



Canyon Wrenderings

The Journal of the Black Canyon Audubon Society

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

Summer 2014

Volume XXVI Number 4

Audubon Colorado Council

By Chris Lazo

Audubon Colorado Council (ACC) is up and running. This is the third generation coalition of Colorado Audubon chapters striving to preserve Colorado birds, other wildlife, and the natural environments on which they depend. We are lucky that the ACC leadership team includes veterans from the two previous state chapter coalitions as well as newer voices bringing new energy. Like the first iteration of coordinated Colorado Audubon chapters, ACC is totally self-sustaining and independent of the national/regional Audubon organization while working closely with them to preserve those habitats and creatures that we value. This effort is carried out through four separate committees: the Policy committee, the Conservation committee, the Water Committee and the new Chapters committee. Generally these committees work to represent the voice of conservation on state and regional issues.

Representatives from the individual chapters are able to attend quarterly meetings via the internet; however, our next meeting will be at Pagosa Springs on May 17th. The day will include some early morning birding, a visit to Audubon's newly acquired education center/ranch and then the business meeting. All meetings are open to any interested Audubon member so BCAS members have an opportunity to check out the state organization here on the western slope. Please contact Chris at 2006clazo@myway.com or call (970) 963 8049 if you would like more information about upcoming meetings

Volunteers Needed

The Black Canyon Audubon Society is looking to fill positions as the Vice-President on the Board, and to organize and help plan trips and programs. The Programs Committee Chair may organize and lead, or not lead, but find volunteers to lead trips in the area to interesting birding areas. The programs that have been offered in Delta have been highly successful and the BCAS wishes to continue with more programs.

For more information, come to the next BCAS Board meeting on May 8 at 6PM at the Alpine Archaeological Consultants office 900 South Townsend in Montrose, or, e-mail Jon Horn at jon_horn@alpinearchaeology.com. Meetings are held semimonthly in Montrose or in Delta; all are welcome to attend – and volunteer!

Mark Your Calendar

May

- *Saturday May 10*

Annual Spring Bird Count

Join the Grand Valley Audubon Society Annual Spring Bird Count, May 10. For more information on this event, use the link to the Grand Valley Audubon Chapter found on the BCAS website.

June

- *Thursday June 12th*

Annual Dinner

Make reservations by June 3 to join us for a great dinner, silent auction, and hear about the birds of Colombia. To sign up, please complete the reservation form on page 3. Contact Jon Horn at 249-6761 x 14 or Elaine Probasco at 252-0918 with questions.

September

- *Friday September 12- 15*

Yampa Valley Crane Festival

Third annual crane festival, Steamboat Springs. For more information, see article page 4.

FOR LATE BREAKING NEWS
DON'T FORGET TO CHECK US
OUT ON THE BCAS WEBPAGE:

www.blackcanyonaudubon.org/

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Comings and Goings

Spring migration is well underway and we should begin to see many of our summer resident birds arriving soon and hopefully enjoy some more unusual birds passing through as they head northward. I particularly look forward to the arrival of kingbirds and orioles to my yard for the color, sounds, and antics that they provide. What a wonderful time of the year to get out and enjoy the beautiful place that we live!

Our annual dinner is the evening of June 12 and we hope that you will attend. For the past few years we have met in the upstairs of Remington's Restaurant at the Bridges Golf Course where beautiful views of the San Juans are to be had. This year, Pete Loncar will be giving a slide presentation about a recent birding trip he took to Colombia. Pete has traveled widely in the pursuit of birds. His talks are not only illustrated with beautiful bird pictures, but include the flavor of the people, cultures, and scenery of the places he visits. For a fun and relaxing evening, please join us.

Jon Horn

BCAS President



Crimson-rumped Toucanet; photo by Carl Downing. Come to the BCAS annual dinner to hear more about the birds of Colombia.

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Black Canyon Audubon Society Annual Dinner

Thursday, June 12, 6:00 p.m.

