



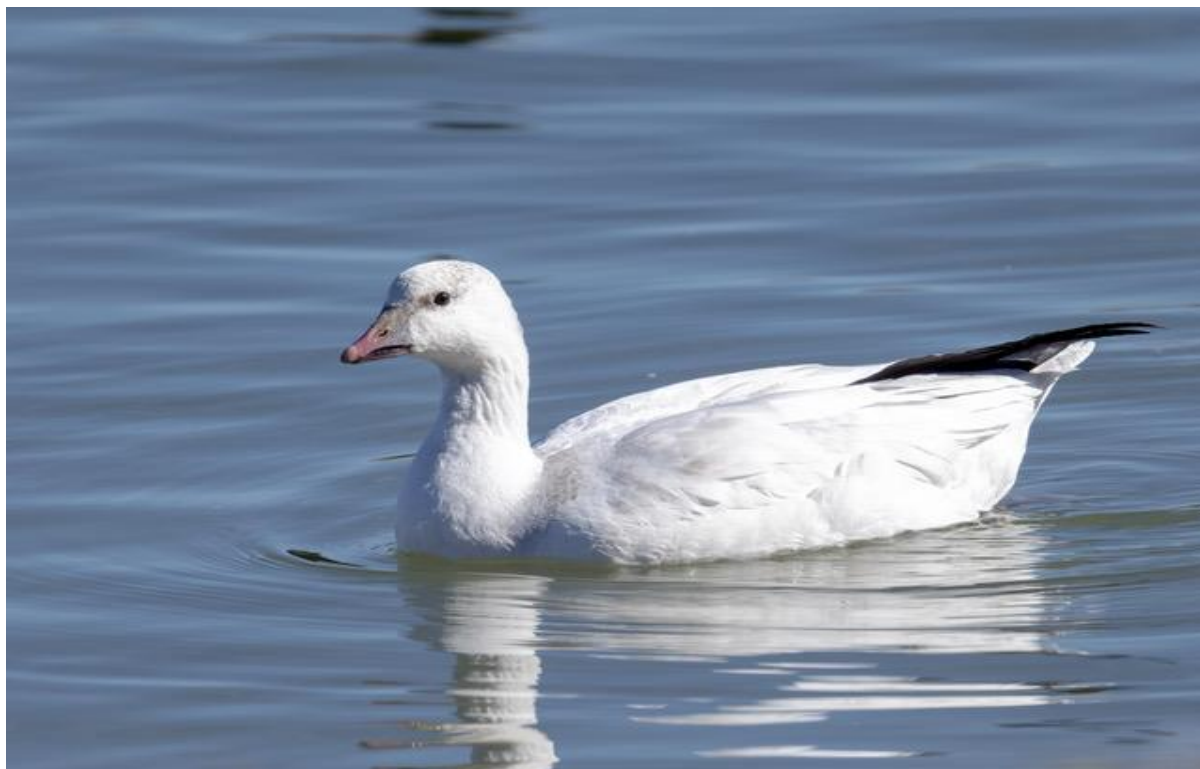
# Canyon Wrenderings

The Journal of the Black Canyon Audubon Society

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

Winter 2022

Volume 36 Number 4



*Ross' Goose (Photo by Verlee Sanburg)*

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## Christmas Bird Counts!!

Christmas bird counts are coming up quickly! Please contact the count leader at least **5 days** prior to the count day to let him or her know you plan to participate and to learn of any changes to logistics based on community risk levels for COVID. We ask that all participants be vaccinated against COVID to participate in groups.

**Sunday Dec. 18th - Montrose.** Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the Centennial Room off Centennial Plaza, Downtown Montrose. We will break into teams, and you will be given maps and data sheets to complete the field count. Please contact Missy Siders ([missy.siders@gmail.com](mailto:missy.siders@gmail.com)).

**Sunday Dec. 18th - Gunnison.** Contact the organizer Arden Anderson at [arden@gunnison.com](mailto:arden@gunnison.com) for meeting time and place.

**Saturday Dec. 24th - Delta.** Meet at the Delta City Market parking lot at 8:30 am. We will break into teams, and you will be given maps and data sheets to complete the field count. Please contact [amy.seglund@state.co.us](mailto:amy.seglund@state.co.us)

**Sunday, January 1st - Hotchkiss.** Meet at the Hotchkiss City Market parking lot at 8:00 am. All experience levels are welcome and encouraged. Please RSVP to Adam Petry at [petry@westernbiology.com](mailto:petry@westernbiology.com).

*Continued Christmas bird count page 4*

## **President's Message** by Bruce Ackerman

As we come to the end of 2022, I want to thank everyone. We have had an Action-Packed Year! Looking back over 2022, we had so many events. We are so thankful for moving past being mostly shut down for two years. If you were able to attend some of these events, thank you for joining in with us! If you helped make these events happen, an even bigger thanks from all of us!

