

Canyon Wrenderings

The Journal of the Black Canyon Audubon Society

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

March 2015

Volume XXVII Number 1

Mark Your Calendar

• March 13 - 15

32nd Annual Monte Vista Crane Festival

Viewing, tours, speakers For more information, see article on page 5

• March 18

Gardening for Birds

Pete Loncar, experienced birder and gardener, presents gardening tips for those with a birding interest.

Provided by the Montrose Botanical Society; meet at 7 p.m. Centennial Room off Centennial Plaza, Montrose, No charge.

• March 20 – 22 Eckert Crane Days

Viewing, presentations and more. Sponsored by the Black Canyon Audubon Society. See schedule of events, this page and articles this issue.

April 24 − 25

Wings N Wetlands Festival

Bird Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge near Great Bend, Kansas. For more information 1-877-243-9268

May 8 − 9

Birding the West End

Birding areas include the San Miguel River and Dolores River valleys. More information page 5

For more upcoming events: www.blackcanyonaudubon.org

Eckert Crane Days

Friday, March 20, 2015

Viewing at Fruitgrowers Reservoir along North Road, 9-11 a.m. to watch liftoff. Speaker: Van Graham, "Colorado Sandhill Crane: Rocky Mountain Population." 1:30 pm to 3:00 pm, Cedaredge Community Center, 140 NW 2nd St, Cedaredge. Mr. Graham is a retired wildlife biologist with Colorado Parks and Wildlife who developed Colorado's Greater Sandhill Crane recovery plan.

Saturday, March 21, 2015

Viewing at Fruitgrowers Reservoir along North Road, 9-11 a.m. to watch liftoff. Speaker and pie social: Evelyn Horn, "Cranes, the Symbol of Survival" (video). 1:00 pm to 2:30 pm, Eckert Presbyterian Church, 13025 Highway 65, Eckert. Evelyn Horn is a local educator, naturalist, and author who is a self-professed "Craniac."

Sunday, March 22, 2015

Viewing at Fruitgrowers Reservoir along North Road, 9-11 a.m. to watch liftoff.

Directions to the venues:

Fruitgrowers Reservoir (also known as Hart's Basin) is located east of the community of Eckert, Colorado. From Delta, drive 4 miles east on Highway 92, then turn north on Highway 65 and drive 6 miles to Eckert. Turn right on North Road at Big E Market, across from the Eckert Presbyterian Church, and proceed east until you reach the reservoir.

Volunteers from the Black Canyon Audubon Society and Colorado Parks and Wildlife will be set up either at "Crane Point"—the hill overlooking the reservoir—or along the causeway across the reservoir, depending on where the best viewing opportunity is on that particular day. Please park off the road, and be careful to also watch for traffic when watching the birds. Delta County has constructed a new parking area near the causeway for our use this year, and a portable toilet will also be available at that location.

Cedaredge Community Center is at 140 NW 2nd St. in Cedaredge. From Eckert, continue north 4 miles on Highway 65. Turn left on Main St. and then right on NW 2nd St. The community center will be on your left. The 1:30 p.m. program will be held in the dining room. (Continued on page 3)

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Comings and Goings

After such a warm and dry fall and winter, snow and colder weather has finally arrived that looks to have hopes of reducing fears of too little snow in the mountains and drought in our future. Hopefully, the snow will accumulate and cooler weather and an absence of dust storms will allow its melting to dribble downslope rather than pour off in torrents this spring and summer. This time of year is when we look forward to returning migrant birds, many of which we catch a glimpse of as they pass through and others that are welcome summer residents that we thoroughly enjoy seeing where we live and where we venture. Our annual celebration of spring migration is Eckert Crane Days at Fruitgrowers Reservoir in Delta County. If our timing is right – and it is completely in the control of the birds - it will be an unparalleled spectacle of sight and sound. More information can be found in this newsletter and on our website. We hope you will join us! The new parking area at Fruitgrowers Reservoir is virtually complete, so please use it when visiting. Many thanks to Delta County and the Bureau of Reclamation in collaborating on that effort!

