



# 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 2024

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Evening Grosbeak © Verlee Sanburg

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## Invasive Apex Predators— A Global Threat to Birds and Other Animals

By Susan Chandler-Reed

An alarming headline, I am sure you might agree. Yet when the “invasive apex predator” is revealed to be a housecat, many cat owners become dismissive of the threat and defensive of their choice to let their cats roam free. I recently heard an argument along the lines of, “Sure, I know my cat will live longer if I confine him to the house, but what kind of life would that be?”

To be clear, I am a cat lover who has shared my entire life with a series of feline friends. And it is only in the last 25 years that my husband and I came around to the realization that letting our cats roam free was literally killing them (just to name a few causes of death: ingesting antifreeze, being run over by a car, being attacked by the neighbor's dog in his yard). We also realized that even though our cats were well fed, their instinct to hunt made them indiscriminate killers of the local wildlife. Granted, we heard some complaints from the cats when they first learned that they couldn't go outside, but they lost interest in trying to get out the door in fairly short order. Our current cat—adopted at age five from the shelter—has never shown the slightest interest in leaving the house and is quite content with “hunting” and “killing”

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# President's Message

by Bruce Ackerman

I think it is almost Summer. But it sure has been a long cool windy Spring. Enjoy!

Please read about our upcoming great events. Thanks everyone for joining in with us during this fun year!

Thank you so much to our dedicated Board of Directors who plan and lead the field trips, the meetings, and all the other fun events every month. I so much appreciate having their help. Bill Harris is stepping down after being on your Board for three years. Carrie Krickbaum (five years on Board) is also stepping down. Alida Franco is coming on to the Board this year. Alida coordinated the Eckert Crane Days this year and did a great job. Special thanks to Bill, Carrie, and Alida.

Volunteer! If you are interested in participating at a higher level in the chapter, we would love to have you. You don't need any special skills, nor do you need to be an expert birder. You could coordinate a field trip. You could help us staff a booth at a local event. You could write an article for the Outdoor Column of the *Montrose Daily Press*. Dive in!

Our Marine Road Wildlife Area has finally seen our first construction this year, after many years (City park property in Montrose). Trails are laid out and mulched. Construction on bird blinds has started by our volunteers. Sandy Beranich and Jon Horn are leading the work. It should be good birding this year. Check it out!▪



Yellow-rumped Warbler. Photo © Verlee Sanburg.

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### COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Audubon CO Council rep.—**OPEN**

Education— Carrie Krickbaum (see above)

Conservation—Sallie Thoreson (see above)

Field Trips—Don Marsh (see above)

Membership—Missy Siders (see above)

Publicity—Susan Werner 970-688-0757

Newsletter—Mary Menz 719-684-4009

Programs— Kristal Stidham (see above)

Website Manager—Jon Horn (see above)

### 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— Alida Franco

### A note about email addresses in this newsletter:

**All emails have an extra space before the @ sign or “[at symbol]” in the email address to discourage spam coming from web crawlers.**

Would you like to volunteer? Talk to an officer to see where we need help and where your talents can be used! Volunteers are always needed and welcome.

## First Tuesday Field Trips

**First Tuesday Field Trips are June 4, July 2, August 6, and September 3.** Meet at **8 AM** (unless otherwise noted in trip description) at the public parking lot at the intersection of N. 2nd St. and N. Cascade Ave. in Montrose.

A leader will accompany the group to a nearby birding hotspot. Return should be by about noon. Bring a snack, water, binoculars, and field guides. **Please RSVP for all field trips** and included your name, field trip date and contact information in case weather or illness forces a cancellation. RSVP to [black.canyon.audubon.fieldtrips@gmail.com](mailto:black.canyon.audubon.fieldtrips@gmail.com)

## June

### **Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park (Montrose County)**

**Saturday, June 15. Leader: Don Marsh – Meet at 7 AM.**

*Note: The date has changed from June 8 to June 15 due to scheduling conflicts.*

Late Spring/early Summer is a great time to be at the park, with many birds singing on territory and raptors riding the thermals over the deep canyon. Expect to see and hear flycatchers, grosbeaks, swifts, and swallows along with wildflowers. Dress in layers, bring water and a lunch or snacks, and binoculars. **Meet at the public parking lot at the corner of N. 2nd Street and N. Cascade Ave. in Montrose at 7 AM.** This is an early start to get to the park ahead of the crowds and hear more birds. We should be back in Montrose by early afternoon. Please email [black.canyon.audubon.fieldtrips@gmail.com](mailto:black.canyon.audubon.fieldtrips@gmail.com) to reserve your spot.

