grants such as the Great Outdoor Colorado funds later next year.

We had another good surprise in October when we learned that the City has annexed a 2.82-acre parcel along the river and immediately north of the Marine Road property. The addition includes the northern portion of the northern duck pond and some marshland farther downstream. A conversation with the assistant city manager confirmed that the intention is to fold this into the BCAS project.

It appears that all parties involved are engaged and interested in moving this forward and making it a real point of interest for the Montrose area! ■

First Tuesday Field Trip to Marine Road



Bruce Ackerman led a socially-distanced field trip to Marine Road November 3. Twelve participants attended. Birds of note included a Black-Crowned Night Heron and Sharp-Shinned Hawk. © Judith Lopez.

First Tuesday Field Trips

These field trips will continue as COVID-19 protocols allow: with small groups, driving separately, and wearing masks. Mark your calendars for December 1, January 5, February 2, and March 2. Meet at 9 AM at the northeastern corner of the Gold's Gym parking lot in Montrose (corner of Hillcrest and East Main St). All skill levels are welcome.

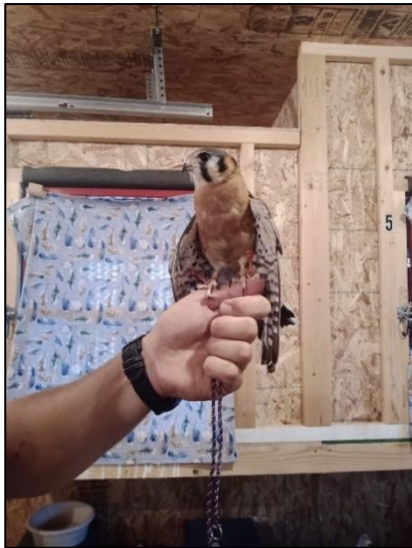
Bring a snack, water, binoculars, and field guides. Trips generally last until NOON. Contact Don at (209) 256-5744 or at ridgwaybrdr@gmail.com for more information. ■

Nature's Educators Brings Raptors to Life...Virtually

By Carrie Krickbaum

On October 1, 27 BCAS members were treated to a live virtual presentation via ZOOM during which Devin Jaffe, founder of Nature's Educators. She shared with viewers some of the raptor ambassadors that live at the Natures Educators wildlife centers.

Many people may think that "birds of prey" and "raptors" are the same thing. Actually, a bird of prey is any bird that eats meat—like shrikes, herons, kingfishers, and penguins. But a raptor, which comes from the Latin word *rapier*, means to abduct or seize, as in using talons to hunt for prey. Raptors include hawks, eagles, and falcons. Raptors have talons for seizing prey. A note: Vultures and condors have feet more like turkeys, but because they have cousins in South America and Africa that hunt like typical raptors, they are included in the raptor classification. The raptor guests that were introduced during the presentation included an American Kestrel, an Eastern Screech Owl, a Ferruginous Hawk, and an immature Bald Eagle. Doodlebug, a three-year-old American kestrel was introduced first. She is an *imprinted* and *captive-bred* bird. Most of the ambassadors are *captive bred* because, older, injured birds that can't be released aren't trained for demonstration. Human *imprinting* means that a bird is bonded to a human.



The American Kestrel is the smallest falcon. This one weighs 110 grams. Some facts about the kestrel:

- They can turn their heads 180 degrees, see more shades of color than other birds, and can hover to look for movement of prey.
- They can hold their head in the same position while the rest of the body is moving about. Their preferred meals include small birds, rodents, snakes, dragonflies and even bats—all seen from a powerline or other stationary high point.
- They have a stripe below the eye. All falcons have these malar stripes to absorb light while hunting, similar to a cheetah.
- Falcons are closely related to parrots!