Since the last newsletter, we have had two excellent public presentations. We hope you were able to come out and enjoy Paul Tickner's talk on birding in Costa Rica and Brenda Miller's talk on bird rehabilitation. Brenda operates Roubideau Rim Wildlife Rescue, a non-profit near Olathe and does wonderful work with injured and sick wildlife of all sorts. For more information, visit their Facebook page at

https://www.facebook.com/RRWildlifeRescue and consider a donation.

Our need for new board members is becoming more and more critical, so we hope that you will consider stepping in. The time commitment is whatever you would like it to be, but we have upcoming needs for help in basic recordkeeping tasks that are integral to any organization. Most pressing is for someone willing to keep track of membership and someone to be the recording secretary at our board meetings. Soon, Elaine Probasco's term as Treasurer will come to an end and we will need someone to take over that role. Please call or email me or any of the current board members to let us know that you would like to keep this terrific organization on track. If you like to have fun, like to help others enjoy birds, want to do something that helps birds, would like to see BCAS remain vital, or all of the above, don't be shy, we would like you to join us.

Jon Horn

BCAS President

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Eckert Crane Days (continued from page 1)

Eckert Presbyterian Church is at 13025 Highway 65, at the northwest corner of Highway 65 and North Road. The 1:00 p.m. talk and pie social will be held in the church meeting hall, at the lower level. The entrance is at the rear of the building.

2015 Eckert Crane Days Speakers

Van K. Graham is a retired wildlife biologist who worked for the Colorado Division of Wildlife (presently Colorado Parks and Wildlife) for 32 years. His interest in Sandhill cranes began while working in Steamboat Springs where the core population of nesting and staging cranes was located. Sandhill cranes were listed as a Colorado state endangered species in 1973. By the mid-1970s, research on cranes had intensified, primarily to gather baseline data and begin development of management plans and programs. Throughout his career he assisted with annual work plans, inventories, field studies, and development of a Greater Sandhill Crane recovery plan. He worked with CDOW wildlife managers based in northwest Colorado and collaborated on plans with the U.S. Forest Service.

Van currently lives in Grand Junction, Colorado, where he works for Wildlife West LLC as a private environmental consultant, primarily in western Colorado. He maintains a deep interest in Sandhill cranes and enjoys traveling to various locations to observe, photograph, and enjoy the Rocky Mountain population of Greater Sandhill Cranes.

Van's presentation is at 1:30 p.m. on Friday, March 20 at the Cedaredge Community Center. A PowerPoint slide program primarily addressing the Rocky Mountain population of Greater Sandhill Cranes in Colorado, the program will include historical information, the decline of crane populations in the 1800s and early 1900s, crane biology, crane management studies in Colorado, recovery of crane populations in Colorado, and the annual cycle of life from reproduction through annual migration.

Evelyn Horn is an educator who has been monitoring the Sandhill cranes from her home in Hart's Basin since 1995. Horn, who considers herself more of a botanist than a birder, has published three books dealing with Sandhill cranes and natural history:

- Following the Sandhill Cranes in Colorado: Enticed into Birding
- Still Following the Feathered and Flowered

 Intriguing Discoveries with the Naturalist-in-Training.

A member of the Black Canyon Audubon Society board of directors, Evelyn is a familiar face on the lecture circuit. This year, she will be speaking at the Eckert Presbyterian Church at 1 p.m. on Saturday, March 21. Evelyn's program will include a brief video, "Cranes" the Symbol of Survival," which tells about the International Crane Foundation's work to secure these rare species in the wild around the world. Her talk will be followed by a coffee and pie social, hosted by the EPC Ladies Hospitality Group.

Volunteers Needed for Crane Days

The Black Canyon Audubon Society (BCAS) will serve as the "hosts" for Eckert Crane Days. Please join us for Friday, Saturday, and/or Sunday mornings to share your spotting scope, to talk about birds with visitors, or to take a shift at the BCAS information table, where we will have information available about sandhill cranes, about BCAS, and about the Crane Days programs.

We need you – it's easy, fun, and a great opportunity to share your enthusiasm for birding.

