



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

Spring 2017

Volume XXX Number 1

Upcoming BCAS Events



Resident Sandhill Cranes along G50 Road outside of Delta, photo taken by Andrea Robinsong.

March

March 17 through 19: come join us on the Causeway (North Road) at Fruitgrowers Reservoir outside of Eckert, CO, to view sandhill cranes and other migrants present on the reservoir. BCAS members will be available with spotting scopes and information from 9 a.m. until 11 a.m. each day. For more information, see pages 3 and 4 of this newsletter.

March 31: BCAS member Marcella and her sister Aleshia Fremgen will provide a presentation on *South Africa: Birds, Mammals, and their Behavior* based on their study abroad. Join us at the former Montrose City Council Chambers off Centennial Plaza at 7 p.m. In addition to a brief overview of their sponsoring program, they will describe some of their experiences, which included tracking animals, wildlife capture, and some wildlife rehabilitation centers.

April

April 20: James Cooper will discuss the results of his research on the Gunnison Sage Grouse and his advisor, Thomas Grant III, will discuss the impacts of riparian restoration on terrestrial invertebrate diversity and richness. To be held in the Environmental Building, Kelley Hall on Western State campus in Gunnison. Contact Sandy for more information sj07pioneer@bresnan.net 970 240-4913.

May

May 7 and 8: Black Canyon Audubon will sponsor a field trip to Paradox Valley and other West End venues for a spring birding adventure. Nucla residents and Audubon members Coen Dexter and Brenda Wright will assist the group in checking out prime birding areas. The opportunity to see over 70 species is very high. The group will meet at the Dan Noble Wildlife Area next to Miramonte Reservoir at 9:30 a.m. on May 7th. For those who want to get there a day early, the wildlife area has camping and facilities at the wildlife area. Directions to the meeting site will be sent to those who sign up.

The Paradox Valley and West End areas have a great mix of habitats ranging from desert scrub to classic alpine to riparian, allowing for a rich mix of birds during the spring migration. Expect to see a variety of water fowl, sage sparrow, vireos, yellow-breasted chat, grace's warbler, black phoebe and a host of migrants. Day 1 will wrap up near Naturita, so participants can access either hotel accommodations or camp for the night. The Uravan Ball Park campground is open for our use, and the Rimrock Hotel (970-865-2500) in Naturita has renovated rooms at reasonable prices. A potluck dinner will be organized for participants. Day 2 will focus on the San Miguel River corridor and nearby mesas.

The field trip is limited to 12 participants. To sign up, contact Bill at 970-615-7166, or email at trlgpa48@gmail.com

Continued on page 3 of this newsletter.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Comings and Goings

This is the hard time of the year – when you want it to be spring but it never seems to arrive fast enough. From my house, I always like looking up at all of the snow in the San Juans and hope it hangs on long into the summer. I like birding during the winter because you never know what might arrive unexpectedly, but spring is when you know new arrivals are on the way, and their bright colors are complimentary to the newness of lush green growth and brightly colored flowers. You can also follow spring upwards into the mountains, culminating in the alpine tundra above timberline, where spring and summer are brief. We live in a wonderful place, and I hope you can experience all that it has to offer. The BCAS calendar is filling up with opportunities that I hope you will take advantage of, too. Lots of speakers to come to listen to and many field trips planned.

Eckert Crane Days kicks off the spring season for us. It is our best guess as to when to have it, as the cranes and weather are unpredictable. Regardless of conditions outside our control, it is a fun time to visit Fruitgrowers Reservoir, not only because of the possibility of seeing thousands of cranes rising from the ground in large, primordially noisy groups on their way north, but also because of the simple joy of being outside in a beautiful setting. I hope you can come out and enjoy it with us. In addition, we have a large number of other excursions planned throughout the spring that will take you to many diverse places in our area.

I hope you have had a chance to visit our web page lately. After thinking about it for quite some time, we have finally begun putting information about great places to see birds in our area under the “Places to Birdwatch” tab. We now have 10 places described, complete with maps so you can easily get there. If you have a place that you would like to add, look at the format that we are using and send it to us. Don’t worry about making a nice map. As long as we can figure out where it is from your directions, we can make a map to include with the text. Whenever I go to a new place to bird, I always try to find information ahead of time, so I hope this will be useful to visitors to our area. It may also surprise you about places nearby that you never knew about before.

Jon Horn,
BCAS President

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Crane Days March 17 – 19, 2017

By Chris Lazo

It has been called one of the great wildlife migrations of planet Earth. Every spring hundreds of thousands of Sandhill Cranes leave their winter grounds to fly north to middle and northern latitudes on North America in search of nesting territories. Roughly twenty thousand of those travel north through western Colorado during March. The majority of those twenty thousand birds pass through the area covered by the Black Canyon Audubon Society (BCAS).

