



# Great Blue Herald

Grand Valley Audubon Society

Grand Junction, Colorado

## THIS IS YOUR LAST PAPER EDITION OF THE GREAT BLUE HERALD.....UNLESS.....

We have arrived at a time in our chapter's history where the print and mailing costs of our quarterly newsletter have surpassed our chapter's ability to completely finance it. This is in part due to chapter funds being earmarked for other local projects.

If you, like many of us, enjoy holding a hard copy in your hands instead of reading it on a screen, or printing it out, we understand! That's why we encourage you to:

### *Join Grand Valley Audubon Today!*

We have created options for you to continue to receive GVAS news while you also support your local Audubon Chapter.

These options include:

- **receiving just an e-edition.** We need you to furnish or confirm your email address on our website using the LINK on the main page
- **receiving a paper copy only.** An option available only to GVAS members.
- **receiving an e-edition and a paper copy.** An option available only to GVAS members.

Please go to [audubongv.org](http://audubongv.org) and click the LINK on the main page to complete the information if you are interested in receiving future editions. **Let us know your preferences by 12/31/2020.**

Go to [www.audubongv.org](http://www.audubongv.org).

Click on JOIN GVAS!

#### Membership Levels

Individual	\$35	Screech Owl	\$100
Family	\$45	Great Blue Heron	\$250
Student	\$15	Peregrine Falcon	\$500

100% of your dues stays local and directly benefits local chapter activities

# Christmas Bird Counts

## *Modified to comply with COVID-19 Guidelines*

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, this year's Christmas Bird Counts require a few changes. November 15 will be the earliest to confirm whether the CBC will take place; it depends on what local regulations allow. Here are the guidelines we are currently working with:

- Cancel all in-person compilation gatherings. That means that, unfortunately, we won't have our usual Chili Supper get-together hosted by Barbara and Dick Churchley.
- Social distancing and/or masking are **required** at all times in the field.
- Carpooling may only occur within existing familiar or social "pod" groups.
- Activities must comply with all current state and municipal COVID-19 guidelines.

Given all the variables, we hope/plan to conduct the **Grand Junction CBC** on Sunday, December 20.

The **Mesa CBC** will be held on New Year's Day 2021. To participate meet at 9 a.m. at the Wagon Wheel Restaurant in the town of Mesa. This is an easy event to accommodate social distancing.

CBC area leaders have recruited their own small teams; thank you for understanding why we are limiting participation.

We also owe Jackson Trapett a huge THANK YOU for his 6 years and many hours devoted to our local CBC compilation of species. Jackson also used his Geographic Information System expertise to create new, clearer area maps for the Grand Valley CBC. And we welcome Harriet Stephens who is stepping up to take on this important monitoring task.



There is another way for people to participate and that is by doing feeder counts from the safety and comfort of your own home! If you have a feeder or have friends or neighbors who would welcome someone to monitor their feeders, this is a great way to add observations to the count. To sign up to be a Feeder Watcher, email Dave Price [djprice50@msn.com](mailto:djprice50@msn.com) or text 970-640-4508.

This marks the 121st year that the Christmas Bird Count has been conducted. Each November, birders interested in participating in the CBC sign up and join in through their local Audubon chapter. From December 14 thru January 5 each year tens of thousands of volunteers throughout the Americas brave snow, wind, or rain, and take part in the effort.

Audubon and other organizations use data collected in this long-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations, and to help guide conservation action. Check out the Audubon [Christmas Bird Count](http://www.audubon.org/ChristmasBirdCount) website to learn more about this conservation effort!