Once again, we will be gathering at Remington's Restaurant at The Bridges Golf Course in Montrose. This year's annual dinner will include a delicious meal and a talk by Pete Loncar about a bird watching expedition he recently took to Colombia. Pete's talk will include photos of Colombia's incredible scenery, not to mention its spectacular birds. Please join us for a fun and relaxing evening!

Banquet Reservations

Please indicate choice and number of entrees, each priced at \$30 (includes tax and gratuity):

_____ *Flame-grilled NY Strip with smoked paprika chipotle butter and crisp onion straws.*

_____ *Dry-rubbed roast chicken halves served with southwestern fruit and sweet pepper chutney.*

_____ *Fresh vegetable crepes with feta cheese and roasted red pepper and tomato coulis.*

Includes: Coffee, iced tea, and water Chef's Dessert Nibble Creations

Cash bar available!

_____ Total number of reservations, at \$30 each.

Your name _____

Phone# _____ Email address _____

Please mail your check to arrive by June 3 to: **BCAS, P.O. Box 387, Delta, CO 81416**

Directions to Remington's at the Bridges (2500 Bridges Road):

Take East Oak Grove Road east from South Townsend Avenue (US 550) (This is the intersection with a light with Walgreens on the corner.) East Oak Grove becomes a wide, divided road after a bit. Turn right on Bridges Circle to the Bridges clubhouse where we will be upstairs.

Please be prepared to bid on delightful silent auction items!

If you have any questions, please contact:

Elaine Probasco at 252-0918 or Jon Horn at 249-6761 x 14

Fruitgrower's Reservoir Cleanup Day a Success

On Saturday March 15, BCAS did cleanup work at Fruitgrowers Reservoir. Five volunteers – Martha Grewal, Elaine Probasco, Susan Chandler-Reed, Alan Reed, and Jon Horn – arrived with hand tools and garbage bags at the handicap-accessible trail along the south side of the reservoir near the dam. Tamarisk, greasewood, rabbitbrush, saltbush, grasses, and other small weedy growth that was encroaching on the concrete trail were lopped off and trimmed to make use easier and to enhance the trail's appearance. Soil that had accumulated along the route was also scooped away. Surprisingly little trash was found, but was pounced on and removed when it was seen. The land on the south side of the reservoir is administered by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR). The cleanup work on the south side of the Reservoir was completed by BCAS volunteers as a volunteer project for the BOR. It was windy and stormy enough to prevent a liftoff of sandhill cranes, but we were serenaded by their calls the whole time.



Above: Martha Grewal, Elaine Probasco, and Susan Chandler-Reed (right to left) (with Alan Reed in the background) work on trimming the vegetation along the handicap-accessible trail on the south side of Fruitgrowers Reservoir.

Right: Alan Reed, Susan Chandler-Reed and Elaine Probasco (front to back) hard at work on the edge of the reservoir.

It only took about two hours to complete the cleanup on the south side of the reservoir, after which we moved over to the north end where North Road crosses on a causeway. Eckert Crane Days activities were planned for the causeway and it was important to remove accumulated trash and debris along both sides of the road. BCAS volunteers have picked up along the causeway in preparation for Crane Days for the past several years, so it was rather astounding to see the quantity of cans, glass and plastic bottles, fast-food containers, and a wide variety of other items that were rounded up. Closer views of cranes and sightings of a variety of other birds made the work more enjoyable. After another couple of hours, we departed the area and had a very nice lunch in Eckert.



Not had enough of cranes? Plan to attend the Yampa Valley Crane Festival held in Steamboat Springs, Hayden, and Craig, September 12-15. This year will be the third annual festival. Cranes from the Rocky Mountains join the local flock to rest and feed before continuing south for the winter. The festival will include daily crane viewings, expert speakers, films, art exhibits, workshops, family activities – and more. Lodging is limited; Wyndham Vacation Rentals is the official lodging sponsor and offers reduced rates during the festival. Watch for more information: Google: Yampa Valley Crane Festival