For the sixth year in a row, the Black Canyon Audubon Society will be hosting the viewing of Sandhill Cranes during Eckert Crane Days. This March 17, 18, and 19th, from nine in the morning to eleven, BCAS will offer spotting scopes for fascinating close-up views of the cranes as well as an information table with free hand-outs about Sandhill Cranes. In the past we have had as many as three thousand birds in one day and as few as a single handful. BCAS is still looking for volunteers to help with the information table and with the spotting scopes for Saturday and Sunday. There are no special skills or advanced birding knowledge needed, just a willingness to engage the public with enthusiasm about wild creatures. If you would like to participate in this rewarding event, please send an email to Chris at 2006clazo@gmail.com.



Photo of sandhill crane in the morning taken by Carole Scott.

Even if you can't help BCAS at the viewing tables, consider joining us for a thrilling wildlife experience as these magnificent birds lift off in near-unison to soar over our heads on their way up and over the Grand Mesa. Since Saturday is usually the busiest day, we suggest either Friday or Sunday. The viewing location is on North Road on or near the causeway across Fruitgrower's Reservoir. Just drive into Eckert and turn east at North Road. Look for the directional sign near the intersection of Highway 65 and North Road. As with any wildlife activity, there is no certainty of how many birds will be at the reservoir and any given day.

BCAS Trips Continued from Page 1

May

May 15: BCAS will partner with the Colorado Canyons Association (CCA) again this year for a birding field trip to the Gunnison Gorge NCA east of Delta. This will be a birding/hiking trip in search of spring migrants in a variety of habitats. Highlights of last year's trip included red-tail hawks feeding young, an eastern and black phoebe and river otters. Sign up information TBA through CCA after April 1, 2017 – contact bryanna@canyonsassociation.org or call 970-244-3000 to RSVP and/or for directions.

June

June 3: Meet us near the Kevin Parks wetlands at 7:30 a.m. for a tour of this privately-owned riparian area. In addition to birds of prey, expect to see riparian woodland species, wetland obligates, and waterfowl. The wetlands are located near Hotchkiss. In 2015, 24 species were identified as present. The area also contains Yellow-billed Cuckoo habitat. For more information, directions, and to sign up, contact trip leader Adam Petry 970 462-8702 or email petry@westernbiology.com The trip is limited to 12 participants, including the trip leader.

June 22: Nic Korte from Grand Valley Audubon will be the featured speaker at the BCAS Annual Dinner, June 22. He will be speaking on tropical bird migrations and illustrating his talk with photos from his many trips to tropical areas. Watch for more information to come.

The Hummingbird Effect...

A change in one element can trigger unexpected positive effects in unrelated areas. For example, Red Knots travel 9,300 miles to their northern summer breeding grounds. They are dependent upon historically available high-energy food sources along their migratory route. One important stop over is Delaware Bay where they may double their weight foraging on horseshoe crab eggs before continuing north. To save the imperiled Red Knot, measures were needed to sustain the needed horseshoe crab populations from overfishing. An unexpected result of saving the horseshoe crab populations is that it was discovered that the medical community also benefited – a compound taken from live horseshoe crabs is used to detect bacterial contamination in vaccines. (Red Knot photo credit to Audubon.org)



Know More about Cranes

People often want to know how many cranes will be present. Should I come out to see just a dozen cranes? Will I see hundreds? Let the cranes decide how soon or late they will be migrating north, we can only give past data. In 2016, the final tally for Greater Sandhill Cranes coming through Hart's Basin was 12,543. 2016 was considered a low year for numbers. In fact, populations of between 13,000 and 14,000 are considered more typical. According to local crane expert, Evey Horn, this area is supposed to have between 15,000 and 20,000 Greater Sandhill cranes come through in contrast to the 500,000 to 600,000 Lesser Sandhill cranes that migrate through the Midwest (*per email from Evey Horn to Sandy Beranich dated May 23, 2016*).

The cranes leave in the morning when the air warms, which might be around 10 a.m., and they typically arrive in late afternoon, around 4:30 p.m. Nearby resident, Evey Horn, maintains a **crane hotline** that will inform you of the numbers of cranes that flew in to rest and feed for the night: **970-835-8391**.

