



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 2024

Volume 38 Number 1



Sandhill Cranes © Verlee Sanburg

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There will be two evening Lectures about Sandhill Cranes: Montrose March 14 and Cedaredge March 22. Details on page 4.

24th Annual Eckert Crane Days Approaches

By Alida Franco

The 24th Annual Eckert Crane Days Festival is set to take place the weekend of March 23 and 24 at Fruitgrower's Reservoir in Hart's Basin. This is just east of Eckert on North Rd. This year's sponsors include the Black Canyon Audubon Society and Western State Ranches, LLC (WSR).

Members of BCAS will be onsite with spotting scopes and extra binoculars for viewing the roosting sandhill cranes, as well as other birds and waterfowl. Viewing begins each day at 9:00 AM for a late morning lift-off and again at dusk as more cranes come in to roost. WSR will again be hosting a community BBQ at the ranch just north of the causeway in Hart's Basin at noon on Saturday, March 23. The community is invited to attend free of charge and join in the festivities.

Plan to stop by the BCAS table and find out what the Audubon Society is doing in your area to support the local and migrating bird populations. Find out how homeowners can create an environment that attracts and supports bird species in the local area.

This is a family event, so if you have school-aged children who would like to learn more about Sandhill Cranes, make sure to ask for a youth packet.

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President's Message

by Bruce Ackerman

Winter is ending. Spring Migration is starting!

Alida Franco is organizing Eckert Crane Days for March 23-24. Please join us! These spring migrants are among the largest flying birds on the Western Slope. You can watch the cranes feeding in the morning and then lifting off to continuing their migration northward, near Fruitgrower's Reservoir. On Saturday, there will be a free BBQ lunch at a nearby ranch. Come out and see the migrating cranes on one of these days. Better yet, help us chat with other visitors about the birds we are seeing. Read the article on the cover about Crane Days.

In this issue are descriptions of upcoming great events. Mark your calendars for upcoming field trips, evening lectures, and the annual dinner (Thursday, June 6 at the Grove Restaurant in Delta).

Thank you so much to our dedicated board members who plan and lead the field trips, the evening lectures/meetings, and all the other events. I so much appreciate having their help. If you are interested in participating at a higher level, we would love to have you, too.

Our Marine Road Park has finally seen the first phase of construction. This city park property in Montrose, after many years, now has trails laid out and mulched. Construction on bird blinds has started by our volunteers. It should be good spring birding. Check it out!

Just a reminder Annual membership expired for everyone in December. You can renew online or by check. See the back cover for more information on how to renew your membership for 2024.



Sandhill Crane. Photo © Verlee Sanburg.

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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
Eckert Crane Days— Alida Franco

A note about email addresses in this newsletter:
All emails have an extra space before the @ sign or “[at symbol]” in the email address to discourage spam coming from web crawlers.

Would you like to volunteer? Talk to an officer to see where we need help and where your talents can be used! Volunteers are always needed and welcome.

First Tuesday Field Trips

First Tuesday Field Trips will be on:

March 5, April 2, and May 7. Meet at **9 AM** at the public parking lot at the intersection of N. 2nd St. and N. Cascade Ave. in Montrose.

A leader will accompany the group to a nearby birding hotspot. Return should be by about noon. Bring a snack, water, binoculars, and field guides. **Please RSVP for all field trips** and included your name, field trip date and contact information in case weather or illness forces a cancellation. RSVP to black.canyon.audubon.fieldtrips@gmail.com

Other Field Trips & Events

Grand Junction Trip (Mesa Co)

Thursday, March 14

Both Connected Lakes and the Grand Junction State Wildlife Area in Mesa County can offer up a good variety of waterfowl and songbirds during the late winter months. Join leader Don Marsh as we explore the ponds, fields and cottonwood forest along the river corridor. Dress in layers, bring water and a lunch or snacks, and a spotting scope if you have one. Meet at the public parking lot at the corner of N. 2nd Street and N. Cascade Ave. in Montrose at **8:00 AM**. We should be back in Montrose by early afternoon. Email black.canyon.audubon.fieldtrips@gmail.com to reserve your spot.