### **Grand Mesa Tour (Delta County)**

**Saturday June 22. Leader: Bill Harris -- Meet at 8 AM**

The Grand Mesa has a wonderful array of birds during the summer that include Lincoln sparrow, Swainson's hawk, American three-toed woodpecker, hermit thrush, pine grosbeak, red crossbill to name a few. We will be stopping along highway 65 at several points and going for short hikes to view birds. Hiking distance will be around 3-4 miles total. This will be an all-day trip, so bring lunch, snacks, water, and clothing to deal with cooler, inclement weather. Group limited to 10 people. Please email [black.canyon.audubon.fieldtrips@gmail.com](mailto:black.canyon.audubon.fieldtrips@gmail.com) to reserve your spot. Meet at the City parking lot (N. Second and N. Cascade) in Montrose at 8 AM. We can cruise by City Market in Delta to pick up Delta County participants around 8:40 AM.

## July

**Red Mountain Pass to Molas Pass (San Juan County) Saturday July 13. Leader: Don Marsh -- Meet at 8 AM in Ridgway.**

A high elevation trip along Highway 550 south of Ouray. The high elevation allows us to enjoy cooler temperatures, abundant wildflower displays and birds like the American Pipit that we rarely see or hear in courtship display. This will be an all-day trip, so bring lunch, snacks, water, and clothing to deal with cooler, inclement weather. Group limited to 10 people. Please RSVP at [black.canyon.audubon.fieldtrips@gmail.com](mailto:black.canyon.audubon.fieldtrips@gmail.com) to reserve your spot. We'll meet at the Visitor Center in the town of Ridgway (near the intersection of Highway 550 and Highway 62) at 8 AM.

### **Ouray Box Canyon and vicinity (Ouray County)**

**Saturday July 20 – Meet in Ridgway at 8 AM**

We will look for nesting Black Swifts near the waterfall and then spend time looking for other montane birds in the general area of Ouray. Please RSVP at [black.canyon.audubon.fieldtrips@gmail.com](mailto:black.canyon.audubon.fieldtrips@gmail.com) to reserve your spot. We'll meet at the **Visitor Center in the town of Ridgway (near the intersection of Highway 550 and Highway 62) at 8 am.**

## August

### **Ridgway State Park (Ouray County)**

**Saturday August 24. Leader: Don Marsh – Meet at 8 AM**

We'll look for various early fall migrants like shorebirds, ducks, and gulls in addition to the resident breeding birds that should have lots of young birds to look through. Note: The park charges an \$10 dollar entrance fee per vehicle, but we'll try to minimize the number of cars and use available park passes. We'll meet at the **Ridgway State Park Visitor Center at 8 AM.** Please RSVP at [black.canyon.audubon.fieldtrips@gmail.com](mailto:black.canyon.audubon.fieldtrips@gmail.com) to reserve your spot.

## Monthly Meetings

**Thursday, July 11: 7 PM**

**Montrose Field House Summit Room**

**William Allred: Ponderosa Pines and Tassel-eared Squirrels**

Dr. William "Sylvester" Allred is a retired professor from Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff where he taught various courses in Biology to 20,000+ students over 27 years. He has also proudly served as an ecological consultant for the British Broadcasting Corporation, the Department of Energy, is the author of eight

*Monthly Meetings continued on next page ►*

children's books and the Discovery Channel. He is the also the author of natural histories about two of the Southwest's icons: Ponderosa Pines and tassel-eared squirrels. Dr. Allred will be visiting from his retirement home in Durango to enlighten us about the symbiotic relationship shared by his two favorite subjects of study.

**Thursday, August 8: 7 PM**

**Montrose Field House Summit Room**

**Arden Anderson, Photography of New Guinea**



**Raggiana Bird-of-Paradise, the national bird of Papua, New Guinea © Arden**

Join Gunnison naturalist Arden Anderson as he explores the wild areas of Papua New Guinea. This rarely visited tropical island lies north of Australia and hosts a variety of endemic wildlife as well as unique

cultures. From lowland jungles to misty mountains to tropical beaches the diverse environments of New Guinea provided an interesting backdrop for nature-based adventures. Arden's impressive photography and engaging narrative will help you understand and appreciate an area that few of us are likely to visit.