2014 Crane Days

The BCAS celebrated the annual spring Sandhill Crane migration by hosting the Eckert Crane Days event on March 21-23, 2014 at Fruitgrowers Reservoir. The morning of the first day (Friday) over 300 visitors witnessed the mass ascension of about 3,000 cranes. The crowd's large size was, in part, due to the excellent publicity arranged by Kelli Hepler of the Delta County Tourism Board and Geoff Tischbein. The event was a featured tour of the Montrose Recreation District, which sent two vans with 23 people to watch the cranes, have lunch, and attend the afternoon program. The afternoon program was presented by Evelyn Horn and featured a video on Whooping Cranes ("Operation Migration"). Over 100 people packed the Eckert Presbyterian Church basement to see the program and to enjoy pie made by the church members

Saturday was cold and windy and threatened rain. Only about 500 cranes had arrived the evening before. About 75 people turned out to view the cranes through spotting scopes and binoculars in the fields below Crane Point. The cranes were as put off by the weather as the birdwatchers, so decided to stay put for the day.

Nice weather returned Sunday morning. About 100 people saw the 500 cranes take off on their migration to nesting grounds in southeastern Idaho.

Event organizers Susan Chandler-Reed and Alan Reed are grateful for the assistance of others. We extend special thanks to Chris Lazo, Evelyn Horn, Kelli Hepler, and Geoff Tischbein. Martha Grewel, Elaine Probasco, Carole Scott, and Bob Morris of the Colorado Parks and Wildlife also helped with the crane viewing. Delta County enhanced safety by providing portable traffic warning signs.

About 3,600 cranes and 450 people participated over the March 23-25 BCAS Crane Days event.



Crane Days by the Numbers

Hart's Basin 2014

Total landed at basin: 15,067

Total counted Escalante Wildlife

Area: 5,525

Total reported in flight: 728

Hart's Basin 2013

Total reported: 13,294

Gunnison Sage-Grouse Working Group Update

By Bill Day

For the last three springs, Colorado Parks and Wildlife has transplanted 72 grouse from the Gunnison Basin population of the Gunnison sage-grouse (GUSG) to the Crawford area. Twenty five of the transplants are known to be alive and are being tracked by VHS transmitters. Twenty-three are known to have died. Twenty-one have slipped their collars or the transmitter batteries have died. Five of the transplanted birds returned to Gunnison.

Working groups often discuss the effects of predation on the GUSG. Grouse may occasionally be killed while strutting on the lek, although it has been pointed out that this is not generally considered to be a major contributor to the grouse's decline. Nest predation might be a more important cause of bird mortality. (Continued on page 7)

Ouray's Special Bird: the Black Swift

By Sue Hirshman



I always knew that Ouray was a special place, and when I discovered the Black Swift it became even more special. This specie was one of the last North American birds to be described by scientists in 1857. Nearly a half-century passed before the first nest was found in 1901. Could they be called the most elusive bird on earth? One of the reasons it took so long to learn about this bird is where they hide their nests and young. To reach them, one has to hike, bush-whack, and then rappel down sheer canyon cliffs. No easy job! The one exception, Box Canyon, is known as Colorado's largest nesting colony and the most accessible viewing opportunity, which has gained world attention as an Important Birding Area.

The Black Swift adult probably picks such an area for several reasons. One would be due to security from predators. Others theorize that these nest sites are chosen because of constant temperatures that ameliorate outside changes and high humidity to aid in attaching the nest to a cliff or shelf of a rock. Their nests start out with mud and water which hardens, and then grasses and moss are added. Moss may have some nutritional value, and hold water for their nestlings.

The adult will lay only one egg. If that egg is infertile or damaged, a second egg may be laid, but several factors such as the 24 to 25 days required for incubation and the 48 to 52 days needed to reach full maturity are involved. Food source is another nesting factor. Adults seek out widely scattered "blooms" of certain aerial insects; traveling many miles to obtain food for their young. A bolus of food is carried in the adult's throat and then regurgitated to the chick.

As the chick's wings start to grow in length they will hang onto their nest and appear to flap as fast as a hummingbird. They'll do this quite often in intervals, looking around to decide which direction they will fly out of the canyon to start their migration to Western Brazil where they spend their winters.