Eckert Crane Days (Delta Co)

Saturday and Sunday, March 23 and 24

See page 1 for details on this event.

Fruitgrower's Reservoir (Delta Co)

Saturday, April 20, 8 AM to 12 PM

Fruitgrower's Reservoir in the Hart's Basin is one of the top hotspots on Colorado's Western Slope. A variety of migrating birds, including ducks, gulls, shorebirds and some early migrant songbirds should be present in late April. We'll wrap up around noon and head back to Montrose. If you live near Delta, you can meet us at the parking lot on North Road around 8:45 AM. Dress in layers, bring water, a lunch or snacks, and a spotting scope if you have one. Please email black.canyon.audubon.fieldtrips@gmail.com to reserve your spot.

West End Field Trip (Montrose Co)

Wednesday-Thursday, May 8-9

Black Canyon Audubon will sponsor a field trip to Paradox Valley, near Nucla, and other West End venues for a spring birding adventure on May 8-9. Expect to see up to

70 species on several short walks to access bird habitat. 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.

The group will meet at the Vestal House in Naturita at 9:00 AM on May 8. 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. It is 13 miles from Naturita along highway 141 and the Vestal House in Naturita has nice rooms at reasonable prices. There will be a potluck dinner the evening of May 8 at the hotel. The field trip is limited to 12 participants.

Birding the Colorado River—Raft trip (Mesa Co)

Friday to Sunday, May 17-19

The Colorado Canyons Association (CCA) will again organize a fully supported raft trip focused on birding the Ruby/Horsethief section of the Colorado River. Visit CCA's website for more information.

Escalante SWA (Delta Co)

Wednesday, May 29

BCAS has received permission to visit the Hamilton Tract of the Escalante SWA to document bird species. Normally, the wildlife area is closed to visitors during the spring and early summer to protect nesting birds. We will be eBirding the results. The field trip is limited to six individuals to limit impacts on nesting birds. Sign up by contacting Bill Harris at TRLGPA48@gmail.com.

Black Canyon of the Gunnison NP

Saturday, June 8

Late Spring is a great time to be at the park, with many birds singing on territory and raptors riding the thermal around the deep canyon. Expect to see and hear flycatchers, grosbeaks, swifts and swallows along with wildflowers. Dress in layers, bring water and a lunch or snacks, and binoculars. Meet at the public parking lot at the corner of N. 2nd Street and N. Cascade Ave. in Montrose at **7:00 AM**. **This is an earlier than usual start** to get to the park ahead of the crowds and hear more birds. We should be back in Montrose by early afternoon. Please email black.canyon.audubon.fieldtrips@gmail.com to reserve your spot.

Field Trips & Other Events continued on next page

100 Bird Challenge

Saturday, June 1

BCAS is throwing down the gauntlet by challenging interested members in spotting 100 bird species in a single day. The rules are simple. Go look for as many species as possible from dawn til dusk on June 1. Several of our members have done this in past years with good success. Members are encouraged to form teams of 3-4 people, then plan out a route. The team that spots the most species will receive the eternal admiration of all BCAS members. Will a Red-tailed Hawk be seen that day?▪



Red-tailed Hawk. Photo © Verlee Sanburg.

Upcoming Monthly Meetings and Speakers

By Kristal Stidham

Thursday, March 14, 7:00 PM

Montrose Field House Summit Room

Tagging Sandhill Cranes

Evan Phillips, our friend and wildlife biologist based out of the Montrose CPW office, will share details about a recent partnership with USFWS to tag Greater Sandhill Cranes in the Delta area and track their movements thereafter. The goal is to learn how and why the populations of sandhills have been increasing on the Western Slope. This will be great information for our members to have and share with the public while we represent BCAS at the Eckert Crane Days event the following weekend.