An Eastern Screech Owl named Thistle made an appearance next. These birds are sometimes called "little horned owls," because they look like a small version of a Great Horned Owl, yet they only weigh 140grams. Colorado is home to both Eastern and Western Screech Owls, depending on which side of the Continental Divide you're located. They both make different sounds which you can check out here https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Eastern_Screech-Owl/sounds

This bird also was raised in captivity and is an *imprint*. Actually, owls are the hardest raptor to raise in captivity, especially if they were born in the wild, injured, and then



can't be released. They are a very primitive bird. Devin says they are also very stubborn and take three times longer to train than other raptors. Owls are mostly nocturnal, though a few are diurnal. Others are *crepuscular* and hunt at twilight. Screech owls will grow to full size in six weeks.

Owls are zygodactyl, meaning they have two toes in front

and two toes in back. In addition, one of those toes in back is double-jointed, so they can move it to the front to help provide more flexibility while hunting. The tufts of feathers that resemble ears are called plumicorns. The origin is from the Latin words *pluma*, which means feather, and *cornu*, meaning horn. There are three main theories about the purpose of these feathers. One is camouflage, another is for communication, and the third is that they may help catch sound.

The Eastern Screech Owl has some other adaptations, including:

- A fairly flat face and a facial disk that funnels sound to its ears. The ears are at asymmetrical locations on its head to help triangulate sound.
- Extremely large eyes compared to the head. They are so big that they touch each other inside the skull and touch the back of the skull. The large eyes allow for many rod cells to capture light. They don't have as many cone cells, which detect color. This means owls see more in grey tones.
- Specialized feathers to alter air turbulence and absorb sound so that they can hunt without making much noise.



A Ferruginous Hawk by the name of Storm was presented next. The bird is about five pounds and is one year old. This is one of the raptors that Devin uses for hunting, along with a Prairie Falcon, two Harris Hawks that hunt as a team, and occasionally a Great Horned Owl.

The Ferruginous Hawk is the largest hawk species and it gets its name from the rust to reddish-brown colored feathers. They look similar to a Red-tailed Hawk, but can be distinguished by their feathered legs. A Red-tailed Hawk does not have feathered legs. (Rough-legged Hawks and Golden Eagles also have feathered tarsi, or feet.) The Ferruginous Hawk also has a huge mouth that extends back past the eyes. This makes it look like the bird is smiling!

These hawks mostly hunt prairie dogs so will be seen on the ground. They have lightning fast feet to grab prairie dogs. They will also hunt jack rabbits. This is aided by the force of their talons, which can grab with 270 pounds of pressure per square inch! Also, Ferruginous Hawks have a light morph and a dark morph like many hawks. The light morph has the more rust colored shoulder feathers and lighter feathers underneath. The dark morph is more of a solid dark chocolate color. The typical tail is solid white with grey or a striped brown or red tail. Like many raptors, they have counter-shading, or lighter coloring underneath so prey cannot see them as well from below, and darker colors on top so they blend in while feeding on the ground. Here is a link to a video of Devin with a Ferruginous Hawk outdoors. <https://video.search.yahoo.com/search/video?fr=mcafee&p=nature%27s+educators#id=3&vid=08b3bf97bcfe35f1c39bedfa1b6ba268&action=click>

The final guest was an immature Bald Eagle called Juno. He weighs 10 pounds and is still speckled at two-years-old. Generally, the first 3-4 years a Bald Eagle is not white-headed. One easy way to tell the difference between a Golden Eagle and an immature Bald Eagle is by looking at the beak (if you are close enough to see it). Bald Eagle beaks are very large compared to the head, especially in length. Also, they have naked legs, whereas the Golden Eagle has

feathered legs. The naked legs make it easier for them to catch fish!

Juno came to Nature's Educators from Nebraska. He was being illegally fed near a popular lake and became habituated to people. They determined this because he was found in three different vehicles stealing fish out of coolers. So, Nebraska Game and Fish took him to a rehab facility in Nebraska and put him with two adult Bald Eagles, hoping he would learn to act "normal" around humans. Devin called him a food imprint because he associated humans with food and did not fear humans like wild Bald Eagles do. Bald Eagles eat mostly fish but will also feed on carrion, waterfowl, and small mammals. They are also kleptoparasitic and will often steal from other birds. They do this to Osprey, because Osprey are much better at catching fish.

