



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

Fall 2021

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Inside this issue

- 2 President's Message
- 2 There's a New Bird in Town
- 3 First Tuesday Field Trips
- 3 Upcoming Field Trips
- 4 BCAS Book Club Host Inaugural Meeting
- 4 Next Meeting & Book Selection
- 5 Gunnison Sage-grouse Update
- 5 Migratory Bird Visitors to RSP
- 6 It's a Bird, It's a Plane; No, It's Bird Migration!
- 7 Bluebird Auction at Montrose County Fair
- 8 Who Was That Bird Named For? Hammond's Flycatcher
- 9 Generating Conservation Conversations

Migratory Bird Banding at Ridgway State Park

By Carrie Krickbraum

Ridgway State Park is gearing up for its annual fall migratory bird banding after having to skip 2020. Nine different schools from Ouray, Ridgway, Montrose, and Delta will bring 50 to 80 students to the park each day September 7 through 17. Students rotate through education stations learning how to use binoculars, learning about adaptation, playing a migration challenge game, and studying the area's habitat for birds.

The public is invited to visit the banding station Saturday, September 11, 7:30 to 11:00 AM at the Dallas Creek entrance, across the bridge, at the south end of the park. This is a rare opportunity to see citizen science at work. The bander will share information about bird species as you watch birds being measured, sexed, weighed, and banded before release. The state park charges a \$9.00 / car entrance fee.

More Volunteers Needed

BCAS volunteers are critical to help this annual partnership remain successful. Consider volunteering for one or several days. Volunteers lead activities and are provided all of the information and props needed to lead activities with each visiting classroom. Contact me at (970) 209-3703 to help!

See page 5 for more about birds that visit the Ridgway State Park banding station.

President's Message

FALL is coming! It is still hot right now, when I am writing this in August, but our birds are already migrating south. Our Bullock's Orioles have already left, headed south to their wintering areas in Mexico.

Rufous Hummingbirds are visiting feeders now, but will also be leaving soon for Mexico. Keep your eyes out for migrating songbirds and shorebirds. Wading birds can turn up anywhere that is wet in September. Watch also for shorebirds, Blue Grosbeaks, White-face Ibises, American Avocets, and Black-necked Stilts.

We have been having two field trips per month since May 2021, yet we are still avoiding indoor activities at this time due to the continuing pandemic. Thank you for your patience.

Thank you to everyone who participated in our annual Silent Auction of Bluebird Nest Boxes at the Montrose County Fair, July 26-31. Thank you to all who made a bird house, volunteered at our booth at the fair, or if you purchased one of the boxes! Special thanks to the Montrose Woodworkers Guild who made and donated the boxes, and to Sandy Beranich, who organized the volunteers for our booth. We raised \$760, to support Audubon education activities.

Finally, welcome to new BCAS treasurer Gayle Johnson! Want to be more involved in this Audubon chapter? Let me know.

Bruce Ackerman



Black Swift on chick. Photo by Verlee Sanburg during BCAS field trip to Box Canyon Falls.

Canyon Wrenderings

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ON THE COVER

Warbling Vireo in the hand © Mary Menz.

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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.

See an OPEN position? Talk to an officer to see if it's a good fit for your skills and talents! Volunteers are always welcome.

There's A New Bird in Town

By Sandy Beranich

The Basic—Size: about 3.5 inches; Shape: slim silhouette; Color pattern: solid color; Markings: has a central spot; Behavior: quiet unless aroused, then highly active; Habitat: found in small hidden pockets; Call: loud squawking sound.

Not for women only, the *Birdie* is a personal safety alarm that features a 130 decibel siren and flashing strobe light and will easily attach to a key ring or slip into a pocket or pack. It is light weight and comes with replaceable batteries. There are many color choices. Who needs this in the birding world? Well, people who bird alone, live alone, hike alone, and more.

This deterrent was brought to my attention in an article about Tiffany Kersten, a female bird guide who was sexually assaulted while birding. She is currently traveling the U.S. trying to establish a new one-year record as the youngest female birder to see 700 species in the lower 48 states. Along the way, she is also trying to raise awareness on female sexual assault and is gifting these alarms as she meets and talks with solo women birders.