This event repeats on Friday March 22, 6:00 PM, at Grand Mesa Arts and Events Center in Cedaredge.

Thursday, April 11, 7:00 PM

Montrose Field House Summit Room

Improving Population of Cavity Nesting Birds

Kevin Corwin, chairman of the Colorado Bluebird Project will be speaking about the group's efforts to improve the populations of bluebirds and other cavity-nesting species like swallows, wrens and chickadees. Kevin's presentation will include a 15-minute video that spans the entire nesting process for one new bluebird family. He will also share up-to-date information on bluebird vitality in our state, which will be especially exciting because several of our BCAS members actively contribute data throughout the summer regarding the bluebird boxes we monitor at Ridgway State Park.

Thursday, May 9, 7:00 PM

Montrose Field House Summit Room

Survival of Desert Bighorn Sheep

Our guest speaker will be Joel Berger, Colorado State University professor and wildlife conservationist. Joel has nearly 50 years' experience studying endangered mammal species in some of the most extreme environments on Earth. Coming to us fresh from his field season with desert bighorn, he will make a case for why we should care about their survival in particular.▪

Know Before You Go—Visiting Colorado's State Wildlife Areas

By Susan Werner, retired Area Wildlife Manager (CPW)

One of the benefits of living in the western US is the plethora of public lands. In our area, we enjoy birding lands owned and managed by the federal government or by the State of Colorado. I would like to address lands owned by the State of Colorado, particularly those owned or managed by Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

We are all familiar with our 43 State Parks. We frequently head to our local state parks to spot migrating and resident birds. And several of our members actively volunteer at these parks in various capacities, including monitoring raptor presence and bluebird nesting success. You must have a State Parks pass to enter any of these lands. The Legislature made this much easier with the introduction of the \$29 "Keep Colorado Wild Pass" which you can purchase when you pay for your vehicle registration.

Another category of land administered by Colorado Parks and Wildlife are over 350 State Wildlife Areas. These lands were originally purchased or leased with dollars collected through the sale of hunting and fishing licenses and taxes of equipment used in those pursuits. State Wildlife Areas are purchased and managed solely for the

Continued on next page

Know Before You Go continued from page 4

benefit of wildlife. These areas may also offer wildlife-related recreation and potentially opportunities for other forms of recreation when it does not conflict with wildlife or wildlife recreation.

To use a State Wildlife Area, each person over the age of 16 MUST have either a valid hunting or fishing license, or a State Wildlife Area pass. These passes may be purchased online for approximately \$40 ([Purchase a State Wildlife Area Pass](#)) and there is a \$30 discount for seniors. Annual passes are valid from April 1 through March 31 of the following year.

We are all adapting to a state that has an increasing human population. Impacts on public lands from use by people have skyrocketed. Land managers are struggling to keep up with these demands. User fees are one tool to help mitigate some of the human impacts on State Wildlife Areas. Funds build and maintain fences, fight weeds, pump outhouses, maintain roads, enforce rules, and improve habitat.

Remember that State Wildlife Areas are for wildlife so there are often rules that restrict our behaviors to help wildlife. For instance, the Billy Creek and the Escalante Wildlife areas prohibit dogs unless the handler is actively hunting, and both are completely closed to human activity during critical periods for wildlife. Permitted activities are listed on entrance signs and are also outlined in the online Colorado State Recreation Lands brochure ([State Wildlife Area regulations](#)). And most State Wildlife Area regulations prohibit the use of bicycles except on designated roads.

To further complicate the issue for users, Colorado Parks and Wildlife also leases lands from the Colorado State Land Board. These state trust lands (STL) are leased for hunting and fishing only, and only in rare circumstances do the leases allow any other types of recreation. If you choose to enter one of these properties, you **must** have a valid hunting or fishing license. These areas are sign-posted, and the parking lots are closed except during hunting or fishing seasons.

