



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 2022

Volume 36 Number 1



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Results from the 122nd Annual Christmas Bird Count

By Susan Werner

Montrose – December 19, 2021

Volunteers braved unusually wintry weather to conduct the Montrose Christmas bird count. We saw 71 species and 12191 individuals. Notable sightings included a White-fronted Goose and a White-throated Sparrow. This year was the highest recorded count for the Montrose Circle for Northern Shoveler, Sandhill Crane, Cooper's Hawk, Prairie Falcon, American Robin, American Tree Sparrow, Western Meadowlark, House Finch, and Lesser Goldfinch. Total numbers were down this year.

Delta – December 20, 2021

Twenty volunteers documented 71 species with 12180 individual birds recorded. We had a record high count of 4016 Sandhill Cranes! New species included Canyon Wren, Ruddy Duck, and Pine Grosbeak.

Hotchkiss – January 2, 2022

Volunteers braved icy roads and bitter cold temperatures to locate 67 species of birds with 3884 individuals. Notable detections include Common Loon (first time detected on a Hotchkiss CBC), Cinnamon Teal, Say's Phoebe, and Spotted Sandpiper. Total numbers were down this year perhaps because of the cold temperatures.

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President's Message

Bruce Ackerman

Mexico! Susan Werner and I are back from southern Mexican, Feb 11 to 24, 2022. We went there for a whitewater rafting trip on the Usumacinta River, the big river that borders Chiapas in southern Mexico and Guatemala. We were camping on beaches along the river, in both countries (6 days, eighty-eight miles of wilderness). We also did a lot of birding on our own, around the town of Palenque, MX, and everywhere we went. We saw some great birds, like Toucans, Trogons, Parrots, King Vultures, Tiger Herons, White Hawks, Black Hawks, and Bat Falcons. We had a boat tour on Lake Catazaja, which is a large reservoir that made me feel like Florida, with many kinds of wading birds. We saw different cities of fabulous ancient Mayan Ruins, two that are impossible to access except from the river. But eleven of the 17 Americans caught Covid. Susan had to bail out of the rafting trip. It made me sad to not have my travel buddy.

We are back in Montrose now and feeling well. Now I am sorting through the 1,400 photos I took and trying to identify all the birds. It was 92F when we started towards home, and 22F when we got home to Montrose with 8 inches of new snow. Now we are back to reality, shoveling snow, and working towards Audubon activities for this spring.

This is Susan Werner's first newsletter as editor. Thank you very much for an excellent job!

PS – Just a reminder that our annual membership expired 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 2022. If for any reason this is not working for you, let me know and we will come up with another solution.

Positive effect of the pandemic on bird song?

By Sallie Thoreson

Do you remember during the early part of the pandemic lock-down that it was quieter outside, with less human (anthropogenic) noise? Less vehicle and airplane traffic!

Researchers used this time to examine the relationship between noise and the songs of birds. Researchers in the San Francisco Bay area found that White-crowned Sparrows (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) during Spring 2020 started to sing at lower frequency and with more trill performance. Despite a reduction of amplitude (loudness) researchers could hear bird songs at over twice the distance. These birds showed a remarkable change as noise levels decreased. *Continued on page 5*

Canyon Wrenderings

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Managing editor

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ON THE COVER

Bald Eagles checking it out © Patt Dorsey

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Conservation—Sallie Thoreson (see above)

Field Trips—Don Marsh (see above)

Membership—Missy Siders (see above)

Publicity—Susan Werner 970-688-0757

Programs— **OPEN**

Website Manager—Jon Horn (see above)

AD HOC COMMITTEES (ANNUAL EVENTS)

Montrose County Fair—**OPEN**

Bird Banding—Carrie Krickbaum (see above)

Christmas Bird Count Team—Arden

Anderson, Adam Petry, Amy Seglund,

and Missy Siders (see above for contact information)

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 webcrawlers from spam activities.

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 Spring Field Trips

Thursday, March 17, 8:30AM

Rosy Finches

We will meet at Cimarron Coffee on Highway 62 in Ridgway at 8:30 am and carpool as needed to Rebecca Kindred's house to observe the Brown-capped, Gray-crowned and Black Rosy-finches that often show up at her feeders. If the rosy-finches are "no shows," we will still likely see other ponderosa pine and montane species, including Steller's Jays, Pygmy Nuthatches and Band-tailed Pigeons. Note: Rosy-finches are most often seen after a significant snowfall.