In contrast to migrating crane populations, there have been populations of cranes known to overwinter in the Grand Junction, Delta, and Montrose areas. The Delta population has grown to an estimated 3,000 individuals. They can be observed in the fields near the Escalante State Wildlife Area (ESWA) west of G50 Road and north of Delta. During the day, they feed in area agricultural fields or irrigated farm land. In late afternoon they return to the fields around the ESWA and spend the night standing in the Gunnison River. Watching the late afternoon fly in is often a spectacular sight. Note that much of the surrounding property is private and that there is no shoulder for parking along G50 Road. You can park at the ESWA. These cranes will soon join the other migrating cranes to fly north for the summer.

BCAS Bird Skin Collection

Do you ever wonder if the dead bird you found could be of use in a bird skin collection? BCAS maintains bird skin and mounted bird collections that are used for a wide variety of educational presentations. There are currently close to 70 bird specimens in these collections; the majority of them are bird skins.

Museum specimens are a great way for children to see birds up close. BCAS members show the skins to groups at the Ridgway banding station, in classroom presentations, and occasionally at other events, so specimens are used quite a few times throughout each year. They are a great way to teach about bird anatomy, what distinguishing field characteristics are (e.g., size, color, beak shape), and even how to identify some species of birds. They also provide a great discussion on how individuals can help conserve birds, by letting the kids know how the birds died and how they can prevent similar incidents in the future. Bird skins are an invaluable tool for education about birds and bird conservation! BCAS welcomes your contributions; the following birds are already present in our collection and we do not need any more

Crane Etiquette

1. Sandhill Cranes tend to arrive at Fruitgrower's Reservoir in the afternoons and early evenings. They stop to feed and rest on their journey north in the spring and on their journey south in the fall. They are used to cattle and other wildlife but are shy of people and move away when people approach. The cranes need the resting and feeding opportunities that Fruitgrower's Reservoir and the surrounding lands provide.

2. The Bureau of Reclamation controls the Reservoir and its shoreline. The surrounding land is privately owned and entry is prohibited without landowner permission. These landowners enjoy the cranes and they provide and protect the land that the cranes rely on.

Generally speaking, if you cross a fence or go through a gate to look at the cranes, you have gone too far! If possible, please park in the designated parking lot. Please do not park where you will be blocking access to ranchers' gates or driveways. Please observe all signs that have been placed to help you identify the boundaries.

3. Crane-watching etiquette also includes attention to your surroundings. North Road, along which we park to view the cranes, is a county road used by local residents to commute from place to place. Park in the parking area or along the shoulder, not on the road. Don't open your car door or step out onto the road without looking. Please be attentive to the traffic while you watch the cranes!



Lesser Scaup with female Ring-necked Duck, photo credit to Vic Zerbi

specimens: Evening Grosbeak, American Kestrel (male), American Robin (immature), Cedar Waxwing, Cooper's Hawk, Downy Woodpecker (female), Marsh Hawk (AKA Northern Harrier), Mourning Dove, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Red-naped Sapsucker, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Junco – both Black-headed and Gray. Should you find a dead bird that is in excellent condition, place it in the freezer in a freezer bag with the date, location, and situation under which it was found, along with your name and contact information, then contact Elaine Probasco at 970 252-0918, eprobasco6@earthlink.net for more information.

Audubon Council News

By Robin Nicholoff

BCAS Board member Robin Nicholoff represented BCAS in lieu of regular representative, Jane McGarry, at the last quarterly ACC meeting.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) Commission have created a very controversial \$4.5 million proposal to reduce cougar and black bear predation of mule deer by increased hunting and trapping followed by euthanasia. The “experiment” generated so much opposition from the public, wildlife biologists, and national environmental groups, that Wild Earth Guardians has filed a lawsuit seeking an injunction to prevent the project from going forward.

The State Land Board approved staff recommendation that all oil and gas leases on state trust lands be automatically approved upon nomination. They will seek input from CPW on drilling locations that might help protect listed species.

We asked that chapters receive regular updates from Audubon Colorado Council’s lobbyist at the state legislature and subsequently received a list of 31 bills that Audubon is opposing, supporting, or monitoring. Some bills are alarming, such as HB1141, the “Cliven Bundy Bill of Rights” that essentially prevents federal agencies (e.g. the BLM and Forest Service) from doing their jobs on range allotments. Violation would be a felony with fines to \$500,000 and 5 years in prison!

Some other informative notes:

- Greater Sage Grouse may be hunted despite deserving listing as threatened under ESA.
- Winter concentration areas for Bald Eagles and ungulates should be protected from oil and gas and residential development, but they are not.
- Funding for non-game species management in Colorado is woefully inadequate. The “Recovering America’s Wildlife Act” would return some of federal revenues from oil and gas to the states for wildlife purposes.
- The CPW is too dependent on selling hunting licenses resulting in inadequate management of non-game species. Consider promoting a bill that would tax birdseed, binoculars, cameras, etc. as a way for people who appreciate wildlife to help fund its management.