Please use these lands wisely and respectfully. Know before you go! Purchase the requisite pass or license at the beginning of each field season! Regulations for each State Wildlife Area can be found at [State Wildlife Area regulations](#).▪

BCAS Book Club Selections

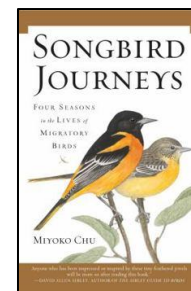
Looking for a way to meet new people or to expand your reading genres? Join the Audubon Book Club! Here are the next three book selections. Meetings will be virtual or in-person in Montrose on the third Tuesday of each month at 2:00 PM. Contact Bruce Ackerman for more details.



Tuesday March 19, 2PM, ZOOM. *The Highest Tide* by Jim Lynch (2005). Coming-of-age novel that features Puget Sound, lots of natural history about squid and the ebb and flow of the rich tidal world. "The fertile strangeness of marine tidal life becomes a subtly executed metaphor for the bewilderments of adolescence in this tender and authentic coming-of-age novel." (from Publishers Weekly)



Tuesday April 16, 2PM, ZOOM. *Crossings: How Road Ecology Is Shaping the Future of Our Planet* by Ben Goldfarb (2023). Environmental journalist Ben Goldfarb travels throughout the United States and around the world to investigate how roads have transformed our planet. Wild animals experience roads as alien forces of death and disruptions of their lives. Yet road ecologists are also seeking to blunt the destruction through innovative solutions. Today, as our planet's road network continues to grow exponentially, the science of road ecology has become increasingly vital. Learn how humans have altered the natural world—and how we can create a better future for all living beings (from Amazon). **Ben Goldfarb will be speaking at the BCAS Annual Dinner June 6 in Delta.**



Tuesday May 21, 2PM, IN-PERSON. *Songbird Journeys: Four Seasons in the Lives of Migratory Birds* by Miyoko Chu (2006). Miyoko Chu of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology explores the intricacies of the ebb and flow of migration, the cycle of seasons, and the interconnectedness between distant places. Scientists have shown how songbirds navigate using stars, polarized light, and magnetic fields. *Songbird Journeys* pays homage to the wonder and beauty of songbirds while revealing the remarkable lives of migratory birds and the scientific quest to answer age-old questions about where songbirds go, how they get there, and what they do in the far-flung places they inhabit throughout the year (from Amazon). Meet at Sheryl Radovich's house in south Montrose. ▪

Conservation Conversations

by Sallie Thoreson, Conservation Chair

This column was written on Valentine's Day, so I showcased some love.

Recently the BLM announced a Draft Environment Impact Statement for its Plan to promote the recovery of the threatened Gunnison Sage-Grouse. Our Gunnison Sage-Grouse are only found in eight isolated populations, occupying 10% of their historic range, with about 4,300 birds left. The National Audubon Society, with Black Canyon Audubon as one of the chapter sign-on organizations, sent in 26 pages of comments. The comments were asking for additional management actions to protect this iconic species.

The National Audubon Conservation Ranching Initiative was listed by Food Tank as one of the food and agriculture organizations to watch in 2024. Through their program, the Audubon Society works with ranchers to sustainably steward grasslands which protect imperiled grassland birds. Ranches that meet their standards for conservation may sell meat products with the Audubon Society's bird-friendly seal.

<https://www.audubon.org/our-work/prairies-and-forests/ranching>.

The British Antarctic Survey, using satellite photos found four previously unknown Emperor Penguin colonies, adding a total of about 5,700 pairs to the estimated population. Emperor Penguins, in order to lay their eggs and raise their young, need "fast" ice, a type of stable sea ice that is firmly attached to the shore. This is evidence that some penguin colonies are moving to adapt to changing ice conditions. (reported by *Smithsonian* magazine)

The Natural Resource Defense Council reports: "Good news! The Biden administration recently hit pause on new Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) exports, a critical first step toward our ultimate goal of phasing out LNG – especially as the United States is the world's largest exporter of this climate-destroying energy source. This pause is while the administration decides whether it's in the public interest to permit massive new LNG projects, which would worsen the climate crisis and further threaten our health."