Attendees of this presentation also learned that raptors will make a cast of the animal material they can't digest and cough it up like an owl pellet. Owl pellets include bone because they cannot break down bone. An eagle, however, can break down bone. Eagles have very strong stomach acids to do this but they will cast other indigestible parts such as feathers, fur, and some bone. Eagles, like most other birds, also have a crop where they can store food for several hours (or days) before digesting it. This is beneficial when food is scarce.

The program finished up with a question and answer period. Devin talked about her falconry and the variety of residents at Nature's Educators facilities, which includes other birds like pigeons, parrots, a chukar, and lizards and snakes! ■



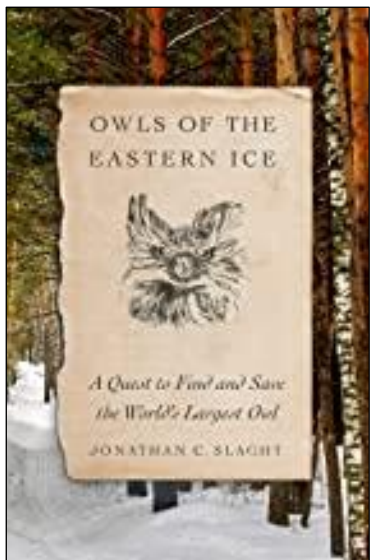
Devin with Skeedo presenting virtually to students from Colorado, Washington, Arizona, Tennessee, South Carolina, Texas, Maine, Massachusetts, Hawaii, Idaho, and Mexico in partnership with Environment for the Americas. All photos © Nature's Educators.

Book Reviews

Owls of the Eastern Ice: A Quest to Find and Save the World's Largest Owl

Reviewed by Sandy Beranich

In 2000, the author Jonathan C. Slaght and a friend were hiking in coastal southeast Russia, north of Vladivostok, when they unexpectedly flushed an enormous and panicked



bird in the canopy above them. Later identified as the Blakiston's Fish Owl--the largest owl in the world--this was Slaght's impression: "Backlit by the hazy gray of a winter sky, it seemed almost too big and too comical to be a real bird, as if someone had hastily glued fistfuls of feathers to a yearling bear, then propped the dazed bear in the tree."

This book is more than a narrative of an American scientist studying an unusual owl in an extreme

environment to complete his PhD requirement. This book is much about the uniqueness of the fish owls and the many details and perils related to conducting a field study in this remote area of Eastern Russia. It is also the author's way to intertwine descriptions of his environment, local village life and customs, wildlife populations (this is also home to the endangered Amur Siberian Tiger), and the threats logging brings to the owl habitat.

Slaght introduces his many field assistants who each contribute their own unique personality shaped by the remoteness of the area and daily efforts to survive. Spending nights in a tent with subzero temperatures during the winter waiting on a fish owl to call leaves plenty of time to hear life stories. His Russian hosts are no less unique. One hermit asked the author in all seriousness if "the gnomes came to tickle his feet last night." All people he met were welcoming and supportive of his work.

The remote human populations in this part of Russia have adapted to simple living conditions and depend on skills of hunting, fishing, and trading for supplies. All visitors are welcomed—even scientists there to study owls. Living remotely with little transportation available on a regular basis, personal ingenuity becomes a survival necessity (duct tape is another one). Slaght shares it all in this book.

He writes with a sense of humor and acceptance of the unusual and unforgiving world he temporarily inhabited. This book is available through the Colorado Library System. ■

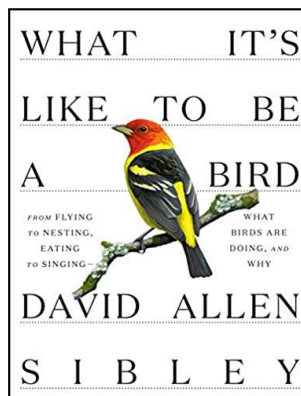
What It's Like to be a Bird

Reviewed by Sallie Thoreson

Many of us have the Sibley Bird Guides by David Allen Sibley, and appreciate the details of drawings and text about bird identification. This nontechnical book by Sibley starts out with 24 pages of really fun facts about birds such as "small birds have over 2000 feathers" or "If you 'ate like a bird' you'd eat more than 25 large pizzas a day." There are plenty of these facts you might want to bring up during a Zoom meeting or a social distancing family gathering.