- Since August, we have restarted our monthly evening lecture series. Kristal Stidham has arranged a great list of talks all the way through June 2023.
- Field Trips at least two per month
- Book Club since July 2021
- Our special events included –
  - Eckert Crane Days, March 2022
  - Bluebird nest box monitoring at Ridgway State Park and Billy Creek State Wildlife Area
  - Montrose County Fair, Bluebird boxes fundraiser, July 2022
  - Annual Picnic, July 2022 (after a 2-year gap)
  - Bird Banding research station at Ridgway State Park, September 2022
  - Christmas Bird Counts, December 2022

Christmas Bird Counts are coming up, between December 18 and January 1. I hope you can go along on one of them. Read about them on Page 1. Expect them to be smaller than other years, socially distanced, masked, and with limited social gatherings before or after. A big shoutout to the leaders, Missy Siders, Adam Petry, Arden Anderson, and Amy Seglund. It takes a lot of work to coordinate the counts, round up the data, and submit it all to the national database.

And finally, just a reminder that our annual local membership expires for everyone in December. You can renew online or by check. \$20 for individuals or \$30 for families. When you renew, your membership will be paid through December 2023. Your National Audubon membership includes your local membership.

## **Volunteer opportunities!!**

By Missy Siders

Black Canyon Audubon Society is looking for more volunteers to help us accomplish our mission. You do not have to be an expert birder to lead bird walks, organize talks, serve on the Board, or participate in other activities. If you would like to help with bird walks, contact Don Marsh (ridgwaybrdr@gmail.com; 209-256-5744). If you have ideas for speakers for the monthly meetings, contact Kristal Stidham (nationalparkfan1@yahoo.com; 580-919-5987). If you have ideas for activities, contact Bruce Ackerman (BruceAckermanAUD@aol.com; 727-858-5857).

### ***Canyon Wrenderings***

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**Managing editor** Susan Werner at wrenderingseditor@gmail.com

### **BLACK CANYON AUDUBON SOCIETY**

#### **OFFICERS**

**President**—Bruce Ackerman (Montrose)  
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**Secretary**—Sallie Thoreson (Montrose)  
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**Treasurer**—Gayle Johnson (Montrose)  
970-964-8051

Gaylejeff@yahoo.com

**Past President**—Jon Horn (Montrose)  
970-209-5404

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#### **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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Carrie Krickbaum (Ridgway) 970-209-3703  
carrie.krickbaum@gmail.com

Don Marsh (Ridgway) 209-256-5744  
ridgwaybrdr@gmail.com

Melissa (Missy) Siders (Montrose)  
970-275-6639

missy.siders@gmail.com

#### **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

Programs—Kristal Stidham (see above)

Website Manager—Jon Horn (see above)

#### **AD HOC COMMITTEES (ANNUAL EVENTS)**

Montrose County Fair—Sandy Beranich

Bird Banding—Carrie Krickbaum (see above)

Christmas Bird Count Team—Arden

Anderson, Adam Petry, Amy Seglund,  
and Missy Siders

Eckert Crane Days—**Open**

**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.**

See an OPEN position? Talk to an officer to see if it is a good fit for your skills and talents! We would love to have an at-large board member. Volunteers are always welcome.

## BCAS Winter Field Trips

### Wednesday, January 11

**Open Water Trip** – Meet at 9:00a.m. in Montrose to join us as we search for open ice-free lakes and ponds in the greater Montrose area. These water sources often host large numbers of waterfowl. Trip will conclude in early afternoon. Dress in layers, bring water and a lunch or snacks, and a spotting scope if you have one. For more information contact Don at (209) 256-5744 or at [ridgwaybrdr@gmail.com](mailto:ridgwaybrdr@gmail.com).

### Saturday, January 21

**Grand Junction Wildlife Area** - Grand Junction State Wildlife Area in Mesa County can offer up a good variety of waterfowl and songbirds during the winter months. Join leader Bill Harris as we explore the ponds, fields, and cottonwood forest along the Colorado River. Dress in layers, bring water and a lunch or snacks, and a spotting scope if you have one. For questions and to sign up contact Bill Harris at TRLGPA48@gmail.com.

### Saturday, January 28

**Ridgway Rosy-finch Trip #1** -Join us as we visit the home of a Ridgway BCAS member who regularly hosts all three species of Rosy-finch at her feeders. We'll meet in Ridgway at the Cimarron Coffee parking lot at 8:30 am and carpool to her home. Because it is a private residence, the trip is limited to 10 participants. Please contact Don Marsh at (209) 256-5744 or [ridgwaybrdr@gmail.com](mailto:ridgwaybrdr@gmail.com) to RSVP.