February is Black History Month when we celebrate the diversity of conservation leaders. The Defenders of Wildlife highlighted four such leaders. "Hazel M. Johnson, the mother of the environmental justice movement, fought against pollution in her Chicago community, while Michael Werikhe, known as Kenya's "Rhino Man,"

traversed continents to save endangered rhinos. Paula Kahumbu works tirelessly to protect elephants and elevates African voices in conservation. Lisa Perez Jackson, the first African American EPA Administrator, left an indelible mark on federal regulations and policies." More on this story at

<https://defenders.org/blog/2024/02/raising-their-voice-wildlife-conservation-history> Another inspiration is Mamie Parker who served as the Head of Fisheries at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. An interview with her is at [Conservation and Racial Justice | The Nature Conservancy](#)

2023-24 Christmas Bird Count

By Missy Siders

This season was the 124rd Christmas Bird Count. For more general information on the bird count and its history check out the following website

<https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>. The Black Canyon Audubon Society supports

four count circles: Delta, Gunnison, Hotchkiss, and Montrose. Below is a brief summary of this year's efforts from the count circle leaders. If you would like more detailed information about these four counts or even any of the Audubon counts, check out the Audubon Christmas Bird Count app by clicking the CBC link above, then clicking "Access Count Results" for results for various years or click "See 100 Years of Data" for trends, under the heading Christmas Bird Count Links.

December 17, 2023. Montrose. Count Leader: Missy Siders. "It was a cold day with a high of 26F. Thanks to everyone that braved the cold and searched for birds for the Montrose count. There were 29 participants, including five watching feeders. A total of 317 miles by vehicles and 17 miles by foot. We ended up with 69 species, and 13,220 individuals. Top three species were Canada Goose, European Starling and Sandhill Crane. We had one rare bird: a Williamson's Sapsucker (female). In general, it seems that woodpeckers and chickadees are low this year."

December 17, 2023. Gunnison. Count Leader: Arden Anderson. "It was a sunny and reasonably warm day for the 50th annual Gunnison Christmas Bird Count on Sunday Dec. 17th. The temperature when we started was about 8 degrees (better than the -10 we started in last year) and it warmed up to a comfortable 38 degrees. A record 28 people came out to help with the count. Unfortunately,

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Board Meeting Highlights

by Sallie Thoreson, Secretary

These highlights cover the board meeting in January. Our regular projects and programs are continuing. Book club meetings are going well, on the third Tuesdays of each month at 2 pm. Thanks to a survey of Book Club readers, we now have a schedule of book for the rest of 2024.

Future spring and summer birding trips are planned and publicized through the normal channels. Kristal has programs booked through summer 2024. The annual meeting and banquet is June 6.

The BCAS currently has 263 paid members, with many members yet to renew their memberships.

BCAS continues to contribute an article to the *Montrose Daily Press* every five weeks coordinated by Bill Harris. The Motus committee is finalizing the location for our first tower (to detect bird migration and contribute to research and information gathering), as we have the money to proceed.

The Marine Road Open Space project continues to move forward. A Work Day will be scheduled in March to lay the foundation for one of the viewing blinds. The city of Montrose has improved the parking at the site, and is still on track to provide an actual parking lot in 2024. Members are encouraged to bird the site.

Crane Days at Eckert will be March 23-24. Alida Franco is spearheading the scheduling of events, developing promotional posters and a brochure, and educational events. Lunch will be provided by Conscience Bay/Western State Ranches management company on March 23.

The next Board Meeting is March 21 by Zoom. Contact Bruce Ackerman for details. ▪

Treasurer's Report

Gayle Johnson, treasurer

We currently have \$37,073.72 in checking. We received several large gifts from members to support the installation of a MOTUS tower in our area. The expenditures have been small: \$300 to the Grove restaurant to secure annual meeting venue, \$266.45 to the UPS store for copies, and \$228 to website/domain maintenance. ▪

RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP TODAY!