Please contact Jon Horn to let him know how and when you can help: 249-5404 or (jon_horn @alpinearchaeology.com)

Counting Cranes – Hotline Available

In past years, Jim Durr has posted daily tallies of cranes arriving each evening at Fruitgrowers Reservoir on his Eckert Crane Days website

(http://eckertcranedays.com/). As of February 15, it still shows crane counts for 2014 and earlier years.

The Hart's Basin Crane Hotline (970-835-8391) operated by Evelyn Horn is another source of daily crane counts.

Cooper's Hawk Transport Needed

A ride is needed for a Cooper's Hawk from the Durango Vet Clinic to Brenda Miller at the Roubideau Rim Wildlife Rescue in Olathe as soon as possible. If you can help, please contact Brenda at rrwildliferehab @gmail.com or (970) 209-5946.

Crane Etiquette

(Adapted from the Eckert Crane Day website)

- 1. Sandhill Cranes tend to arrive at Fruitgrowers 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 Fruitgrowers 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 designating 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 our 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!

Boating on Fruitgrowers Reservoir????

Some questions have been raised regarding boating on Fruitgrowers Reservoir. Kent Van Roosendaal, Resource Management Specialist with the Bureau of Reclamation, provided this response in an e-mail to BCAS.

In answer to your question, the reservoir is closed to boating and fishing, this has been in effect for many years. The reservoir is also closed to skin contact water activities such as wading, swimming, fishing, water skiing, drinking, etc., due to water quality concerns. The reservoir was closed to skin contact water activities by the Delta County Health Dept. We support this closure for public health and safety reasons. Please also note that since we do not have a recreation managing entity or partner the recreational activities at Fruitgrowers Reservoir are limited.

Boating is of special concern. Since we don't have a recreation manager at Fruitgrowers we have no one available to manage or monitor recreational boating whether motorized or non-motorized. We are also concerned with the possible spread of aquatic nuisance/invasive species (ANS/AIS such as quagga and zebra mussels) to Fruitgrowers. Boats that do not go through the State's inspection process for ANS are a major factor in the spread of ANS/AIS between bodies of

water, not just mussels but also invasive water vegetation, etc.

The reservoir area (Reclamation property) is also closed to OHV's, ORV's, ATV's, etc., all off road vehicles. The only exception that our Office has approved is the Water District's administrative use for project purposes, and Reclamation's approved use by certain contractors for controlling the spread of noxious weeds, or boundary fence repair or replacement.

No camping is allowed and no camp fires are allowed. No shooting is allowed other than for water fowl using a shotgun during the legal hunting season.

Another problem has been illegal dumping of animal carcasses, garbage, and other items. Dumping is certainly not allowed.

What is allowed are activities such as watchable wildlife & bird watching, hiking, picnicking, and waterfowl hunting with a shotgun.

We hope to get new signs installed around the reservoir area this spring, including a new replacement sign for the main parking area. The problem we've had in the past is visitors like to shoot the signs we install as well as many other things so we're a little hesitant in buying and installing new signs.

Update on Gunnison Sage Grouse

Crawford Working Group
By Bill Lazo

The winter meeting of the Gunnison Sage Grouse (GUSG) - Crawford Working Group was held at the Delta County Fair Grounds on Thursday Feb. 12th. The Black Canyon Audubon Society was represented as were many federal land management agencies, small and large land owners and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW). There were also representatives of nonprofit land conservation groups attending.

Three topics dominated the discussion. Since this was the last meeting prior to April and May lek counts, it was important to cover the basic logistics of continuing the spring lek counts. This year it was necessary to receive US Fish and Wildlife (USFWS) approval prior to counting as the GUSG are now a listed species and managed by USFWS. As the Crawford GUSG group is the largest of the outlier populations, it is vital to continue the close monitoring of the population.

The second item discussed was the ongoing effort to gain a conservation easement on a large parcel of private land that has been changing ownership during the last few years. This land was recognized as being important habitat following the "tagging" of birds in the Crawford population. Tracking data showed that these GUSG are using this land for late summer range. Two attempts to gain CPW funding for conservation easements on the land have not been successful. During the meeting, however, a new and novel strategy was suggested and may offer a solution to getting this important land protected for the benefit of the Grouse and other wildlife.