**Friday to Sunday March 18-20, 9 – 11 am
Eckert Crane Days**

Come out to Fruitgrowers' Reservoir in Eckert, Colorado to see Sandhill Cranes as they migrate to northern breeding grounds. BCAS members will be available with spotting scopes and will answer questions about Sandhill Cranes and any other birds that are in the area. Bring binoculars and scopes if you have them. BCAS volunteers will be set up at "Crane Point" on the hill overlooking the reservoir or along the causeway across the reservoir, depending on where the best viewing opportunity is that day. Take Highway 92 east of Delta and turn left onto Highway 65 towards Cedaredge and Grand Mesa. After entering Eckert turn right just before the "Big E Market" onto North Road and proceed out to the reservoir. Come early so you don't miss the lift-off. The cranes usually lift off between 9 and 10am if the weather is nice.

**Saturday, April 16, 8:00 am
Marine Road**

The City of Montrose's Marine Road property is a great local wetland. We hope to see or hear some good spring birds, such as soras and Virginia rails. The City is proposing some improvements to this property. Meet at the public parking lot at the intersection of N. 2nd Street and N. Cascade Ave in Montrose. We will caravan to the Marine Road property. Parking is limited. Return by 11 am. The trail is likely to be wet, so wear appropriate footwear. Follow the Covid protocol that protects both you and those around you. Contact Bruce Ackerman at (727) 858-5857 or bruceackermanAUD@aol.com for more information.

Thursday, April 28, 8:00AM

Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP

We will meet at the public parking lot at the intersection of N. 2nd Street and N. Cascade Ave. in Montrose and arrange carpooling if desired before heading up to the south rim of Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. We'll look for Peregrine Falcons, White-throated Swifts and maybe some early warblers, such as Virginia's and Black-throated Gray. Dusky Grouse is another possibility. The trip will head back to Montrose sometime around noon. Remember that there will be an entrance fee for the Park.

First Tuesday Field Trips

Mark your calendars for **March 1, April 5, May 3, and June 7**

The First Tuesday Field Trips continue! Meet at 9:00AM in March, April, and May, and at 8:00AM on June 7. 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.

Independent driving and social distancing (including wearing masks and not sharing equipment) will be the protocol in use. Please stay home if you are ill. Contact Bruce Ackerman at (727) 858-5857 or bruceackermanAUD@aol.com for more information.

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

**Friday May 6 – Sunday May 8
Ruby and Horsethief Canyons**

This is not a BCAS trip but consider supporting this local conservation organization. Colorado Canyons Association is leading its fourth annual Birding Adventure on the Colorado River! Relax aboard a guided oar raft as you travel 25 miles through Ruby and Horsethief. Register at <https://www.coloradocanyonsassociation.org/events/2020/5/8/birding-rafting-adventure-2022>

**Sunday, May 8
CFO Colorado Birding Challenge**

This is not a BCAS event, but folks may want to field a team to help raise funds for bird conservation in Colorado, while enjoying an enjoyable day of comradery and birding. Contact Don Marsh (ridgwaybrdr@gmail.com) if you are interested in joining a team.

May 10 – 11

Montrose County West End

Black Canyon Audubon will sponsor a field trip to Paradox Valley and other West End venues (Norwood, Nucla and Naturita) for a spring birding adventure. The chance to see over 70 species is very high. Expect several short walks to access bird habitat. The group will meet at 9:00 AM on May 10th. Directions to the meeting site will be sent to those who sign up. We will have a potluck dinner the evening of May 10th.

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 waterfowl, Black-throated Sparrow, vireos, Yellow-breasted Chat, Grace's Warbler, Black Phoebe, and a host of migrants. Day 1 will wrap up near Naturita; participants can access either hotel accommodations or camp for the night. The Uravan Ball Park campground is open, and the Rimrock Hotel (970-865-2500) in Naturita has nice rooms at reasonable prices.

The field trip is limited to twelve participants. For questions and to sign up contact Bill Harris at TRLGPA48@gmail.com.