### Saturday, February 4 & Sunday, February 5

**North Fork Winter Raptor Trip** - Join biologists Jim Lefevre and Adam Petry as they search the North Fork area of the Gunnison for winter raptors, including Eagles as well as Ferruginous and Rough-legged Hawks. Dress in layers, bring water and a lunch or snacks, and binoculars. Leaders will have spotting scopes. Meet at the City Market in Hotchkiss at 9a.m. Trip should conclude around 2 or 3:00p.m. These trips are limited to 12 participants each day. For more information contact Jim at [jimlef@paonia.com](mailto:jimlef@paonia.com).

### Saturday, Feb. 11 & Sunday, Feb. 12

**Montrose Winter Raptor Trip** - Join Bruce Ackerman and Bill Harris at 9:00a.m. as they search the Montrose area for winter raptors, including Eagles as well as Ferruginous and Rough-legged Hawks. Trip will conclude in early

## First Tuesday Field Trips

Mark your calendars for **December 6, January 3, and February 17!!**

The First Tuesday Field Trips continue! Meet **9:00AM through the winter months!** We will meet at **the public parking lot at the intersection of N. 2nd Street and N. Cascade Ave. in Montrose**. A leader will accompany the group to a nearby birding hotspot. Return about noon.

We will be watching community COVID infection rates to determine appropriate protocols. Please stay home if you are ill. Contact Bruce Ackerman at (727) 858-5857 or [bruceackermanAUD@aol.com](mailto:bruceackermanAUD@aol.com) or Don Marsh at (209) 256-5744 or [ridgwaybrdr@gmail.com](mailto:ridgwaybrdr@gmail.com) for more information and to RSVP. This is especially important in case of sudden weather changes.

Bring a snack, water, binoculars, and field guides.



*Red Crossbill by V. Sanburg*

afternoon. Dress in layers, bring water and a lunch or snacks, binocular and a spotting scope if you have one. These trips are limited to 8 to 9 participants each day (three vehicles). To reserve a space and to learn the meeting place for Saturday's trip contact Bill at TRLGPA48@gmail.com. To reserve a space on Sunday's trip, contact Bruce at (727) 858-5857 or at [bruceackermanaud@aol.com](mailto:bruceackermanaud@aol.com)

### Thursday, February 23

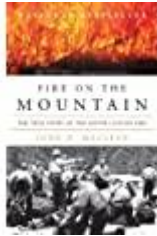
**Ridgway Rosy-finch Trip #2** - Join us as we visit the home of a Ridgway BCAS member who regularly gets all three species of Rosy-finch at her home feeders. We'll meet in Ridgway at the Cimarron Coffee parking lot at 8:30a.m. and carpool up to the Elk Meadows home. Because it is a private residence, the trip is limited to 10 participants. Please contact the trip leader, Don Marsh at (209) 256-5744 or [ridgwaybrdr@gmail.com](mailto:ridgwaybrdr@gmail.com) to RSVP.

## Winter BCAS Book Club Selections

Here are the next three club selections. Meetings will be by Zoom on the third Tuesday of each month at 2:00p.m. Contact Bruce Ackerman for the Zoom link.

### Tuesday, December 20, 2022

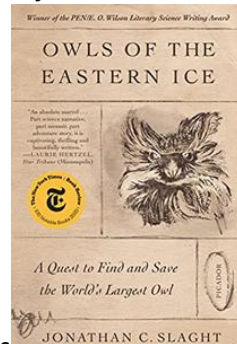
In bestseller *Fire on the Mountain*, author John Maclean reconstructs the 1994 wildfire near



Glenwood Springs that claimed the lives of 14 wildland fire fighters.

### Tuesday, January 17, 2023

January's selection is *Owls of the Eastern Ice, A quest to*



*Find and Save the World's Largest Owl.* Author Jonathan Slaght provides the reader a glimpse into the everyday life of a scientist as he and a small team pursue the Blakiston's Fish Owl in its native habitat in Eastern Russia.

### Tuesday, February 21

Traveling the full length of the hummingbirds' range, from



the cusp of the Arctic Circle to near-Antarctic islands, acclaimed nature writer Jon Dunn encounters birders, scientists, and storytellers in his quest to find hummingbirds. Join us in a discussion of *The Glitter in the Green: In Search of Hummingbirds*

### Christmas Bird Count by Missy Siders

(Continued from page 1)

Between December 14, 2022, and January 5, 2023, local volunteers will join birders across the country to brave various weather conditions to count birds during the annual Audubon Christmas Bird Counts (CBC). Birders and nature enthusiasts will take part in this tradition, many rising before dawn to participate in the longest running wildlife census on the planet.