The heart of the book is the Portfolio of Birds. Sibley presents 87 groups of birds with drawings and short essays about the amazing things birds do—or what it's like to be a bird. The essays are broad and overlapping, so this book is best read not cover-to-cover, but savored in random readings.

After a lifetime of studying and drawing birds, Sibley concludes that birds are motivated by more than strictly biological (in the DNA sense) instincts. He dares to say birds have feelings like attraction, satisfaction, pride, anxiety, etc., and that birds have to make many decisions when nest-building, choosing a mate, when to migrate, what seed to choose at a feeder, or which plant to visit. Of course, this is highly anthropomorphic, but it rings true to any of us who observe birds.



Birds have individual personalities and certainly demonstrate adaptive behaviors. Two personal examples: We have a "woodpecker junco" that prefers suet to eating seeds on the ground with fellow juncos. Each year we seem to have one junco (the same one?) that tries to figure out ways to eat from the suet feeder and hangs around when woodpeckers and nuthatches hammer away at the

suet, sprinkling available suet particles on the tree or ground. Also, when robins are feeding their young, an adult male seems to size up a worm to see if it's the right size to bring to the nest or decide that it should be consumed on the spot.

The lack of an index is maddening, however. There is no way to search for individual species or find which essays cover specific bird life topics. For example, you can't cross-reference the essays that touch on feathers or feeding behaviors. On the other hand, if you want to sit back and meander through a book, knowing you will enjoy every page; well, this is your book. Consider giving the book as a holiday gift and put it on your personal wish list. ■

Christmas Bird Count continued from cover

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this year's Christmas Bird Count requires a few changes to keep everyone safe. Per National Audubon guidelines, BCAS will run a safe and socially distanced CBC, if local rules allow.

- All in-person compilation gatherings are cancelled.
- Social distancing and/or masking are required at all times in the field.
- Carpooling may only occur within existing familiar or social "pod" groups.
- Activities must comply with all current state and municipal COVID-19 guidelines.

Given the rapidly changing conditions of COVID-19, count leaders are not ready to set dates or finalize how counts will be conducted at this time. The Montrose Count is December 19 and the Gunnison Count is December 10. Contact trips leaders below to learn more. Other Information will be shared via Bruce Ackerman in his BCAS President updates via email. If you have helped in the past, group leaders may be contacting you to see if you are available and willing to help.



Gambel's Quail © Missy Siders.

If you are unable to participate in the count circles this year, you can still participate by doing a count at your feeders. These counts need to be conducted on the same day as the count circles and must be located within the count circle. Contact your count leader for more information on feeder counts. If you see interesting birds during the same week as your local count, you can report those to the count to add to the count week list of species.

Questions? Please contact the count leaders!

Delta: Amy Seglund at amy.seglund@state.co.us

Gunnison: Arden Anderson at arden@gunnison.com

Hotchkiss: Adam Petry at petry@westernbiology.com

Montrose: Missy Siders at missy.siders@gmail.com ■

Bluebird Boxes Mounted at Kebler Pass

On October 9, BCAS members joined US Forest Service wildlife biologist Valerie Horncastle on Kebler Pass to position and hang 20 bluebird boxes on the Grand Mesa Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forest.

The bluebird boxes were constructed by member Jon Horn. They were installed in a northeast direction and filled with wood shavings. They will be checked next year for occupants.

Thanks to members Robin Nicholoff, Ames Rau, Tim Shortell, and Linda Hansen for organizing this activity. ■



Four of five volunteers, left to right: Robin Nicholoff, Ames Rau, Valerie Hardcastle, and Tim Shortell. © Linda Hansen.

Generating Conservation Conversations

By Sallie Thoreson, Conservation Chair

BLM Colorado's Oil and Gas Lease Sales

The BLM continues to submit oil and gas leasing sales for parcels of land in Colorado, generally in the northwestern counties and northern Front Range counties of Larimer and Weld. The National Audubon Society (NAS) closely follows this issue and provides detailed comment for each scoping, review, and final leasing events.