Yellow-breasted Chat (from www.allaboutbirds.org)

Wednesday June 15

Silver Jack Reservoir and the Cimarron

Explore this lightly birded watershed east of Cerro Summit. Spring migrants should still be moving through the area and the resident breeders should be in full song. Temperatures may be cool in the morning so dress in layers, bring drinks, snacks, and a lunch. We'll return to Montrose in the early afternoon. For questions and to sign up, contact Don Marsh at ridgwaybrdr@gmail.com or 209-256-5744.

BCAS Book Club Selections

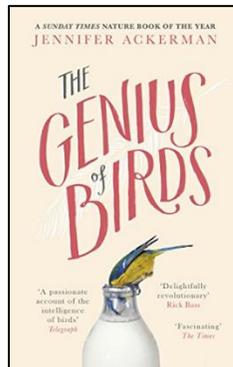
By Sheryl Radovich

The BCAS Book Club formed in July 2021 to meet other birders and explore the natural world through shared experience and literature. In the past year BCAS Book Club readers ventured around the globe with wildlife writers. Their stories have ranged from wolves of Yellowstone's Lamar Valley to Ravens at the Tower of London, Crowned Cranes in Tanzania, and Ivory-billed Woodpeckers in a Mississippi old growth forest. At each stop along the way we have learned more about the incredible diversity of wild species and our human connection to the natural world.

The next three club selections are described below. Meetings are virtual on the third Tuesday of each month at 2:00PM. Contact Sheryl Radovich to confirm your participation. Reach her by email canyon.creek@bresnan.net or phone (970) 240-3788. Bruce will provide a ZOOM link prior to each meeting.

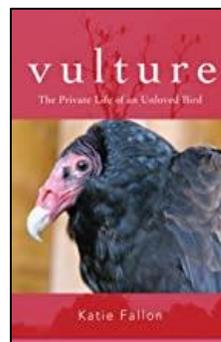
March 15

The March book club selection is a New York Times bestseller, "The Genius of Birds" by award-winning author and editor Jennifer Ackerman. From her personal observations and scientific research Ackerman describes avian intelligence and the complex ways in which birds think.



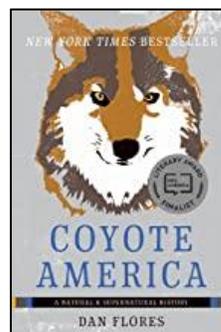
April 19

Meet virtually to discuss "Vulture: The Private Life of an Unloved Bird" by Katie Fallon who traced a year in the life of a typical North American Turkey Vulture. Turkey Vultures, also known as buzzards, are the most widely distributed and abundant scavenging birds of prey on the planet.



May 17

Meet virtually to discuss "Coyote America," by Dan Flores, which looks at the five-million-year biography of this extraordinary animal, from its origins to its successful integration with human civilization.



Avian Ramblings

By Bill Harris

This is the first of what I hope to be a regular *Wrenderings* column. First, I must put out a disclaimer that I am not a birding expert. The only time I consider myself an expert is walking down the craft beer aisle in the liquor store. I'm an avid birder, although my spouse, Kathy, likes to use the word "obsessed" to describe my passion for birding.

In the 9 years that I have seriously taken up birding I've learned a lot about ornithology. I use Ebird as a source of learning about birds and keep track of what birds I spot. I also go birding with friends who know a lot about birds; it helps to have more eyes and ears searching for those feathered phantoms. It also gives me a chance to socialize and tell some tall tales.

I got the idea about doing a Montrose County Big Year after talking with birding cohorts Steve, Alan, and Jon. I have lived in Montrose County for over 43 years and have explored much of its landscape hiking, biking and jeeping. Montrose County is much longer than it is wide and reaches from the Black Canyon all the way to the Utah border. It has a wealth of different habitats with a wide variety of birds.

According to Ebird, 302 bird species have been sighted in Montrose County. I have spotted 223 of those species. My 2021 Big Year yielded 195 bird species. That seems like a substantial number, but it could have been higher given the regularity of my birding ventures during the year. I missed an Olive-sided Flycatcher, Black-throated Sparrow, Greater Yellowlegs, Loggerhead Shrike, Common Loon and Burrowing Owl; all birds that are possible in Montrose County.

Best birds of the year included Lifer's Common Tern and Snowy Plover, as well as Northern Goshawk, Lewis's Woodpecker and Willow Flycatcher.

In my next article I will discuss some of my favorite birding spots in Montrose County.