One in five women in the U.S. is raped in her lifetime. Many more are sexually assaulted. This alarm was designed by, and for, women and is sold by a woman-owned company. The cost is reasonable and there are often discounts posted on the Birdie website:

www.shesbirdie.com

As of August 13, Kersten had identified and reported 663 species. Her blog provides a running description of the species that she is targeting and her often-interesting explorations into remote canyons using GPS coordinates to locate a recently-spotted bird. I liked a recent comment she made about plans that often don't work out—you need backup plans and even backup to backup plans. You can find her blog detailing her birding experiences and her current list of species at: tiffanykersen.blogspot.com. Her blog also has a link to the Birdie website, which provides a 10 percent discount if accessed from her blog. ■

First Tuesday Field Trips

Mark your calendars for **September 7, October 5, November 2, and December 7.**

Meet at 8:00 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. Carpooling is available. Independent driving and social distancing (including wearing masks and not sharing equipment) will be the protocol in use.

Bring a snack, water, binoculars, and field guides. Trips generally last until NOON. Contact Don at (209) 256-5744 or at ridgwaybrdr@gmail.com or contact Bruce at (727) 858-5857 or bruceackermanAUD@aol.com for more information. ■

Upcoming Field Trips

October 20

Miramonte Reservoir and vicinity

Look for migrating ducks and shorebirds at this seldom visited reservoir in San Miguel County. The Don Noble State Wildlife Area hosts good numbers of waterbirds and raptors during fall. The reservoir is approximately an hour and forty-five minutes from Montrose so we'll need an early start. For those coming from Montrose who want to carpool, meet at Gold's Gym at the corner of Hillcrest and East Main Street in Montrose at 7:00 AM, at the Ridgway Visitor Center at the southwest corner of Highway 550 and Highway 62 at 7:30 AM, or at the first parking lot at the Don Noble State Wildlife area at 8:45 to 9 AM. We expect to wrap up birding around 1:00 PM, before heading home. Be sure to dress in layers, and bring a lunch, snacks, water and a spotting scope if you have one. Please contact trip leader Don Marsh at (209) 256-5744 or ridgwaybrdr@gmail.com to RSVP and to confirm an individual State Wildlife Management Area permit is needed. ■

November 13

Ridgway State Park

Ridgway State Park in November can host a variety of migrating birds, including ducks, gulls, shorebirds, and late migrant songbirds. The state park charges a \$9.00 day use fee per vehicle, but we'll meet at the Visitor Center near the Dutch Charlie entrance at 8:00 AM and see if we can carpool with annual pass holders to minimize expenses. We'll wrap up just before NOON. Dress in layers, bring water and a lunch or snacks, and a spotting scope if you have one. Please contact trip leader Don Marsh at (209) 256-5744 or ridgwaybrdr@gmail.com to RSVP. ■

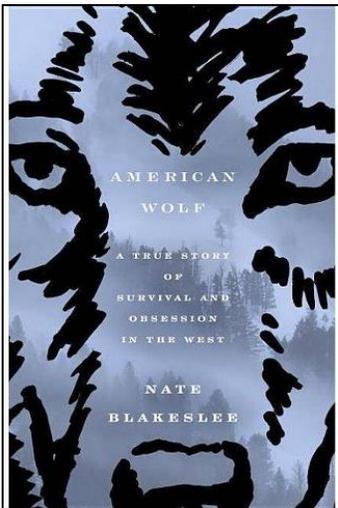
BCAS Book Club Meets Monthly

Sheryl Radovich's hosted the August 17 meeting. The group read *Birding Without Borders*, by Noah Strycker. The group enjoyed Strycker's personal narrative style and whirlwind adventure. ■



July book club participants pictured left to right: Susan Werner, Lauren Ruddell, Carol Pierce, Don Radovich, Joan Schmidt, Sheryl Radovich, Jane McGarry. Photo by Bruce Ackerman, who also attended.