NAS has been adamant that future leasing should be halted in sage-grouse habitat until BLM has developed a legally-compliant, enforceable approach to prioritizing leasing and development outside sage-grouse habitat, as directed by the 2015 Sage-grouse Plans.

Many of the proposed lease sale parcels in the Northwest District contain migration corridors, high-priority big-game winter habitats, and production areas for elk and pronghorn. The NAS supports the Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) recommendations that BLM implement specific stipulations to protect these areas and limit the density of surface facilities.

The NAS also asks that BLM consider wilderness characteristics, cumulative impacts, impacts to groundwater, potential climate impacts, and the need for regulations of petroleum product waste and flaring.

The BCAS has regularly signed on with other state Audubon chapters to the comment letters submitted by Audubon Rockies and the NAS. The latest from Audubon Rockies is that that BLM has, to date, failed to act on most of the recommendations, but has deferred leasing on one 240-acre parcel in sage grouse habitat.

Colorado Oil and Gas Commission (COGCC)

Legislation passed last year changed the mission of the COGCC to mandate that the Commission must now protect the public and wildlife when issuing permits for oil and gas operations. The COGCC has begun the rulemaking process to make decisions on how to implement this new mission.

The wildlife section (1200 Series) of the rules deal with habitat and species protection. The main issues, according to NAS, are to ask COGCC to: increase protection for certain wildlife species—including increased buffers around Greater and Gunnison Sage-Grouse leks, and suitable nesting areas for Western Yellow-Billed Cuckoo and Southwest Willow Flycatcher; enhance riparian-area protections; prohibit pad construction in big-game migration corridors; ensure compensatory mitigation benefits wildlife; and protect biological resources.

USFS Proposal to Revise its Oil and Gas Regulations

To streamline leasing and development, the US Forest Service is prioritizing energy development over water, wildlife, and recreation interests. The NAS reports “we need science-based management of our public lands, not this unbalanced approach. We hope to squash these misguided aspirations and make that argument in [our] comments.” The BCAS signed onto the 33-page comment letter that NAS submitted in November.

Conservation Priorities under a New Administration

Conservation organizations are putting together conservation and environmental priorities and plans for life during the Biden-Harris administration. Policies and rules instituted by the Trump administration continue to be challenged in the courts. Additional tools available to the new administration are executive actions, working with Congress through the Congressional Review Act to rollback some rules and regulations, and additional legislation that address climate change and habitat and species protections. ■

Two Winter Feeder Visitors continued from cover

even in its native habitat in Europe. The same is true in the US. Cornell's Project FeederWatch data confirms a 22% decline in flock sizes at feeders from 1996 to 2016. The decline is in urban and suburban areas, not in rural areas. Why? The decline doesn't seem to be related to hawk numbers, but is possibly due to pollution, feral cats, loss of greenspace, and loss of food sources. This highlights the need for bird-friendly yards with plants and trees that encourage insects birds need for breeding and nest raising.

On the other hand, Project FeederWatch has reported an increase for the bushtit in the SW region of the US (CA, NV, AZ, NM, UT and CO). This small brown-gray bird has increased regionally from observations at 11% of winter feeders in 1990 to 35% in 2019. Sightings in Colorado are reported at 26% to 31% of the state FeederWatch sites, with an average group size of six. Again, Cornell has not confirmed any reasons for this increase. Bushtit groups may visit suet feeders (like other insect eaters such as woodpeckers and chickadees) and could also be attracted to hulled sunflower seeds, peanuts, and mealworms. We see bushtits year-round in the BCAS area.

Contribute to science and the local economy and enjoy birdwatching. More details and good bird identification resources are available at <https://feederwatch.org/>. Maybe, you'll draw in some bushtits this year! ■

Birding with Children— Tips from a Naturalist

By Carrie Krickbaum

“Chick-a-dee-dee-dee, chickadee in the tree. I see a chickadee, chickadee in the tree.”