From feeder-watchers and field observers, to count compilers and regional editors, everyone who takes part in the Christmas Bird Count does it for love of birds and the excitement of friendly competition, with the knowledge that their efforts are making a difference for science and bird conservation.

The count takes place within Count Circles, which focus on specific geographical areas. Each circle is overseen by a Count Compiler. Count circles will be divided, and areas assigned to participants at the pre-count meeting. **All levels of birding experience are welcome. We'll be birding most of the day.** If you are a beginning birder, you will be able to join a group that includes at least one experienced birdwatcher.

If your home is within the boundaries of a Count Circle, you can stay home and report the birds that visit your feeder.

**Bring:** warm clothes (dress for expected weather), boots, snacks and/or lunch, water, sunscreen, binoculars, spotting scope (if you have), and bird books. Clip boards are very helpful.

**Provided:** Map of birding areas, checklist of birds that might be seen, and instructions.

For more information about CBC participation, visit Audubon's website at [Christmas bird count](https://www.audubon.org/ChristmasBirdCount) For additional information on local efforts call the numbers listed above or contact Bruce Ackerman of Black Canyon Audubon, [Bruceackermanaud @aol.com](mailto:Bruceackermanaud@aol.com).



## Winter Program Meetings

By Kristal Stidham, BCAS Board member

All meetings will be in the Summit Room of the Montrose Field House (25 Colorado Avenue in Montrose)

### **Thursday, December 8, 7:00PM**

Our guest speakers will be range ecologists Aaron Maier and Dustin Downey, program leaders for **Conservation Ranching** for Audubon of the Rockies. “Dusty” is also on the board of directors for the Wyoming Alliance for Environmental Education. He will be discussing both organizations and their outreach efforts, as well as progress toward protecting many species of grassland birds. If you know anyone who is managing ranch or farm properties of any size, please invite them to this presentation so they can hear about potential ways to improve outcomes for their land, animals, environment, and themselves! Please see a special message from Dusty Downey on page 10 of this newsletter!

### **Thursday, January 12, 7:00PM**

Rob Bleiberg, Executive Director of **Colorado West Land Trust**, will be speaking about this nonprofit organization, based in Grand Junction. They “protect and enhance agricultural land, wildlife habitat and scenic lands in western Colorado to benefit the community at large, enrich lives, provide opportunities for outdoor recreation, and ensure our connection to land for generations to come.”

### **Thursday, February 9, 7:00PM**

Madagascar! Just the name evokes exotic images of nature, leaping lemurs, bulbous Baobab trees, crawling chameleons, rare reptiles, and brightly colored birds. Join us for a photo “safari” by Renée Herring, a retired CPW Watchable Wildlife Coordinator, to explore some wildlife riches found on the island that time forgot. We visited the varied landscapes of rainforests, spiny deserts, lakes, and dry forests. Ninety percent of Madagascar’s plant and animal species are found nowhere else on earth.

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## Avian Ramblings

By Bill Harris, BCAS Board member

Last summer I traveled to Southwest Ontario for some North Woods fishing. Alan Reed, Jon Horn, and Steve Dike joined the fun. The trip was initially instigated by my brother, Doug. He brought along a fishing buddy of his, Kurt Ringwald.

Although the focus of the trip was catching a bunch of Smallmouth bass, Walleye, and Northern Pike, when our cadre of West Slope retirees get together, the topic inevitably turns to birding. We were all very much aware of the potential to spot birds we don’t normally see in Colorado.

One family of birds that we focused on was warblers. Fortunately, our cabin resort – Harris Hill Resort (no relation) is aware of the growing interest in birding and the business potential that birders bring to the table. The resort had some excellent birding information on their website. They also had well-stocked bird feeders. The resort grounds were quite lush with a north woods forest nearby.

We found ourselves birding around the feeders every day, sometimes in the morning, other days later in the afternoon. Black-capped Chickadees, Red-eyed Vireos, White-throated Sparrows, and Purple Finches were regulars. Most times Eastern Wood-pewees could be heard and seen on the utility wires. A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker visited on several occasions. Blue Jays woke us up every morning.

As with many bird observations I have experienced in other places, sightings seem to come in waves. One particularly productive morning, I birded around the resort while the others were out fishing. I spotted 20 species including a Least Flycatcher, White-throated Sparrows, Black-and-white Warblers, a Tennessee Warbler, and a Pine Warbler.

As a group we sighted 73 species, including 12 warbler species. I added a Mourning Warbler, an Alder Flycatcher, and Eastern Wood-pewee to my life list. Other good birds were Common Terns, an American bittern, a Clay-colored Sparrow, Solitary Sandpipers, and a Veery.