Local memberships expire December 31. Please pay online or by check and extend your membership through December 2024.

Dues paid to the Black Canyon Audubon Chapter stay in the chapter and help fund activities, public outreach, and more!

If you would rather join the National Audubon Society, you can do so for a minimum contribution of \$20. If you become a member of National Audubon, you are automatically a member of the Black Canyon Audubon Society.

Bluebird Nest Box Monitoring

If you like checking on nesting birds and are interested in the Bluebird populations of Colorado, this opportunity might be for you! We have several bluebird boxes within Ridgway State Park that need monitoring. Ideally, we need 2 people to commit to approximately eight boxes each in the Dallas Creek entrance area and Pa-Co-Chu-Puk entrance area. Contact Carrie at carrie.krickbaum@gmail.com for more information. Some training is required, which will take place on site. Check out this link to the Colorado Bluebird Project for more information <https://denveraudubon.org/colorado-bluebird-project/>. ▪



Western Bluebird. Photo © Verlee Sanders

Crane Days continued from cover

Migration of the Lesser Sandhill Cranes

For those of you who have witnessed the lift-off of a group of Sandhill Cranes, it is an experience like none other. The orchestration of the whole flight is truly something of a wonder and not to be missed.

Typically, after foraging in the nearby cornfields during the day, the cranes fly into Fruitgrower's Reservoir at dusk to roost for the evening. The next morning, the cranes remain in Hart's Basin waiting for the air to warm up to facilitate their flight. In the meantime, in various areas along North Road, you can witness pairs of cranes dancing in rhythm with one another, slathering themselves with mud in the wetlands giving their feathers a rusty hue, watch them flex their wings, and hear the primeval chorus of cranes in community.

When the temperatures are just right, one crane gives the signal and takes flight, quickly followed by a string of others.



Sandhill Cranes. Photo © Judith Lopez

One by one they follow in queue and begin to turn in an ever-ascending spiral climbing higher and higher and higher up toward the thermals. If you're lucky, they will circle right over your head providing you with a great photo opportunity. When they reach the appropriate loft, they catch the thermals and glide over Grand Mesa with a somewhat effortless grace and then onward north on their journey, not stopping until they reach their breeding grounds.

Each year their journey begins at Bosque del Apache in central New Mexico south of Socorro, where they over winter. About mid-March, they head north to Monte Vista in Southern Colorado and wait until the weather is

right to cross over the Continental Divide -- not an easy feat for our winged friends. It is for that reason that you see the vast majority of Sandhill Cranes (in the tens of thousands) migrate up the Central Corridor through the mid-Western states. The next stage in their journey is Delta County, where they rest and forage a bit after the arduous trip over the Divide and before their final trip north. The final destination of this particular migratory path generally ends around Gray's Lake in southern Idaho, where they breed and spend the summer raising the young only to return south in the fall once again.



Sandhill Cranes. Photo © Judith Lopez.

The Lesser Sandhill Cranes measure up to 4 feet in height weighing about 7-8 lbs. and have a wing span of 7-8 feet wide. You may have also witnessed the Greater Sandhill Cranes along highway G50 that over-winter in Delta County near the Escalante State Wildlife area. Always when viewing a flock of foraging cranes, it is important to be still and it is best not to get out of the car. Movement will spook the cranes and force them to move farther away.

To keep up to date on local Crane activity throughout the month of March and into April, visit the *Eckert Crane Days* Facebook page. There you can see postings from avid and amateur crane watchers alike, not to mention wonderful photographs of the cranes taken in the area.