Making up quick songs while hiking with children is a fun way to connect with them and also to reinforce names and songs of birds. Chickadees are a favorite bird for kids and adults because the words we use to describe their song is also their name.

Another fun one I’ve done with kids on the trail is the Ruby crowned Kinglet. We call it the “cheeseburger bird” because the mnemonic for its song is “cheeseburger, cheeseburger, cheeseburger.” Mnemonics—words to help us remember—are fun and easy to learn. Check out this resource:

<https://www.audubon.org/news/quiz-name-tune-12-tricks-remembering-bird-calls>.

How to Share Your Love of Birds with Kids

Sharing your love of birding can be as simple as buying a pair of binoculars and an age-appropriate bird book, or taking walks together to just look and listen.

There are also many children’s books that introduce kids to the wonder and beauty of nature with a variety of cultural interests. One example is a children’s book about the endangered Golden-cheeked Warbler and how it became part of a movement to embrace Indigenous languages in Mexico.” *The Tale of Chipilo Crisopario* is also available in Tsotsil and Spanish. <https://www.audubon.org/news/the-tale-one-tiny-songbird-amplifying-ancient-mayan-language>.

If you want to bring the wonder of birds to children or grandchildren, visit the Audubon website for activities for kids and virtual events available for families. Audubon also has a page on its website that is *just for kids* (or kids at heart). The page includes activities from across the Audubon network, plus related DIY activities and content from Audubon’s editors. See more at this link <https://www.audubon.org/get-outside/activities/audubon-for-kids>.

One doesn’t need to be an expert to teach children about birds. Consider being a “student” alongside a child. It’s a fun way to learn and bond together. My philosophy is that the more kids love and understand our natural world, the more they will want to protect it! <https://www.audubon.org/news/easy-ways-get-kids-birding>. ■

The Gunnison Sage-Grouse and Its Nemesis the Raven

By Sallie Thoreson

The sagebrush-steppe ecosystem is a rich web of plants and animals. It is more than just sagebrush and sage-grouse. The sagebrush steppe is home to more than 290 species of birds, 87 species of mammals, and a complex of sagebrush, grasses, forbs, and shrubs. Each member of the community has coevolved into a balance, but, when the balance is disrupted, one or more species may decrease in numbers to dangerous levels. One example of this is the relationship between Gunnison sage-grouse and ravens.

Female sage-grouse seek nest sites with sufficient tall sagebrush and grasses to protect their nests from view. They will avoid spots near structures and where avian predators gather. Ravens are now a common predator for the Gunnison sage-grouse during the nesting season. The clever, resourceful, sharp-eyed ravens can find sage-grouse nests and prey on the eggs and young chicks. This is in addition to other sage-grouse predators that include coyotes, foxes, and ground squirrels. Nesting success for the Gunnison sage-grouse is only 21% to 60%, with a primary source of nest failure attributed to predation.

Raven population numbers have grown in recent decades across the western United States. They enjoy habitat in the sagebrush steppe and perch on fences and other structures. Ravens also gather in areas where grazing and residential or energy development provide water, food (especially landfills), and a decrease in plants needed for sage-grouse cover and sustenance.

Programs to manage raven populations have worked on a temporary basis, but long-term solution includes managing the human subsidies that attract ravens. The balance of species and the availability of enough habitats are critical to the survival of our Gunnison sage-grouse.

Learn more about the Gunnison Sage-grouse at The Sage-Grouse Initiative <https://www.sagegrouseinitiative.com/ask-expert-whats-difference-gunnison-greater-sage-grouse/>. ■

Thank You Volunteers!

Contributions from readers and members make this newsletter useful and informative. Thank you to everyone who submitted articles for this issue. Thanks, also, to Jon Horn and Sallie Thoreson for their diligent

Who was that Bird Named For?

Sir John Barrow and the Goldeneye

By Susan Chandler-Reed

Sir John Barrow (1764-1848) was born in the parish of Ulverston, Lancashire, England. The only son of a tanner, he apparently had no desire to follow in his father's footsteps. Unlike most of the men profiled in this regular column, however, Barrow was neither a naturalist nor a famous explorer.