Next Meeting and Book Selection



The September 21 meeting selection is Nate Blakeslee's book, *American Wolf*. Participants will meet at 1:00 PM for an outdoor lunch at Camp Robber's, followed by the meeting at Sheryl's home afterward.

Please RSVP to Sheryl at canyon.creek@bresnan.net to attend lunch at the restaurant or to get directions to her home for the 2:30 PM book discussion following group lunch. ■

Conservation Conversations Continued from page 9

Energy and Natural Resources Committee and we await a date for the mark-up. The CORE Act protects approximately 400,000 acres of public land in Colorado wilderness areas and safeguards existing outdoor recreation opportunities to boost the economy for future generations.

Wins for Alaska Lands!

The Biden administration announced in July that it is ending large scale, old-growth timber sales in the Tongass National Forest. This is the largest national forest in the U.S. The focus will be on forest restoration, protecting wildlife, recreation and sustainable industries.

For the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the U.S. Senate budget resolution passed without Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski's harmful pro-drilling amendments.

HOWEVER, In August, the Biden administration announced that it will undertake a new review of potential oil and gas development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. It is hoped that this review and subsequent legislation and regulations will consider the survival of the Native communities and protect polar bears, caribou and the landscape.

Oil and Gas leasing

Environmental organizations are starting to ask the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's Air Pollution Control Division to recommend that the Air Quality Control Commission develop strong, comprehensive methane regulations for oil and gas wells, by the end of 2021.

Colorado Water Wins!

The Colorado legislature passed a bill to implement the Colorado Water Plan. This legislation authorized grants and funds for the Colorado Water Conservation Board to implement water programs for maintaining and enhancing healthy, flowing rivers while meeting growing demands for water.

The state Water Quality Control Commission has delayed for at least a decade a controversial provision that would have allowed industries opportunities to discharge more pollution in streams already heavily impacted. The current rule stands that requires a polluter to provide a compelling reason why more degradation of a stretch of river is unavoidable in order to create economic growth. Audubon Rockies reported that large numbers of signatures on petitions and public comments at the hearing helped convince the Commission to NOT move forward with the proposed change. ■

Gunnison Sage-grouse Update

By Sallie Thoreson

The results of the 2021 Gunnison Sage-grouse counts give Colorado Parks and Wildlife some cautious optimism about bird numbers. The Gunnison Basin Sage-grouse Strategic Committee reported that male count this year was 629, with a population estimate of 3,086 birds. This is an increase of 884 birds from 2020. Counts do fluctuate year-to-year and some of the fluctuation is undoubtedly due to weather and climate conditions. Both 2017 and 2019 were hard winters for the sage-grouse, and 2018 and 2020 were drought years.

Gunnison Sage-grouse is managed as a threatened species with the lead of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The final Recovery Plan for Gunnison Sage-grouse was released October 2020. State and other Colorado agencies, such as CPW and local governments are actively involved in monitoring and management.

The following four challenges illustrate the complex nature of managing this species to improve the numbers of our iconic Western Colorado bird.

- Invasive species such as cheatgrass and knapweed are a concern for some of the eight populations of Gunnison Sage-grouse. Both of these invasive, nonnative plants (and others) can out-compete the native grasses and forbs found under and around the sagebrush and make a less than desirable location for the females to nest. Land treatment for invasives is one of the management techniques in place.
- The Sisk-a-dee program of Western Colorado University closely monitors the Waunita Watchable Wildlife Site. The lek there seems to be shifting away from the parking lot, possibly due to natural conditions, human presence, or both.
- Wildlife-friendly fencing is being employed near roadways, but these are not always friendly for the Gunnison Sage-grouse. To limit collisions, the fences should have highly visible top wires. Unfortunately, fences near leks can be used by predator birds as perches.
- The Fish and Wildlife Service is currently evaluating an incidental take permit to allow a residential development, with other habitat areas proposed to compensate for the potential loss of Gunnison Sage-grouse. The benefits to the Gunnison Sage-grouse populations with this type of mitigation are not always clear. ■

Migratory Bird Visitors to RSP

It's impossible to predict which migratory bird species will visit the fall banding station at Ridgway State Park in any given year. There are so many variables that affect migration such as wind, heat, cold, precipitation, habitat availability and food sources.