The North Woods of southwest Ontario is radically different from western Colorado – wet, flat, and green, but the birding is fantastic!

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*American coot by V. Sanburg*

## **Pinyon Jays in Colorado**

By Amy Seglund, Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Pinyon jays are thought to be declining range wide and were recently petitioned to be listed under the Endangered Species Act. Prior to 2019, little was known about their breeding status and habitat use in Colorado. Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) partnered with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop standardized protocols to locate and map breeding colonies in Colorado and Utah from 2019-2022. Efforts in western Colorado resulted in the location and assessment of 23 breeding colonies. CPW mapped colony perimeters using 282 active nests and over 1,432 previously active nests. Data are currently being analyzed to assess nest and fledging success, breeding site fidelity, habitat structure in colonies, and extent of breeding colonies. CPW continues to coordinate with land management partners to apply what we have learned from pinyon jay colony surveys to inform habitat management and conservation of the species.



*Female pinyon jay begging for food*

Pinyon jays begin breeding early in the year. Courtship starts in western Colorado around mid-February. They are monogamous breeders and can mate for life. During early breeding, you may see pairs breaking away from the flock and doing various courtship behaviors. These include the male transferring food to the female, silent sitting together, and chirring vocalizations as the pairs discuss where to put their nest. When the tree has finally been selected, they begin to busily construct a sturdy and well insulated nest. The female alone incubates the eggs for 17 days. Males come in as a group at feeding time, making this a raucous event within a colony as females fly off of nests to beg for food. The young fledge at about 22 days. If during fledging, you find yourself in a colony, helpers in the flock will make

insistent warning calls and may even mob you to distract you from noticing recently fledged young sitting quietly at the base of trees. As the days pass, you can observe groups of young birds clumsily learning to fly while constantly begging and harassing the parents and helpers for food. As soon as they are proficient fliers, young birds quickly vacate the colony to reduce drawing unwanted attention from predators to the remaining nesting birds.

We have learned that ravens are the biggest threat during all times of the nesting season, as they are active predators of eggs and nestlings. Recent widespread beetle outbreaks on pinyon pine trees have taken a toll on this important habitat resource. Pinyon jays regularly harvest and cache pinyon pine seeds for later use during the breeding season. Sometimes, these seeds are not relocated and germinate to create new pine trees. In this way, pinyon jays are instrumental in replanting the next crop of pinyon pine forest. Little is known about this ecosystem dynamic, but there are significant threats to pinyon-juniper forests. These include efforts to significantly reduce fuels in these forests, increases in insect outbreaks due to prolonged drought, and increasingly common catastrophic wildfires. We need to pay attention to the significant decline in this important local ecosystem.



*Young pinyon jays begging for food in the nest*

# Audubon Education – Bird Banding Research

## Local Students Learn All About Birds at the Ridgway State Park Migratory Bird Banding Station

By Carrie Krickbaum, BCAS Board member

Wow! What an interesting banding season this fall with the drought plus heat, then clouds and rain, plus great weather! Life in Colorado! We banded 109 birds of 30 species according to Megan Miller, bird bander. The Orchard Oriole was unusual because it's not typical on this side of the Continental Divide. Some fun birds were the Nashville Warbler and the Steller's Jay! Here is a list of the species of birds that were banded this fall:

|                        |    |                        |   |                       |    |
|------------------------|----|------------------------|---|-----------------------|----|
| American Robin         | 6  | House Wren             | 2 | Spotted Towhee        | 1  |
| Black-capped Chickadee | 2  | Lincoln's Sparrow      | 4 | Steller's Jay         | 1  |
| Bushtit                | 1  | MacGillivray's Warbler | 5 | Virginia's Warbler    | 7  |
| Cassin's Vireo         | 2  | Nashville Warbler      | 1 | Warbling Vireo        | 2  |
| Chipping Sparrow       | 1  | Orange-crowned Warbler | 5 | Western Tanager-      | 8  |
| Common Yellowthroat    | 1  | Orchard Oriole         | 1 | Willow Flycatcher     | 1  |
| Downy Woodpecker       | 1  | Plumbeous Vireo        | 1 | Wilson's Warbler      | 24 |
| Gray Catbird           | 10 | Ruby-crowned Kinglet   | 1 | Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay | 2  |
| Green-tailed Towhee    | 5  | Red-naped Sapsucker    | 2 | Yellow Warbler        | 3  |
| Hammond's Flycatcher   | 1  | Song Sparrow           | 6 | Yellow-rumped Warbler | 2  |

Nearly 400 students from Ouray, Montrose, and Delta counties were bussed to the park to take part in Ridgway State Park's annual education event between September 5 and 16, 2022. These students were accompanied by more than 25 teachers and chaperones.