Why Do Birds Wander?

“Particular species of birds, like different nations of men, have their congenial climes and favorite countries; but wanderers are common to both; some in search of better fare, some of adventures, others led by curiosity, and many driven by storms or accident.”

_____ *Alexander Wilson, American Ornithology, 1826*

Native Plants for Birds

By Sandy Beranich

Resources

Questions often arise at this time of the year related to what to plant to attract birds. Incorporating native plants in your landscape has many benefits. This year I came across an entire magazine devoted to and called *Gardening for Birds and Butterflies and Backyard Wildlife*. I would call this a beginner’s primer as well as offering information to the more seasoned gardener.

A great new resource for identifying native plants to attract birds is found on the Audubon website. Go to www.audubon.org/native-plants/ After entering your zip code, the data base will provide a listing of the plants suitable for your area, the birds that are associated with the plant, and pictures of the plant and the bird (s). There are also several filters that can be used to restrict your choices. As a test, I entered my own zip code and was provided 45 plant choices.

Why are Birds Important?

A few statistics: 1,200 U.S. crops depend on pollinators to grow. Native plants are essential for pollinators – including birds, bees, butterflies, and bats. Ninety-six percent of land birds feed insects to their chicks. 80 million pounds of pesticides are applied by homeowners to the 40 million acres of lawns in the U.S. each year. Native plants thrive without pesticides.

Neonicotinoids

(The information below is based on research taken from Bird Conservation, Winter 2016-17)

Emerging research is indicating that neonicotinoids, the most widely used insecticide, are found in a large variety of products, which include insect sprays, seed treatments, soil drenches, tree injections, and veterinary ointments to control fleas in dogs and cats. Studies conducted in 2013 indicated that neonics are toxic to birds and invertebrates and may persist in soils for months to years. **A single seed coated with neonic is enough to kill a songbird.** Please read the label when purchasing live plants.

A separate study completed in 2015 found neonics present in more than 90 percent of the food samples tested taken from Congressional dining halls. These chemicals persist in the environment, will infiltrate groundwater, and can have cumulative and largely irreversible effects on parts of the ecological food chain.

What is a Pesticide?

A pesticide is a chemical used to kill harmful animals or plants. It includes fungicides, herbicides, insecticides, and rodenticides. Neonicotinoids affect the central nervous system of insects resulting in paralysis and death.

Fact

One ladybug will eat as many as 50 aphids a day.

Conservation

News from the Gunnison Sage-grouse Working Groups

By Bill Day

Our most iconic local bird, the Gunnison Sage-grouse, has finally been recognized as legally Threatened by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. However, this action has not lessened the efforts that our local working groups are putting into helping preserve the species, especially in the more imperiled satellite population near Crawford and in the San Miguel Basin near Norwood. The Crawford Working Group (CWG) and San Miguel Basin Working Group (SMBWG) are both made up of agency experts and local citizens, and were initially both partially funded by BCAS in the past. Following are some updates on the working groups' progress since the listing decision:

- Doug Homan, the CWG Coordinator, and Leigh Robertson, the SMBWG Coordinator, along with several other BCAS and working group members, attended the 4th GUSG Summit last March in Gunnison. A list of presentations can be found at <http://www.western.edu/academics/undergraduate/env/ironment-sustainability/conferences/spring-symposium-4th-gunnison-sage> . Doug, Leigh, and BCAS and CWG members Chris Lazo and Bill Day informed the attendees from other areas of the critical problem of shed antler hunters disturbing lekking and nesting birds in the Crawford area.
- Members of both working groups worked on building Zeedyk rock structures in local grouse brood-raising habitat to create more wet areas which are necessary for the insect-eating chicks. Zeedyk structures are low tech rock structures that catch and spread out water in swales or small drainages. More info on the structures can be found at <http://www.sagegrouseinitiative.com/enhancing-habitat-resilience-mimicking-beavers-cheap-cheerful-restoration/> and <http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/colorado/colorado-simple-structures-help-wildlife.xml> . The two groups have also worked on marking existing fences in grouse habitat to minimize grouse collisions with fences, and have removed unnecessary fences.
- Both working groups have worked on preserving habitat through conservation easements. The CWG has rated preserving one particular area as our most important goal. Both groups have also discussed and commented on the BLM GUSG Range-wide Draft Resource Management Plan Amendment. Leigh forwarded our members' comments to other conservation groups who were commenting, but weren't as familiar with some local problems.