**Thursday, September 12:– 7 PM**

**Montrose Field House Summit Room**

**Melissa Schreiner on Biodiversity**

Melissa Schreiner is an Entomologist with the CSU Extension office that serves Mesa, Delta, Ouray and Eastern Montrose Counties. She will be speaking to us about our local pollinators which include insects, birds, bats and animals. Spoiler alert: Biodiversity is key! We'll have the opportunity to examine their Western Colorado bug collection and take home free posters and publications. Are you buzzing with excitement? ▀

## Board Meeting Highlights

by Sallie Thoreson, Secretary

These highlights cover the Board meetings in March and May. 3

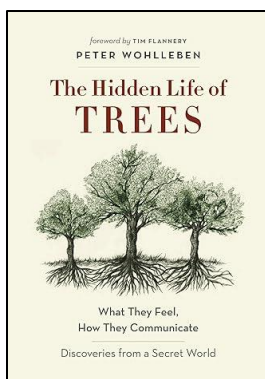
- Our regular projects and programs are continuing. Book club meetings are going well, on the third Tuesdays of each month at 2 PM. The schedule of books for the rest of 2024 is on the BCAS website.
- Future spring and summer birding trips are planned and publicized through the normal channels. Kristal has programs booked through September 2024.
- We are finalizing the menu and program for the annual meeting and banquet June 6.
- Members led a Gunnison sage-grouse educational station for 250 local 4<sup>th</sup> graders, and two more educational events are scheduled.
- BCAS currently has 307 paid members, with 231 members still to renew their memberships.
- BCAS continues to contribute an article to the *Montrose Daily Press* Outdoor column every five weeks coordinated by Bill Harris.
- The Motus committee has finalized the location for our first tower (to detect bird migration and contribute to research and information gathering), and is purchasing equipment to build the tower.
- The Marine Road Wildlife Area project continues to move forward. BCAS members laid the foundation and started on the deck for one of the viewing blinds. Bill arranged for a partner organization, Friends of the River Uncompahgre (FoRU), to advise us on vegetation enhancements and plant 150 willow switches. The City of Montrose planted two large Bur Oaks. Members are encouraged to bird the site.
- We had a successful Crane Days at Eckert March 23-24. Alida Franco spearheaded the scheduling of events, developing promotional posters and a brochure, and educational events. A free lunch was provided on a neighboring ranch by Conscience Bay/Western State Ranches management company on March 23.
- The Board will schedule a planning session to determine which projects BCAS will work on in the next year, using the National Audubon Society's Flight Plan as a model.

The next Board Meeting is July 18 by Zoom. Contact Bruce Ackerman for details. ▀

## BCAS Book Club Selections

Looking for a way to meet new people or to expand your reading genres? Join the Audubon Book Club! Here are the next three book selections. The Book Club list for the rest of the year is on the BCAS website.

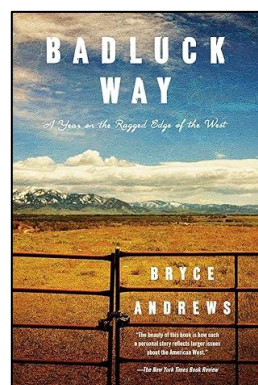
This summer, meetings will be in-person in Montrose on the third Tuesday of each month at 2:00 PM. Meet at Sheryl and Don Radovich's house in south Montrose. Please join us, even if you haven't read the book yet! (May to October in person in Montrose; November to April by Zoom). Contact Bruce Ackerman for more details.



**June 18**

***The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate—Discoveries from A Secret World***, by Peter Wohlleben (2016). Are trees social beings? Forester and author Peter Wohlleben makes the case that, yes, the forest is a social network. He draws on groundbreaking scientific

discoveries to describe how trees are like human families: tree parents live together with their children, communicate with them, support them as they grow, share nutrients with those who are sick or struggling, and even warn each other of impending dangers. Wohlleben shares his deep love of woods and forests, explaining the amazing processes of life, death, and regeneration that he has observed in his woodland. [Amazon]



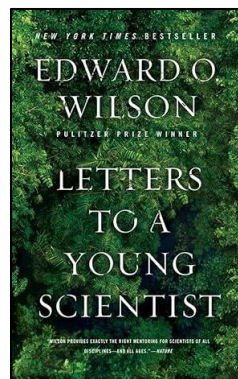
**July 16**

***Badluck Way: A Year on the Ragged Edge of the West***, by Bryce Andrews (2014). In this gripping memoir of a young man, a wolf, their parallel lives and ultimate collision, Bryce Andrews describes life on the remote, Sun Ranch in southwest Montana. The Sun's 20,000 acres of rangeland occupy a still-wild corner of

southwest Montana. Just over the border from Yellowstone National Park, the Sun holds giant herds of cattle and elk amid many predators—bears, mountain lions, and wolves.