Students visited five stations at the Dallas Creek site to learn about birds. Ages were primarily 3 – 5<sup>th</sup> grades with older students from Peak Virtual Academy and the *Step Up to Life* program in Montrose. They rotated through the stations with their classmates and teachers while volunteers and park staff presented information about the following topics during the half-day event.

- Adaptations and Jeop-birdy!
- Habitat Inventory
- Bird banding demonstration
- Birds and binoculars walk
- Migration Challenge game

Megan with students at Ridgway State Park (C. Krickbaum)



The Saturday public day on September 10 hosted another 20 or more adults and children with Bruce Ackerman bringing a group for BCAS. Here is the collaboration it takes to pull off this two-week event:

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Bander's wages    | Colorado Parks and Wildlife pays bander Megan Miller's, of the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, contract wages in Ridgway (two weeks) and allows schools free entry into the park |
| Lodging           | Patty and Gary Ray provide the use of an RV at Ridgway State Park (RSP).  |
| Banding materials | Bird Conservancy of the Rockies provides bands, permit, nets, and other necessary supplies  |
| Net lanes         | RSP volunteers erect and take down the numerous ten-foot poles for the nets and set up tables, tents, and a temporary outdoor learning center. Thank you!                         |



|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Buses for students | Friends of Ridgway State Park pays half of the school district bus fees for students to attend the event  |
| Dry storage        | The Black Canyon Audubon chapter again paid \$180 to store this year's donated RV for the winter at CPW's locked storage unit; RSP paid the other half. |

### Thank You Volunteers!

Thank you to these volunteers who helped ensure the bird banding and education stations were a success again this year:

Mary Menz – banding assistant and recorder

Amanda Clements - educator

Don Marsh – educator and assistant

Bruce Krickbaum – set up

Anne Janik - educator

Bruce Ackerman - education and recorder

Anita Evans - educator

Random students - recorders

Sandy Dick - educator

**Also**, RSP Senior Ranger, Erin Vogel (helped two days and provided us with pizza the final day!!!), seasonal ranger Hannah Blake, seasonal employee Ryan Ossola and seasonal ranger Lou Duel, and Carrie Krickbaum, seasonal educator. They all did an amazing job of jumping in when and where a pair of hands was needed! Special thanks to RSP volunteers for lane mowing and trimming, hauling shelters, poles and rebar and Mary Menz and Bruce Krickbaum for setting up shelters, benches, posts, and hauling, plus labor during take down after banding.

## **Board Highlights (From Board meetings between September and November 2022)**

By Sallie Thoreson

Board meetings were held in-person on September 22 and November 17. Board meetings are bimonthly on 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursdays at 5 pm. We have 302 members from the National Audubon Society and 221 local members (some are both). The quarterly newsletter goes to 370 people.

We had many successful birding trips this fall, including monthly First Tuesday trips and trips to Confluence Park, and Miramonte and Blue Mesa Reservoirs. More trips are scheduled for this winter.

The Audubon Book Club is going strong. We have had a book every month since July 2021, on the Third Tuesday of each Month, 2pm (Zooming in Winter).

The Board started discussion on a program to inform the public about Dark Skies and turning down yard lights during migration.

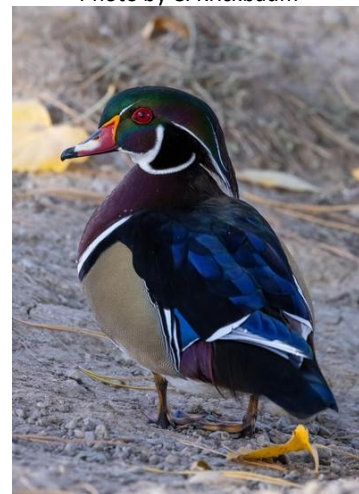
We will work with the Montrose Regional Library District to provide some storybooks on birds and nature for their outdoor storybook walk.

Kristal continues to coordinate great speakers at our in-person programs. The Board approved payment of travel money, lodging and dinner compensation, and/or donation to speaker's organizations. We have an outstanding line-up of speakers through July 2023.

Treasurer Gayle Johnson reported that Black Canyon Audubon has a balance of \$27,965 as of November 28, 2022. Major expenses this quarter included \$225 for five years of website domain registration, \$250 to the Friends of the San Luis Valley, \$906 to Audubon of the Rockies, and \$160 to the Montrose Recreation District.