In late May, large numbers of Black Swifts have been reported flying over Confluence Park in Delta; possibly a final staging area before they disperse to various nesting locations. By mid-June the adults in Box Canyon can be seen repairing old nests or building new ones and beginning to lay and incubate a single egg. In 2013, only five chicks reached maturity and fledged; the lowest number in seventeen years of observation. Throughout the summer season birders from around the world come to Box Canyon in search of this rare and elusive species, and for many, it's a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Black Swift's are 7.25 inches long and have a notched tail that is sometimes fanned. A touch of white may be seen on the forehead.



Black Swift with chick under her, photo taken July 24, 2013.

Conservation Days at Paonia River Park

By Sheryl Radovich

Trails along the North Fork River in Paonia River Park were busy with activity on April 24th and 25th as fourth graders from five surrounding communities gathered for the Second Annual Conservation Days Field Trip. Stations manned by educators, resource managers and volunteers provided two full days of hands-on activities for the 230 students who attended.

Each of seven stations focused on stewardship of the natural resources that enrich our lives in Western Colorado. At one stop, children generated solar energy with pedal-power and mini-solar collectors. At another, they used lessons in composition to sketch and photograph plants and animals in a riparian area. U.S. Forest Service staff guided students as they examined macro invertebrates, and conservationists used interactive models to demonstrate the dynamics of watersheds and water quality.



At the final station, Black Canyon Audubon members Cheryl and Bill Day, Marti Isler, Amber Carver, and Sheryl Radovich guided children through a lesson on migration and bird identification. Teams raced to match birds and photos in their field



guides using field markings and measurement: there was a tie for the Grand Championship with ten birds identified in less than 15 minutes. But the most rewarding experience of all was watching a pair of Golden Eagles soar overhead in their courtship flight and swallows and White-throated Swifts swoop and swerve through clear blue skies.

Thanks to sponsors like Western Slope Conservation Center, Captain Planet Foundation, and The Cocker Kids Foundation, and the work of Coordinator Joanna Calabrese of AmeriCORPS, this program now reaches a wide range of students with an important message to get outdoors, interact with the natural world, and become a caretaker of this rich environment.

Gunnison Sage Grouse Working Group Update (Continued from page 5)

The working group has also been studying the movements of native Crawford grouse in more detail. Doug Ouren of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) has caught 12 grouse and outfitted them with GPS backpacks. Every five days they send him an e-mail giving him their location at midnight, plus every hour during the day. This information shows what kind of habitat the grouse use throughout the year. It has been found that the grouse spend more time in shrubbier Gambel oak and serviceberry habitat than was previously thought. USGS data has also shown that grouse tend to avoid roads and, by combining this information with their traffic studies, Doug has shown that they move away even more when there is traffic on those roads. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service expects to make a decision on listing the Gunnison sage-grouse in May.

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<http://www.blackcanyonaudubon.org>



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To help reduce our use of paper and postage and to receive photos in color, send an e-mail to:
blackcanyonaudubon@gmail.com or
megrich@montrose.net

Black Canyon Audubon Society (NAS chapter C9ZD140Z)
Membership Renewal and Application Form

Members may participate in all chapter activities, receive the *Canyon Wreanderings* newsletter and vote on chapter issues. Annual local membership dues are \$10 if newsletter is received electronically, \$15 if newsletter is mailed. Dues remain locally.

(Check one) Renewal (see mailing label for expiration date)____
New Member____

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone (optional): _____

Enc: _____ \$10 for email newsletter.
Email address: _____
_____ \$15 for U.S. mail/print subscribers.

Mail your renewal to:
Black Canyon Audubon Society, PO Box 387, Delta, CO 81416.

If you would like to join or donate to National Audubon Society and receive Audubon magazine, please send a check for \$20 to National Audubon Society, P.O. Box 422250, Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250. Please use this form and list Black Canyon Audubon Society/C2ZD140Z on your check so that BCAS can receive membership recruitment funds.