In lyrical, haunting language, Andrews recounts marathon days and nights of building fences, riding, roping, and otherwise learning the hard business of caring for cattle,

an initiation that changes him from an idealistic city kid into a skilled ranch hand. But when wolves suddenly begin killing the ranch's cattle, Andrews has to shoulder a rifle, chase the pack, and do what he'd hoped he would never have to do. [Amazon]



**August 20**

***Letters to a Young Scientist*** by E.O. Wilson (2014). Edward O. Wilson has distilled 60 years of teaching into a book for students, young and old. Coming-of-age in the South as a Boy Scout and a lover of ants and butterflies, Wilson threads these 21 letters, each richly illustrated, with autobiographical anecdotes that illuminate his career—both his

successes and his failures—and his motivations for becoming a biologist. At a time when our survival is more than ever linked to our understanding of science, Wilson insists that success in the sciences does not depend on mathematical skill, but rather a passion for finding a problem and solving it. [Amazon]

## “Birdability” is Birding for All

Are you aware that one in four Coloradans identify as living with a disability, according to the CDC. Other sources state that 10-11 percent of Coloradans identify as living with a disability. According to the recent National Wildlife Viewer Survey, approximately 40 percent of viewers identified as experiencing somewhat to a great deal of accessibility challenges when participating in wildlife viewing; this figure was one third of Colorado-specific respondents.

Birdability is an organization that helps make birding areas more accessible to people with mobility issues and works to share the joys of birding with people who have disabilities and other health concerns. Birdability also hosts monthly virtual events such as a book club and game night for people who experience disabilities or health challenges that prevent them from leaving home. Check it out at <https://www.birdability.org/events>.

*Reprinted from CPW Connect, the monthly update for Colorado Parks & Wildlife volunteers.* ■

# Conservation Conversations

by Sallie Thoreson, Conservation Chair

## Good News on the Federal Level

In April President Biden signed into law the Migratory Birds of the Americas Conservation Enhancements Act, which reauthorizes the **Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA)**, a key source of funding for research and habitat restoration efforts. The NMBCA reauthorization includes provisions that will support more bird conservation projects across the Western Hemisphere. More than half of U.S. bird species migrate to Latin America and the Caribbean, so we need to protect them everywhere. ([info@abcbirds.org](mailto:info@abcbirds.org) and <https://www.audubon.org/advocacy/neotropical-migratory-bird-conservation-act>)

## BLM Public Lands Rule is A Game Changer

Conservationists have reason to celebrate the recent publication of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Public Lands Rule. This rule places conservation, wildlife habitat, and cultural resource protection on equal footing with uses such as grazing, logging, and oil and gas development. The rule provides tools for applying land health standards across BLM programs, establishes restoration and mitigation leases, and clarifies how Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) will protect land and resources. More than 200,000 comments were received by the BLM, with the vast majority backing the new rule. Audubon Rockies led the charge on a letter of support; it was co-signed by 194 independent Audubon chapters. We are part of the movement to change the way we view and protect our public lands for generations to come.

## Good News on the State Level

Vast areas of U.S. wetlands and miles of streams were left unprotected by a U.S. Supreme Court decision last year. Colorado was the first state to tackle the problem by adopting state regulations to protect those wetlands and ephemeral and below-surface water courses in Colorado. A bipartisan group of state lawmakers passed House Bill 1379. <https://www.watereducationcolorado.org/fresh-water-news/bipartisan-group-approves-law-to-fill-federal-regulatory-gap-that-left-colorado-streams-wetlands-at-risk/#/>.

In another great effort, the state legislature passed [House Bill 24-1117](#) which adds rare plants and invertebrates to the species that may be studied and conserved under Colorado Parks & Wildlife (CPW) direction. Before this time, insects were not considered wildlife in Colorado and are not under the protection of any state agency. In addition to all the insectivorous birds, we know that 96 percent of all terrestrial bird species in North America feed insects to their young. Now we have a stronger framework to protect pollinators and habitat for birds and people. <https://www.peopleandpollinators.org> and <https://www.audubon.org/news/why-native-plants-are-better-birds-and-people>. ▀

## What's in a (Bird) Name?

There's a national movement to peck away at troubling avian history, which flushes a flock of local birder emotions. An article by Michael Booth in the *Colorado Sun* explains the effort to rename birds to be more descriptive and less honorific. According to the article, "Other bird (names) tagged for more innocuous naturalists or family members are also being changed, in an effort to dehumanize names many researchers believe should be more scientific and descriptive than honorific." Check out <https://coloradosun.com/2024/02/18/colorado-birders-avian-names/>



Grace's Warbler © Verlee Sanburg.