The weather can be erratic, but at the RSP banding station, critical elements for migration have not changed. These include net lanes placed in the same place year to year, adequate food sources and habitat, and availability of water.

As an example, these birds visited the station September 4, 2018:

Black-headed Grosbeak (BHGR)
Cassin's Vireo (CAVI)
Cedar Waxwing (CEDW)
Evening Grosbeak (EVGR)
Fox Sparrow (FOSP)
Gray Catbird (GRCA)
Green-tailed Towhee (GTTO)
House Finch (HOFI)
House Wren (HOWR)
MacGillivray's Warbler (MGWA)
Song Sparrow (SOSP)
Western Tanager (WETA)
Western Wood Peewee (WEWP)
Wilson's Warbler (WIWA)
Yellow Warbler (YEWA)



This Yellow-breasted Chat visited the Ridgway State Park migratory bird banding station September 11, 2019. Photo by Mary Menz.

Who knows which birds will pass through the RSP banding station this year? Visit on September 11 to see for yourself!

■

It's a Bird, it's a Plane...No, It's Bird Migration!

By Sallie Thoreson

Have you thought about the fact that while you are sleeping, thousands—even millions—of birds are flying overhead on their way south for the winter? If you visit the website www.birdcast.info, you can watch the migration numbers. According to the site, in the U.S on August 24, an estimated 179 million birds were in flight near midnight ET, and only 29 million at 6 PM ET. In Grand Junction during the third week in August the prediction was for 1,000 birds/km/night (the number of birds per hour that fly across a one-kilometer line transect).

Another website (<https://aeroecolab.com/colorado>) provides more Colorado-specific migration information. According to this site from Colorado State University, on August 24 4.1 million birds were in flight over Colorado. The peak bird flight in Grand Junction is between August 31 and September 24, when 50 percent of all migrants pass through our area.

Both sites use weather surveillance radar to gather information on the numbers, flight directions, speeds and altitudes of birds aloft at night in the U.S. year-round. They also provide forecast maps during spring and fall migration.

We all know that migration happens every year, but every spring and fall we can marvel at the abilities and the sheer audacity of birds. We often concentrate on the longest migration or smallest bird or the most unusual flight pattern. However, consider the “ordinary birds” that make the trip and the perils they endure—all to get to the right place at the right time. Scientists are studying birds using increasingly-sophisticated and accurate tools. They can put geolocators on tiny birds that measure light levels and timing of light intensity to trace the latitude and longitude paths of individual birds. These devices may weigh only 0.3 grams so they can be placed on birds that weight only 8-10 grams (0.3-0.4 ounces).

In the book, *A World on the Wing*, author Scott Weidensaul addresses many aspects of migration. A few fascinating facts about our “ordinary birds” include the following.

- Some birds are like human snowbirds. They may not fly together but they all end up in the same spot for the winter. If you go to Green Valley, AZ, in the winter, you'll run into a flock of folks from Minnesota, including my brother-in-law. Likewise, Ovenbirds from Philadelphia migrate to the Caribbean, while ovenbirds from Pittsburgh end up crossing the Gulf of Mexico to winter in northern Central America.
- Some bird species congregate in one wintering spot, making habitat protection crucial. Audubon's Migratory

Bird Initiative reports that most of the Prothonotary Warblers from the southeastern U.S. winter in one region of northern Colombia, where there are threats to forest cover.