*Bander Megan Miller hands member Sue Hirshman a bird to release  
Photo by C. Krickbaum*



*Male Wood Duck, photo by. V Sanburg*



## **Sandhill Crane Capture and Marking near Delta**

By Evan Phillips, Colorado Parks and Wildlife Biologist

In February of 2022, CPW staff coordinated with US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) researchers to capture and mark Sandhill Cranes near Delta. It took a few long days of waiting for the perfect moment to launch a rocket net and capture some cranes. A total of 13 cranes were captured, 7 of which were outfitted with GPS transmitters and 6 were marked with numbered colored leg bands.

Historically, the Rocky Mountain population of Greater Sandhill Cranes has primarily bred in the spring and summer months in Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and Utah along with parts of northwestern Colorado. In the fall, the entire population would funnel south through Colorado's San Luis Valley down into wintering areas in Arizona, New Mexico, and Mexico. When temperatures warmed up coming out of winter, the cranes come back north through the San Luis Valley during the spring migration into traditional summer areas. The Hart's Basin area northeast of Delta was used as migration stopover by cranes. New in the last 20 years, Sandhill Cranes began to over-winter near Delta.

Monthly winter surveys indicate that the numbers of cranes wintering in the Delta area increased to around 3,000 to 4,000 during the last few years, which is around 15% of the estimated roughly 20,000 individuals in the Rocky Mountain population of greater sandhill cranes. USFWS began marking cranes with GPS transmitters in this population in their more traditional wintering area along the middle Rio Grande River Valley in New Mexico in 2014. Since that time, more than 100 cranes have been marked and at least 10 of the birds captured in New Mexico and outfitted with GPS transmitters have stayed in the Delta, CO area in subsequent winters.

Preliminary results indicate that the cranes marked near Delta in February 2022 migrated north and used the traditional breeding areas in Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana this past spring and summer. Information collected from this effort will allow CPW and USFWS to document and quantify shifts in migration patterns, determine important breeding, staging, and wintering areas, and better understand potential overlap with other populations of Sandhill Cranes and validate timing



*Sandhill Crane with GPS radio*

and spatial extent of population surveys. All this information will be valuable to inform updates to flyway management plans.

*Sandhill Crane with numbered leg bands:*



*Sandhill Crane released with new GPS transmitter and leg bands*

## **A Message from December 8th Guest**

### **Speaker, Dusty Downey**

North America's grasslands are among the most imperiled ecosystems in the world. America's grassland birds have declined more than any other bird group in the continent, some species by as much as 80 percent. Because the vast majority breed on private lands, working with ranchers is our best hope for conserving them. Audubon's Conservation Ranching Initiative seeks to [enhance biodiversity](#) through our certification, technical assistance, and habitat management on working ranches.

To save rangeland birds, Audubon is enlisting and assisting America's ranchers—the stewards of our remaining grassland landscapes—in implementing conservation ranching practices on millions of acres. We're working with them to develop Habitat Management Plans that implement regenerative grazing and other bird conservation practices, such as controlling invasive species and native plant seeding.

Grassland birds have suffered an unparalleled decline over the past half century, stemming from widespread development of North America's grasslands. This calls for Audubon's action. To combat the negative effects of grassland degradations—and to keep grass on the landscape—Audubon has developed the Conservation Ranching Initiative. This market-based conservation approach offers incentives for good grassland stewardship through a certification label on beef products. For the first time, consumers can contribute to grassland conservation efforts by selectively purchasing beef from Audubon-certified farms and ranches.

The Audubon certification seal brings a broad market appeal that enhances demand by consumers that want options for beef that is sustainably raised and benefits wildlife habitat.

Audubon's Conservation Ranching Initiative took another big step forward in 2022 by securing funding to implement restoration projects on four certified ranches in two states. We participated in and implemented the CO Department of Ag's STAR soil health program on seven certified ranches. We are also very proud of our work on the [Rafter W Ranch in Colorado](#), where we completed soil enhancements and native reseeding to help the ranch increase soil health while retaining water, which should increase its drought resilience and biodiversity in the long-term. There are currently 31 ranches covering over two million acres certified in the Rocky Mountain region and 100 ranches covering three million acres nationwide.

## **Conservation Conversations**

By Sallie Thoreson, BCAS Board member

### **Sage grouse – Gunnison and Greater**

Black Canyon Audubon Society sent comments in August to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) regarding the Gunnison Sage Grouse (GUSG) Resource Management Plan Amendment. We recommended that all GUSG critical habitat (occupied and unoccupied) be considered for Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs). We supported no surface disturbing or disruptive activities within GUSG habitat during lekking, nesting, and early brood-rearing (March 1 to July 15) and establishing buffer areas of at least 4 miles for most activities. We urged the Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to take strong measures needed to manage habitat and to make the difficult decisions to limit other uses of the land GUSG will need to survive and thrive.