According to multiple sources, Grace's Warbler was first discovered for science by ornithologist Elliott Coues. Coues was visiting the Southern Rocky Mountains in 1864 when he saw the bird and requested that the new species be named after his sister Grace Darling Coues. Ornithologist Spencer Fullerton Baird honored Coues' request in 1865, when he described the species for science. ▀

## *Apex Predator continued from cover*

his toy mouse and watching birds out the window. Not only is keeping your cat confined a good thing to do for wildlife (more on that below), but City ordinances in both Delta and Montrose prohibit dogs AND cats from running at large. The Delta City Code 6.04.070 (A) reads as follows:

It shall be unlawful for any owner or custodian of any animal to fail to have the animal under effective and immediate control of the owner or custodian by a leash, cord, chain or other restraining device at all times that such animal is within the City, unless the animal is upon the premises of said owner or custodian with adequate and proper supervision.

The Montrose City Code Sec. 6-2-4 (A) has similar wording and requires that all pet animals be contained in the owner's yard or be kept under control by a leash.

So, how serious is the cat problem? Scientific studies estimate that cats have contributed to the extinction of over 63 species of birds, mammals, and reptiles worldwide. Cats are the #1 threat to birds in the U.S. and Canada, where it is estimated that cats kill 2.4 billion birds and even larger numbers of mammals each year. What is happening in other parts of the globe? Here are a few examples:

- Poland has declared cats an “invasive alien species.”
- Many cities in Iceland have imposed dusk to dawn curfews on cats.
- Germany fines owners 500 Euro if cats are caught outdoors and 50,000 Euros (over \$54,000 U.S.) if their cat kills an endangered lark.
- Australia has “declared war” on feral cats in an attempt to curb biodiversity loss.

One study showed that unowned cats are responsible for the deaths of 70% of birds and 90% of mammals killed. The American Bird Conservancy, PETA, and various agencies oppose the popular “Trap-Neuter-Release” programs that do little to reduce cat overpopulation while leaving feral cats free to continue hunting. They urge citizens not to feed feral cats without committing to finding them permanent, indoor homes.

Nesting birds are in particular danger from feline predators. Please do your part to protect them and their chicks by keeping your own cats indoors or—as the law requires—confining them to your yard or leashing them. ■

## Avian Ramblings—Spring 2024

By Bill Harris

This year's edition of the West End Birdathon May 8-9 at the West End of Montrose County turned out to be one of the most prolific in recent memory. We tallied 91 species over our two days birding a variety of habitats. Todd Miller, Missy Siders, David Sinton, Tim Shortell, Steve Dike, along with Carol Pierce on the first day, made up our crew.

We gathered at the Vestal House before heading out. The Vestal House is a comfy, cute B&B in Nucla that opened in 2021. It makes the perfect headquarters for a marauding group of birders. The price is affordable and includes breakfast.

The West End trip, which traces its beginnings back to the 1980s, was revived in 2017 with encouragement from Audubon members Coen Dexter and Brenda Wright. They lived in Nucla and had the local birding hotspots well-mapped. They moved to Cortez a few years ago but not before sharing many great birding hotspots.

Seeing so many bird species (70+ most years) is attributed to the varied habitat. Pinyon/Juniper forest, sagebrush flats, wetlands, Ponderosa pine forest, riparian, even Nucla's waste treatment ponds have a good variety of birds.

The weather was on the chilly side, but a windy front had moved through the region the day before we met. It may have briefly interrupted migration, bringing birds to the ground, seeking shelter.

This year's sightings included Grace's Warblers, Brown Creepers, Red Crossbills, Dusky Flycatcher, Gray Vireos, Black-throated Gray Warblers, Warbling Vireo, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Bewick's Wren and a Great Egret. Best birds were an American Redstart, Black-throated Sparrows and 48 Red-necked Phalaropes.

Participant numbers were down this year, but several BCAS members had gathered the previous weekend to coincide with a visit from a good friend and BCAS member Mary Costello. Mary moved to Montana last year to join her husband. (She returned to a place she knew well, Trout Creek, Montana.) That group spotted 66 species.

If you haven't done the West End trip, you should plan on doing it next year. ■