- Right before migration, it would appear that birds should be lining up at the emergency room. If compared to humans, they might be considered obese, with diabetes and high cholesterol—ready for a heart attack. Yet, when they land at their winter home, they are emaciated and very hungry!
- Most songbirds have 50 to 60 percent mortality in migration. That's why it's important for us to help keep them in shape. They need good habitat in the summer, good food and cover at their stopovers, and quality food and habitat for the winter. Autumn berries on shrubs are an essential source of fats needed for their migration. Previous articles in the Fall 2019 and Fall 2020 issues of *Canyon Wrenderings* provide more details on landscaping for birds.
- The hippocampus of the brain (in both humans and birds) is the place to process spatial information and memory. Migratory birds need to learn and remember where to find food in both their summer and winter territories. Dark-eyed Juncos that migrate from Canada to the southeastern U.S. seem to have more densely packed neurons in the hippocampus than the non-migratory juncos in the southern Appalachians.
- Weidensaul reported that he crept out early one fall morning in Pennsylvania to observe a Catbird eating berries, a Common Yellowthroat on goldenrod, a Red-eyed Vireo finding insects on a crabapple, and a Gray-cheeked Thrush picking insects from the pine trees.
- Scientists are starting to definitively record climate change from bird migration. For example, Red Knots in the Russian Arctic are shrinking in size. Juvenile birds are found to weigh less and have shorter bills, legs, and wings. This can mean when they arrive at their wintering grounds on the African coast, they can only reach the smaller, less abundant clams closest to the surface, missing a more abundant food source found deeper in the sand. This stressor is on top of the other threats such as decreasing food sources on the spring migration path, coastal development and shrinking Arctic nesting grounds.

When out watching local migratory species, take time to consider their incredible journey! ■

Who was that Bird Named For? Hammond's Flycatcher

By Susan Chandler-Reed

William Alexander Hammond (1828-1900) was a renowned American neurologist. By the age of 20, he had attained his medical degree. In 1849, he joined the U.S. Army medical corps. While serving as medical director at Fort Riley, Kansas, he also collected biological specimens for the Smithsonian Institution on behalf of Spencer Fullerton Baird, one time director of the Smithsonian Institution.



Hammond resigned his military commission in 1860 and became the chair of anatomy and physiology at the University of Maryland Medical School. The following year, however, he rejoined the Union Army at the outbreak of the Civil War and, in

1862, was promoted to Brigadier General and appointed Surgeon General by President Lincoln. As Surgeon General, Hammond was responsible for a number of innovative reforms in military health care that led to decreased mortality and increased efficiency. One of these reforms was his ban of the mercury compound calomel.

Hammond's medical colleagues rebelled, believing him to be arrogant and resented him for dictating their patient care. His relationship with Secretary of War Edwin Stanton was also strained and, in 1863, Stanton sidelined him. After Hammond demanded that he either be reinstated or court-martialed, Stanton is said to have used false data to accuse him of supply purchasing irregularities. He was found guilty and dismissed from the Army—a verdict that was later reversed by an Act of Congress in 1878.

Hammond went on to become a successful neurologist in New York, co-founding the New York Medical School and the American Neurological Association. He published extensively on his groundbreaking neurological research and was known for his scientific skepticism, especially with regard to spiritualism. He also somehow found time to write eight published novels.

William Hammond's foray into natural history is commemorated by ornithologist Spencer Fullerton Baird naming of three species after him: Hammond's Garter Snake, Hammond's Spadefoot Toad (also known as Western Spadefoot Toad), and Hammond's Flycatcher. Hammond often sent specimens to Baird.

Hammond's Flycatcher (*Empidonax hammondii*) is one of several Empidonax flycatchers that breed in western Colorado. The term "Empidonax" is a Greek word meaning "king of the gnats," and not "all of these birds look alike." Birders frustrated with trying to identify them in the field would testify to this description. Hammond's flycatchers are small, olive-green birds that nest and forage high in mature coniferous forests. The bird has a prominent eye ring and wing bars and a small, dark bill. Hammond's Flycatchers are most easily confused with Dusky Flycatchers, as even their songs are similar.



Hammond's Flycatcher: Photo credit Dominic Sherony, CC BY-SA 2.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0>>, via Wikimedia Commons

Sources

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

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_A._Hammond

<https://litfl.com/william-hammond/> ■

Generating Conservation Conversations

By Sallie Thoreson, Conservation Chair

Gray Wolf reintroduction

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), through their contractor Keystone Group, is continuing to hold open houses and focus groups—in person and virtual—to collect public comments on aspects of the wolf reintroduction process in Colorado. Many advocates feel the CPW and Keystone Group are deficient in providing information on their websites or at public meetings on the beneficial aspects and benefits of wolf reintroduction. The current phase of the comment period ends August 31, 2021 but there will be ongoing opportunities to make comments. More information is available at the CPW website

<https://cpw.state.co.us/learn/Pages/CON-Wolf-Management.aspx> and the Keystone Group site <https://www.wolfengagementco.org/>

The Stakeholder Advisory Group and the Technical Working Group continue to meet to advise CPW on the development of the state's reintroduction plan.