For more information on Black Canyon Audubon society, its projects and membership, visit <https://www.blackcanyonaudubon.org/>

Alida Franco is the coordinator for the 2024 Eckert Crane Days festival. She has been a member of Black Canyon Audubon since 2018.

in not all the birds got the invitation and, despite the nice weather, we ended up with slightly fewer species and individuals. There was a total of 47 Species, and 3948 Individuals. Both these numbers are just a little bit below our long term average for the CBC. Some of the birds that we normally get but weren't found on Sunday included: Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, Brown Creeper, Horned Lark, American Tree Sparrow, Brewer's Blackbird, American Goldfinch, and Rosy Finches (not enough snow cover to drive them down to feeders in the rural areas on count day, but did get a large flock during count week)."

December 23, 2023. Delta. Count Leader: Amy Segland. "The Delta CBC was conducted on a wet, warm day. We had 12 participants. We recorded 63 species and 13,346 individual birds. The two exciting species observed were a pair of White Pelicans and three Blue-winged Teals. Blue-winged Teals have been recorded previously on three counts, but this is the first count pelicans have been recorded."

January 1, 2024. Hotchkiss. Count Leader: Adam Petry. "Thanks to everyone for kicking off the New Year at the North Fork CBC on Monday, January 1. Believe it or not, overall species diversity and abundance were up slightly compared to recent years. We documented the following: 68 total species; 5995 total birds. These included one Ferruginous Hawk, one Red-naped Sapsucker, and two Snow Geese. New high counts included Merlin (six, previously three), Northern Flicker (91, previously 87), Say's Phoebe (five, previously two), and Snow Goose (two, previously one). There were no new low counts. Tip of the cap to the 30 participants that lead the way through a clear and cool day! A few raptor photos from the day linked here for fun, including the Ferruginous Hawk."

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/Xg5Fs3a2uWXEUzdS7>

Thanks to everyone who participated and made the count happen. We appreciate your dedication. We hope to see you all next year, and encourage others to give it a try.

Avian Ramblings—(Almost) Spring

By Bill Harris

On the last day of the year, I ventured up to Ridgway State Park in search of a Red-throated Loon. Don Marsh had reported seeing one a few days prior. I was hoping to add one more species to my 2023 list, but, alas, my Colorado Big Year was stuck at 269 species. My yard bird population has settled in for the winter. It's always interesting to see what species stick around for the cold weather. I'm seeing Juncos, Flickers, Cedar



Bald Eagle. Photo © Verlee Sanburg.

Waxwings, Mountain Chickadees, a pair of Downy Woodpeckers, Scrub Jays, a Red-Breasted Nuthatch, and an occasional Ruby-crowned Kinglet. These species are usually gone by March or April and are considered elevational migrants that are seen in the high-country spring through fall.

Year-round yard residents include Eurasian-Collared Doves, House Sparrows, Starlings, Robins, and House Finches. Another bird species seen almost daily is the Sandhill crane that winters in the valley. They are either making their way to feeding fields or returning to night-time roosts. The river bottom along G50 Rd., west of Delta, is a Sandhill Crane stronghold, but I have seen them roosting along the Uncompahgre River near Montrose as well.

This winter we have a new yard resident--a pine squirrel. One day in November we noticed a little gray squirrel skipping along our cedar fence. It was not a rock squirrel that has visited the yard from time to time. It's the little squirrel that scolds intruders up in the high country. We named the little critter Skippy, due to its fence-hopping prowess. Initially, Skippy was very busy collecting acorns and cones from our trees.

More recently, the pine squirrel has been caching peanuts that I put out for the birds. The cache is in a bluebird nest box attached to a shed. One afternoon I was scanning the yard for birds when I spotted a Mountain Chickadee entering the nest box and exiting with a peanut. Soon after, a Red-Breasted Nuthatch did the same thing. Skippy noticed the charade and started scolding the thieves. Soon after, a pair of Scrub Jays arrived sending Skippy into a frenzy, chasing the jays through the trees who had, by this time, become quite vocal. It was quite the scene and very entertaining. It's tough being a squirrel in bird land.▪