Covid and Bird Song (*continued from page 2*)

Most studies have looked at how bird songs change in response to increasing noise levels, especially of lower-frequency urban noise. House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*) and Great Tit (*Parus major*) males increased the frequency of certain syllables and length of notes during noisy events. Eurasian Blackbirds (*Turdus merula*) increased both the frequency and

amplitude of their song in urban areas. Zebra Finches (*Taeniopygia guttata*) increased the duration of their song under experimental noisy conditions. Canadian studies reported that Black-capped Chickadees (*Poecile atricapillus*), which have both high and low-frequency songs, adjust to noisy conditions by singing more high-frequency songs and singing fewer of their lower-frequency songs.

Other studies looked at the physiological and behavioral changes to noise. One study with implications for Colorado, found that Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) and Tree Swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*) nested and fed in the vicinity of playbacks of natural gas compressor noise, but their hatching and fledging success diminished. In another study, experimentally increasing compressor noise around Northern Saw-whet Owls (*Aegolius acadicus*), which use sound to find their prey, led to decreased hunting success, prey detection, and strike behavior. And Greater Sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) males had less attendance at their leks when researchers played drilling noises (equipment and traffic). Female attendance at the leks also declined. The drilling noise was in the same frequency as Sage-grouse lek calls, masking the natural lekking sounds. In addition, researchers found elevated levels of a stress hormone in fecal samples at the noisy leks. This information has helped lead to siting restrictions for energy development and human disturbances near leks for both Greater and Gunnison Sage-grouse (*C. minimus*).

Noise may also disrupt the vital activities of birds. In a study of Great Tits, increasing noise levels led to the birds taking longer times to attack insect prey, especially more cryptic prey.

One interesting "note" is the creative way noise levels were determined in the White-crowned Sparrow pandemic study. The researchers used Golden Gate Bridge toll booth data to estimate car traffic. The traffic, and human noise levels were estimated in 2020 to be at the same levels as back in the 1950s! Hopefully, the researchers will be able to continue the study to see how the bird songs change when human noise returns to typical levels.

All these findings illustrate that birds make changes in their songs and behavior when there is a noise change in their environment. This shows the resilience of birds to change or stressors. It may be a temporary change, an indication of "normal" evolution, or indications of evolutionary change accelerated by increasing human noise. Stay tuned and keep listening!



Greater Sage-grouse hen (from www.allaboutbirds.org)

Conservation Conversations Spring 2022

By Sallie Thoreson

GMUG Forest Plan.

The Forest Service received over 9,000 comment letters on the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests (GMUG) Draft Forest Plan and Environmental Impact Statement. Their goal is to publish a final plan and draft Record of Decision in late 2022 or early 2023. Stay tuned for more opportunities for review and comments.

Wolves in Colorado

The biggest news is that the small wolf pack already in Jackson County in Northern Colorado (currently one pair plus their yearlings) is surviving, but unfortunately preying on cattle and dogs. The Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) Commission adopted regulations in January 2022 that authorize livestock owners and their agents to haze gray wolves under certain circumstances and to specify lawful non-lethal hazing methods. Most advocates see this as a positive and necessary step, to address the economic issues for livestock producers and to plan for ways that wolves and livestock can coexist. Conservation organizations and individuals are looking at ways to provide resources and support to the livestock producer suffering losses in Jackson County, while monitoring the health and safety of the wolf pack.

Regarding reintroduction of wolves, the CPW continues to hold meetings of the Technical Working Group and Stakeholder Advisory Group with the goal of a draft plan by end of 2022. You can follow the process at <https://cpw.state.co.us/learn/Pages/Wolves-Stay-Informed.aspx>

Wolf Status in the Lower Forty-Eight

On February 10, a federal court restored Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections for the gray wolf in 45 of the lower 48 states. However, this does not include the Northern Rockies wolf population (Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho) where Congress removed federal protections for wolves in 2011. There are many petitions and calls for contacting the Department of Interior and the White House to ask for emergency ESA protections for wolves in the Northern Rockies.