Since 2014, there has been a rider included in a federal appropriations bill that blocks the USFWS from using any funds to make decisions regarding the listing of Greater Sage-Grouse (GRSG) as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The BCAS and other Audubon chapters co-signed a letter authored by National Audubon Society urging Congressional leaders to eliminate this rider from the FY 2023 appropriations bill.

### **Recovering America's Wildlife Act in the U.S. Senate**

The Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA) proposes funding for the conservation or restoration of wildlife and plant species of greatest conservation need; supporting conservation strategies of states, territories, or the District of Columbia; and enhancing wildlife conservation education and recreation projects. The bill passed in the U.S. House (HR 2773) and is now being considered by the Senate. Both Colorado senators are co-sponsors for the bill. The National Audubon Society says, "Congress has the opportunity to help not only birds and other wildlife but also to create jobs in communities across the country. In addition to providing annual support for proactive, on-the-ground conservation projects, recent studies project that the Recovering America's Wildlife Act could create more than 30,000 jobs and generate over \$93 billion in total economic activity." More information on the RAWA, including a graphically informative factsheet on the RAWA is at the Wildlife Society site at [Important wildlife legislation](#).

*Continued Page 11*

*Conservation Conversations continued*

### **Fuel Reduction Projects in our National Forests**

The Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests (GMUG) have joined with Mesa and Delta counties and the Colorado State Forest Service to create the Grand Mesa Watershed Resiliency Partnership. In its news release, the Forest Service describes it as a “landscape-scale effort to reduce the potential for catastrophic wildfire in critical watersheds on and adjacent to the Grand Mesa...Projects such as mechanical thinning of vegetation and large-scale use of prescribed fire help reduce the threat of big fires that can damage watersheds and homes.” The funding will come from new federal funds, such as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act. The GMUG held public meetings in November on their plans and process. Local conservation groups are questioning aspects of the proposed fuel reduction plans, such as the need for fuel reduction in areas that are away from human habitation and/or in higher elevation subalpine ecosystems that may not have the high risk or impacts from burns, considerations of the value of carbon sequestration of not deforesting, and asking for specifics on ecosystem, wildlife, and water impacts. Other concerns include the impacts of temporary roads; and activities that are usually not allowed in Roadless Areas and Wilderness (roads, mechanized equipment, etc.).

### **Reintroduction of Wolves**

The Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) continues to work on its Wolf Restoration and Management Plan, as required by the passage of Proposition 114. CPW will release the draft plan on December 9. It can be viewed at [wolfengagementco.org](https://wolfengagementco.org). At the December 9th virtual Commission meeting, CPW will present the draft Plan in detail. There are five planned public meetings (in-person and virtual) in January and February, and three additional CPW Commission meetings before the Commission votes on approval of the final Plan and associated wolf regulations in May 2023. More details on the Plan may be found at [Wolf management plan and process](#).

## **Marine Road Conservation Area**

By Kristal Stidham, BCAS Board member

I’m happy to report that our partnership with the City of Montrose continues as we work toward preserving an important 18-acre riparian area between Marine Road and the Uncompahgre River. Last spring, the city enlisted the help of UC-Denver’s College of Architecture and Planning through the University Technical Assistance Program (UTAP), with the end goal of professional-level conceptual designs for our project while providing their students with real-world experience. After visiting the parcel and meeting with the interested parties here in Montrose, the students went to work through the 2021-22 school year.

This summer, they presented BCAS with a comprehensive 18-page plan that will provide guidance for future decisions. Their proposal includes trails and boardwalk near the wetlands, with two bird blinds. The boardwalk is accessed by an ADA-compliant gravel trail system that loops through the property. Along the trail are three footbridges, five benches, two viewing stations, and 15 interpretative signs. See [Conceptual plan](#) for a map of details. They suggested a gravel parking lot, a covered outdoor classroom space, picnic tables, and a bathroom. The students recommended restoring native vegetation after the wildfire that burned almost the entire property early in 2020. The project would be completed in three phases.

On November 10<sup>th</sup>, a committee of interested BCAS members met to discuss the plan. We then met with new Montrose Parks & Special Projects Superintendent, Daniel Payne, on November 17<sup>th</sup>. Our consensus was that we will advocate for a little less development and infrastructure than was proposed by the UTAP group. Our goal is to keep this property a wildlife and habitat conservation area, rather than primarily a family park or educational space. Stay tuned for future updates!



## 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](mailto: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 2023. 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. If you are a member of National Audubon, you are already a member of BCAS!

(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 at: [www.BlackCanyonAudubon.com](http://www.BlackCanyonAudubon.com)  
or mail your renewal to: Black Canyon Audubon Society  
PO Box 387, Delta, CO 81416.