Another topic that has been discussed often during the last couple of years is the impact of predators on nestling and hatchling survival. Few, if any, conclusive studies have been done and the impact of predators on population dynamics is unknown. There has been anecdotal suggestion that certain avian predator numbers are increasing and may be hindering the effort to increase GUSG numbers. While two federal agency biologists who are members of the working group have a study planned, there is no funding available. Efforts will continue to find funds from a variety of sources so that this question may be studied. (Continued on page 6)

Field Trip to West End May 8 – 9

By Bill Harris

Black Canyon Audubon will sponsor a field trip to Paradox Valley and other West End venues for a spring birding adventure on May 8-9, 2015. 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 AM on May 8th. For those who want to get there a day early there is 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. 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 newly renovated rooms at reasonable prices. A potluck dinner will be organized for participants. Day 2 will focus on the Nucla and Delta/Nucla Road areas. The field trip is limited to 15 participants. To sign up contact Bill Harris at 970-249-8055.



Will you be seeing a Song Sparrow on this trip? Photo courtesy of Arden Anderson

Quiz: What bird enjoys a life span of close to 40 years – yet newer information suggests a potential lifespan between 50 to 70 years? Answer in next newsletter!

The final topic covered was what will be needed to continue the working group. The coordinator's position is funded through grants and no new ones have been found to cover the coordinator and previous funds are exhausted. To see more about the progress the Crawford Working Group for the Gunnison Sage Grouse has made to increase the population, go to www.Crawfordsagegrouse.webs.com

More on Crane Festivals

The Monte Vista 32nd Annual Crane Festival will take place March 13 to March 15 and will feature sunrise and sunset tours. Events include speaker John Rawinski, author of <u>Birding Hotspots of South-Central Colorado</u>, who will talk on Owls of Colorado, Jason Beason of the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory who will speak on Black Swift Research in Colorado, a movie entitled "Fly Away Home", a raptor tour, wetlands tour and more. Contact 719 852-2731 for more information.

BCAS Program February 19

By Elaine Probasco

Brenda Miller of Roubideau Rim Wildlife Rescue has dealt with injured, ill, and poisoned birds as well as orphaned nestlings or fledglings taken by a well-meaning misguided human. She presented the successes and failures, crediting the network of help she has. She presented the failures without glossing over the stress that a bird undergoes as the attempt is made to allow it to heal and go free; neither did she omit the times when euthanasia was determined to be necessary. The audience saw pictures of individual birds, and hearing the individual stories and outcomes the audience responded with the occasional heavy sigh or clap of joy.

To help prevent the spread of disease the speaker advocated not feeding the birds with bird feeders but rather planting for wildlife and letting plants go to seed. If having feeders is an important part of your life then clean the feeders on a weekly basis and move the feeders on a weekly basis to keep the ground from becoming a disease source. Think twice about putting out feeders if there are cats around or raptors used to feeding at your feeders. If a diseased bird is seen at a feeder, immediately remove and clean the feeder.

Christmas Bird Count Results

By Jon Horn

We had mostly good weather during the four Christmas bird counts within the BCAS area. Many thanks to the count coordinators for jobs well done in promoting and carrying off successful counts again this year: Amy Seglund for the Delta count, Arden Anderson for the Gunnison count, Jason Beeson for the Hotchkiss count, and Missy Siders for the Montrose count. Here are some statistics and highlights:

The Delta count was done on December 14 and had 9 participants who identified 75 species and a total of 11,494 birds. Of particular interest were 4 Ross's Geese, 3 Hooded Mergansers, large numbers of Sandhill Cranes, 2 Say's Phoebes, and a White-winged Dove found during the count week.

The Gunnison count was also done on December 14 and had 14 participants. 45 species and 3,776 birds were identified including a Yellow-breasted Chat and over 220 Gray-crowned Rosy Finches. Found during the count week were a Wood Duck and a Brown-capped Rosy Finch.