Gunnison Sage-grouse

Love is in the air for the Gunnison Sage-grouse, a threatened species under the ESA. The Waunita Watchable Wildlife Site near the town of Gunnison will open in April to provide controlled viewing of a lek with the amazing breeding dance of the Gunnison Sage-grouse. You can get more details at <https://siskadee.org>

BCAS Board members have been reviewing and commenting on grazing permit renewal applications as they are released for grazing allotments on BLM lands administered by the Uncompahgre Field Office. Many of the grazing permits contain Gunnison Sage-grouse habitat and recent applications have been within the Crawford population of Gunnison Sage-grouse. Domestic grazing is currently on hold in the allotments in the Crawford population until BLM can get full consultation and concurrence with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and new grazing permits fully processed. Various organizations are looking at options to support the grazing permittees while conserving habitat for the Gunnison Sage-grouse.

Christmas Bird Count Results

Continued from cover page

Gunnison – December 19, 2021

Twenty-five volunteers enjoyed a great but frigid day of birding. They recorded 53 species (higher than our average of 48) and 4804 individuals (second highest number ever for Gunnison). Notable in the Gunnison count were Hooded Mergansers (a new species for this count circle), Ferruginous Hawk, Lewis' Woodpecker, American Three-toed Woodpecker, and Woodhouse Scrub Jay.



Wood duck – Baldrige Park in Montrose by Bruce Ackerman

BCAS Study Skins a Big Hit in Schools

By Mary Menz

BCAS education committee chair, Carrie Krickbaum invited Mary Menz, another member, to present a lesson about owls in the third grade classroom at Ouray School. Fourteen students were thrilled to observe the study skins of several species of owls including the Northern Saw-whet, Short-eared, Great

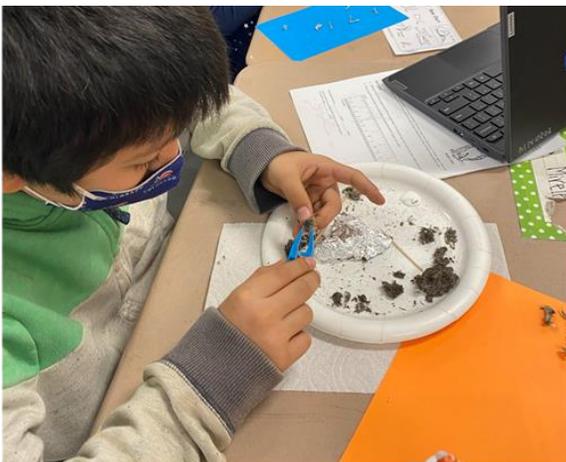


Photo by Mary Menz

Highlights from the Board of Directors

The Board of Directors last met on December 15. The next Board meeting will be virtual on March 9 at 5:00PM. All members are welcome to attend. Contact Bruce Ackerman for the Zoom link. A couple of the highlights from the last Board meeting:

- Carrie Krickbaum advised that the raptor monitoring program at Ridgway State Park won an award on November 7 from CPW. Don, Bruce, and Carrie from BCAS participate, along with other volunteers.
- The last Wrenderings issue went to 303 members electronically and 30 members by US mail.
- Membership renewals are due for 2022.
- The Board continues to work with the City of Montrose on planning improvements for the Marine Road property.
- The Board has agreed in principle to fund grazing on private land for a month during Gunnison Sage Grouse lekking. Details are forthcoming.
- Treasurer Gayle Johnson reports that the checking account balance as of 2/5/22 was \$27,057.17

Horned, and Barn Owls. Discussion also included adaptations and habitat of owls.

The study skins are part of a BCAS collection that includes many species of birds. Although the students do not touch the feathered specimens, they can see up close the differences in plumage, size, shape, and other adaptations such as talons, bills, and eyes. After the February 16 presentation, Menz led the group in dissecting Barn Owl pellets.

“These students are studying the food web, and what better way than to see what owls eat than to dissect the undigested remains that are coughed up as pellets,” explained Menz. Several students found tiny rodent skulls, jaw bones, leg and pelvic bones, and more in the pellets. One student found the remains of a small, unidentifiable bird.

Classroom dissection of owl pellet

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www.blackcanyonaudubon.org

Due to the evolving COVID-19 restrictions, all in-person programs and meetings are still on hold. Watch your email and visit the website often to see when monthly programs start up again.

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.

Please remember to renew your membership

Local memberships expired December 31. Please pay online or by check and extend your membership through December 2022. 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 also 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 or mail your renewal to: Black Canyon Audubon Society
PO Box 387, Delta, CO 81416.