(Continued top of next column)

- The coordinators recently distributed scientific literature to WG members regarding the removal of pinyons and junipers from grouse habitat. Although this has been criticized in some areas, we believe it has been very helpful in our local areas. We have also studied literature about predation on sage-grouse in other areas. This implicated ravens more than other predators.
- In November The Public Lands Foundation (PLF) presented the CWG with a Landscape Stewardship Award for our work with the grouse near Crawford. A description of CWG and of PLF can be found at <http://publicland.org/awards/crawford-area-gunnison-sage-grouse-working-group/> .



Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches in Telluride, photo taken by Eric Hynes

Education News

By Marcella Fremgen

Black Canyon Audubon Society has a busy upcoming spring with several educational festivals on the calendar. BCAS education volunteers will be attending Paonia Conservation Days (April 20 and 21) and the Montrose Natural Resources Festival (NRF) (May 9), where hundreds of local elementary students move through stations to learn about their natural resources and how to use them sustainably. In past years, the Montrose NRF has had more than 300 students in attendance for a full day of educational activities. Additionally, we will have a booth at the Family Nature Night sponsored by Colorado Parks and Wildlife in Ridgway. The event also provides a wide variety of educational stations and activities for students to move through and learn from.

Other things the BCAS education team is working on include an internship for students to measure bird abundance and diversity, and an online educational program. The internship will provide students an opportunity to perform point counts to better monitor the impact of pinyon-juniper removal projects on private lands. These projects are primarily undertaken to reduce wildfire risk and improve big game habitat, but students will measure the impact on local bird populations. BCAS is also partnering with *Peachy Keen*, and education website that provides videos for kids to learn how to do science from other kids. We will provide one month of education activities for them to put up on the website.

Who Was That Bird Named For?

By Susan Chandler-Reed

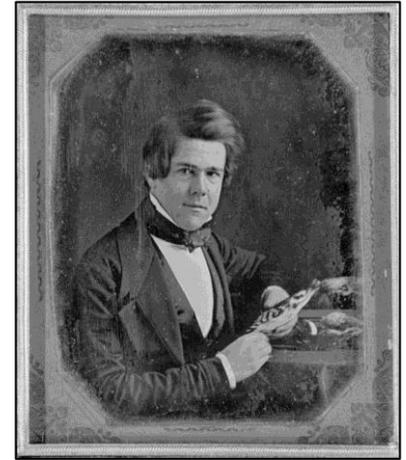


Left: Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay. Photo: FLPA/Alamy

Right: California Scrub-Jay. Photo: Lou Orr/Great Backyard Bird Count (<http://www.audubon.org/news/here-are-biggest-changes-aou-checklist-north-american-birds>, accessed February 11, 2017)

In 2016, ornithologists determined that the "Western Scrub-Jay" should be split into two species: Woodhouse's and California. The Woodhouse's Scrub Jay (*Aphelocoma woodhouseii*) lives in the open habitats and pinyon-juniper woodlands of the intermountain west, including western Colorado. Its California Scrub-Jay cousin (*Aphelocoma californica*) has a distinct blue necklace and its plumage is a deeper, richer blue with brighter gray-white underparts.

Colorado native, the Woodhouse's Toad, is named after Samuel Washington Woodhouse (1821-1904), a Philadelphia physician and naturalist who accompanied Lt. Lorenzo Sitgreaves on the U.S. Army Corps of Topographic Engineers survey of Indian territory. Dr. Woodhouse recounted his adventures in his published journals, *A Naturalist in Indian Territory: The Journals of S. W. Woodhouse, 1849–50*. He continued with Sitgreaves on his 1851 exploration of the Zuni, Little Colorado, and Colorado rivers, in search of a navigable route to California. It was on the latter expedition that Woodhouse first described Cassin's sparrow, while also surviving a rattlesnake bite and being wounded by a Mohave arrow. The Sitgreaves Expedition arrived at Camp Yuma, Arizona near starvation, but discovered that Camp Yuma was also short of supplies and were forced to eat the expedition's mules. Woodhouse later accompanied Ephraim Squier on an expedition to Honduras before returning to Philadelphia to practice medicine for the remainder of his life. An African bird, Woodhouse's Antpecker (*Parmoptila woodhousei*) is also named in his honor.



The Woodhouse's Scrub Jay, as well as another

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Wikipedia, "Sitgreaves Expedition." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sitgreaves_Expedition (accessed February 11, 2017).

Woodhouse photo courtesy of Library of Congress.



Great Blue Heron taken from the dam area, Fruitgrower's Reservoir by Sandy Beranich

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