Gray Wolf Endangered Species status in the U.S.

Conservation organizations and proponents of wolves in the landscape are surprised and disappointed to learn that the Biden administration is planning to go to court to uphold the 2020 Rule removing Endangered Species Act protections for wolves. The Endangered Species Coalition has reported that over 60,000 emails went to the Department of Interior, 70 organizations formally petitioned the Biden Administration to protect gray wolves as "endangered" throughout the West, and over 20,000 contacts were made the White House. A letter from a bipartisan group of 85 U.S. representatives urged Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland to reconsider the decision to delist the gray wolf, and called for emergency measures to protect the species. Let's hope that continued pressure will eventually sway the administration.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

If you haven't read the IPCC report, you should look into it. There have been many stories and analyses from journalists, conservation groups, business interests and others. It's nice to go to the actual source as well.

<https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/#SPM>. This report is from the primary international body responsible for monitoring and responding to climate change. You may have heard the phrase "Code Red for Humanity." The report is meant to be a current status report on the climate system and climate change, and to speak directly to policymakers. The Summary for Policymakers is "only" 42 pages, with many charts and tables. You can peruse the report in small bites and read the sections on the state of the climate, five emissions scenarios, and thoughts on policy to limit future climate change. There are also two-page regional factsheets covering 11 regions and geographic areas on our planet. One factsheet is on North and Central America and separate

factsheets are relevant for Colorado on Mountains and Urban Areas.

It's important for all of us to understand the scale of the problem. We can continue to make individual changes and also actively work toward governmental and policy changes.

GMUG Forest Plan

The Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison (GMUG) National Forest Plan and draft Environment Impact Statement was released on August 13 with a 90-day comment period. There is much to digest in the three volumes. But it is worth the effort to engage in this review process, because the final plan will guide the management of the national forest for decades. The Forest Service website with the documents and opportunities for engagement is at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/DraftForestPlan>. There are five virtual open houses in September spread among the Ranger Districts. The GMUG forest planners have stated that the plan specifically addresses issues of increasing recreation demand, recommends areas for wilderness designations, determines timber acreage and addresses citizen proposals for Special Management Areas. There are four proposed alternatives to consider, but the final plan could combine parts of one or more alternatives.

One interesting aspect is the development of Wildlife Management Areas which will provide wildlife protection by limiting or capping recreation access and numbers in some areas. The Forest Service had identified species of conservation concern (SCC) with protective plans. These are good points for review and input from local conservation groups and individuals.

The counties of Gunnison, Ouray, San Miguel and Hinsdale have already submitted a group letter stating they cannot support the Forest Service's preferred alternative. This is based on their determination of the lack of climate change analysis, lack of adequate socioeconomic analysis of multiple use, a significant increase in suitable timber numbers, and the lack of adequate consideration of designations in the CORE Act.

Please contact Sallie Thoreson or Bruce Ackerman if you are interested in a deeper dive into the plan and coordinating comments individually or from the Black Canyon Audubon Society. ▶

CORE Act

The Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act has passed the House multiple times in the last two sessions of Congress. The bill has been heard in the Senate

Continued on page 4

Black Canyon Audubon Society
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www.blackcanyonaudubon.org

Due to the evolving COVID-19 restrictions, all in-person programs and meetings are on hold. Watch your email and visit the website often to see when monthly programs start up again.

Want to see the color photographs in this publication?

Help reduce the use of paper and lower BCAS expenses by receiving this publication in color via email. Send your request for electronic delivery in PDF format to blackcanyonaudubon@gmail.com.

Please remember to renew your membership

Local memberships expire December 31. Please pay online or by check and extend your membership through December 2021. 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): _____

Email (Required): _____

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.