According to Edward Gruson, author of *Words for Birds: A Lexicon of North American Birds with Biographical Notes*, "Sir John Barrow was another extraordinary Englishmen of most obscure origins, who managed to develop a career based on grasping good fortune,

maintaining influential friendships, and never taking a stand contrary to that of his superior on issues of importance."

Barrow left school at age 13, with the purpose of founding a Sunday school for the poor and working as a clerk in an iron foundry in Liverpool

(<http://www.ulverstoncouncil.org.uk/education/john-barrow>). When he was 16, a friend offered him the chance to go on a whaling trip to Greenland. This adventure seemingly sparked his life-long passion for Arctic exploration.

Upon Barrow's return from the North Atlantic, he took a post as a mathematics teacher at a private school. He befriended the father of one of his pupils, Sir George Staunton, who recommended him for the position of comptroller in the retinue of Lord Macartney. He travelled with Macartney to China from 1792-1794 and from there to South Africa, where he worked as an aide to General Dundas to mediate conflict between the Boers and the Kaffirs. When Dundas became Lord Melville and the First Lord of the Admiralty, Barrow returned to England and was appointed Second Secretary of the Admiralty. Barrow served in this role from 1804 until 1845, using his position to support expeditions.

Following the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815), England found itself with a surplus of ships and officers. Barrow is credited with repurposing these vessels to a peacetime purpose of exploration, particularly of West Africa and the northern polar regions. Barrow was also a founder and member of the Royal Geographical Society in 1830 and, as the man who chaired its meetings, is said to be responsible for setting the RGS on the path of promoting nineteenth-century

explorations. Upon his retirement in 1845, Barrow wrote a history of the Arctic voyages.

In addition to the duck named by the British naturalist William Swainson in honor of Sir John Barrow, the Barrow's Korhann/Bustard and a number of geographic features bear his name (e.g., Barrow's Strait in the Canadian Arctic, Point Barrow in Alaska, and Cape Barrow in Antarctica).

Barrow's Goldeneye (*Bucephala islandica*) males are black and white with a triangular purplish head, steep forehead, and a long white crescent on the face (as compared to the round white spot of the Common Goldeneye. It sports a row of small white spots along the shoulders. A northern duck, it can be seen in Colorado in the winter months on ice-free lakes and rivers. The genus name *Bucephalus*, means "ox head." The species name, *islandica*, refers to the country of Iceland, where they are known as "house ducks" because of their habit of nesting in boxes put up by generations of Icelanders.



References

(https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Barrows_Goldeneye/overview) and <https://www.naturespicsonline.com/galleries/35#57>

Gruson, Edward S. 1972. *Words for Birds: A Lexicon of North American Birds with Biographical Notes*. Quadrangle Books. New York. ■

Seen Recently

The following birds were recently seen and photographed by Don Marsh. All photos © Don Marsh.



Brown Thrasher A Ouray County first! Brown Thrashers, rarely found west of the Continental Divide, put in at least 4 showings on the Western Slope this fall. This thrasher was found by Christine Lance on October 27th east of Ridgway and continued until November 17th (or later).



Red-breasted Merganser This female or hatch year bird was photographed at Ridgway State Park where it stayed for a couple of weeks. The lack of a clean white throat helps separate it from a female Common Merganser.



Harris's Sparrow These large sparrows breed in the Arctic and travel south as winter sets in. This young bird made a one day visit to Don Marsh's yard in Ridgway.

Relevant Reading

"In a Warming Climate, Can Birds Take the Heat?"
Science Daily 12 November 2020

"Sensory Pollutants Alter Bird Phenology and Fitness across a Continent"
Nature 11 November 2020

"These Winged Dinosaurs Hurtled through the Trees like Haywire Hang Gliders"
The New York Times 22 October 2020

"Coronavirus Lockdown Changed How Birds Sing in San Francisco"
NewScientist 24 September 2020

"Thousands of Migrating Birds Drop Dead Across Southwestern US"
Smithsonian 17 September 2020

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all in-person programs and meetings are on hold. Watch
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