Sixteen people participated in the Hotchkiss count on January 3. They identified 61 species and 4,033 birds including 6 Hooded Mergansers, 2 Northern Goshawks, a Ferruginous Hawk (during count week), and 7 American tree sparrows.

The Montrose count had 20 participants on December 20 who identified 69 species and 11,957 birds. These included one Say's Phoebe, a huge number of crows, and 24 Red Crossbills.

<u>Living on the Wind Across the Hemisphere</u> <u>With Migratory Birds</u>, by Scott Weidensaul

"At whatever moment you read these words, day or night, there are birds aloft in the skies of the Western Hemisphere, migrating." So begins this fascinating book that details the trials and successes faced by the smallest among species. When birds take off we have no promises that they will return the next year – and in some instances, we may not even know where they are going. Storms, loss of habitat, predators – all challenges that birds overcome before we once again enjoy their beauty and cheerful sound after many months and many, many thousands of miles of travel. This book is a really interesting read, to be enjoyed slowly. Editor

Results of the Annual Raptor Field Trips

By Jon Horn

Jason Beason, Jim LeFevre, and Bill Harris conducted three individual raptor field trips this year in Delta and Montrose Counties. The raptor field trips have become an annual event in February of each year and are well attended. This year, they were conducted on three consecutive Saturdays. The first two, February 7 and 14 led by Jason and Jim, covered wide swaths of Delta County, and the final field trip, on February 21 led by Bill, was in the Montrose area of Montrose County. The Hotchkiss-Crawford area is consistently a hotspot for wintering raptors, and did not disappoint again this year. The Montrose area has diverse habitat and consistently has a wide variety of raptors present, but not in the numbers encountered in Delta County. Usually, some Rough-legged Hawks are found during the count, but this year they were entirely absent, perhaps reflecting the unusually warm weather and lack of snow cover we have experienced. Many thanks to Jim, Jason, and Bill for doing the annual field trips again this year, and thanks to those of you who participated! Here are the results:

Delta County February 7 (6 species, 78 birds)

Bald Eagle 17
Golden Eagle 12
Red-tailed Hawk 38
Northern Harrier 9
Prairie Falcon 1
Merlin 1

Delta County February 14 (8 species, 105 birds)

Bald Eagle 24
Golden Eagle 7
Red-tailed Hawk 39
Northern Harrier 14
Cooper's Hawk 1
Prairie Falcon 2
Kestrel 17
Northern Shrike 1

Montrose County February 21 (7 species, 36 birds)

Bald Eagle 4
Golden Eagle 2
Red-tailed Hawk 10
Northern Harrier 1
Sharp-shinned Hawk 1
Kestrel 16
Great-horned Owl 2 (on and near nest)



Cooper's Hawk. Photo by Arden Anderson

Audubon Colorado Council

By Chris Lazo

The winter meeting of Audubon Colorado Council (ACC) was held via telephone on Saturday Feb. 7th. Since the Black Canyon Audubon Society (BCAS) no longer has a representative to ACC the western slope had minimal representation in this essential grassroots voice for wildlife conservation in Colorado. The "flipside" of that loss is that BCAS no longer has direct understanding of what ACC is accomplishing to protect Colorado wildlife and habitats at a statewide level. The BCAS board of directors is maxed out with what they can take on and no currently serving board member can undertake another commitment. Any BCAS member who can help in this role would be greatly appreciated. Representing BCAS to ACC involves four meetings per year: two via telephone in the winter and summer and two in person in the fall and spring. If you are interested in helping please contact any BCAS board member. Also remember that this role could easily be shared by two members. Sooo! Why not ask a friend?

Please mail your check to:
Black Canyon Audubon Society
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Delta, CO 81416



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Black Canyon Audubon Society (NAS chapter C9ZD140Z)

Membership Renewal and Application Form

Iembers may participate in all chapter activities, receive the Canyon Wrendering the on chapter issues. Applied to the control of the con

Members may participate in all chapter activities, receive the <i>Canyon Wrenderings</i> 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
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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.