## *Christmas is coming, the goose is.....*

GVAS has several suggestions for Christmas gifts for loved ones and friends. If you have any coffee drinkers on your list, how about buying them some organic/shade grown coffee from Costa Rica? A famous ornithologist has said, "If there's one thing you can do for birds, drink organic/shade grown coffee." Several GVAS members are hooked on coffee from Café Cristina. You can order on line at [www.cafecristina.com](http://www.cafecristina.com). Shipment is fast and convenient. This small, private coffee farm grows gourmet beans and has a bird list of over 300. If local coffee purveyors do not sell an organic/shade-grown variety...you can educate them! (Typical sun coffee plantations might support <10 species.)

Another obvious gift suggestion is a donation or membership for GVAS or like-minded group. We strive to be a strong member of the local conservation community and our voice grows as does our membership. Many people enjoy National Audubon's award-winning magazine as well. There are other great local groups: Conservation Colorado (<https://conservationco.org/>) and Western Colorado Alliance for Community Action (<https://westerncoloradoalliance.org/>) are groups with a strong Mesa County and Western Slope presence. They need our support because it is their staffs that keep us informed of local environmental issues and represent all of us at public hearings. And, check out Great Old Broads for Wilderness ([greatoldbroads.org](http://greatoldbroads.org)) which has an active local chapter. Your friend or relative will feel good to be part of the local conservation network.

Finally, check out local merchants and their supplies of bird seed and feeders. But, when you do, ask questions: Which birds will use which seed is a good one because not all seed is created equal when it comes to attracting birds. And, maybe a summer touch is what we need in the middle of winter. Most everyone can use another hummingbird feeder and thoughts of spring.

## *Stocking Stuffers to Benefit GVAS*



Local artist and GVAS member Barbara Churchley, whose oil and pastel paintings "are interpretive and impressionistic," is once again offering to donate \$4 to GVAS for each of her box set of 8 notecards.

Barbara has a variety of packages available including:

- Birds of Western Colorado - 8 different cards, so a set can be made to order
- Penguins of the Subantarctic Islands - 4 penguins
- Birds of Cuba - 4 different birds
- Rocky Mountain Wildflowers - Blue Columbine, Red Columbine, Shooting Star, Fairy Slipper(orchid)

Price is \$10/set. Box sets are available at Wild Birds Unlimited. In addition Barb can send boxed sets for an additional \$2 shipping fee. And she has boxed sets available at her studio. For more information about options contact Barb at [barbara@barbarachurchley.com](mailto:barbara@barbarachurchley.com). Her website is [barbarachurchley.com](http://barbarachurchley.com)

## *Bird & Words by Cary Atwood*

### **Transition & Transformation**

Recently, I've enjoyed and been heartened by viewing the PBS Series, *The Age of Nature*. Each episode has a theme: Awakening, Understanding, Changing. Short vignettes illustrate examples of human interactions with and destruction of nature. In turn, innovative solutions that work in concert with nature show positive results in repairing ecosystems and slowing the effects of climate change. Each compelling episode draws the viewer in: dying coral reefs, warming oceans, starving orca whales-are but a few examples of the ecosystem damage we have wrought. However, many long-term yet hopeful solutions benefitting animals and humans seem possible as we seek understanding and hope through nature's resilience.

In these times of Covid 19, our lives have been transformed, and in that transformation and transition to adapt, many of us have spent more time out of doors, connecting with nature. That is a good thing. Time spent outdoors allows us all to hear birds, observe wildlife and reconnect to the larger landscape and reflect on our interdependency to the natural world. A recent opportunity for this was a collaboration with Rivers Edge West as weed warriors. In just a few hours of digging and pulling, our small group dug up and bagged hundreds of tamarisk seedlings that had taken hold on the disturbed area where wetlands restoration is taking place. This effort just a small slice in our own backyard of positive transformations taking place worldwide.

On another note: Our chapter is undergoing a number of changes, including an update and reformat of our website, so please be patient. Some of our pages will be under construction, but we hope you join us as we continue to grow. We will be adding a calendar of events and other features and hope you will follow us on Facebook, too.

In this issue of the Herald, you'll see opportunities to get out on your own to view the large flocks of wintering Sandhill Cranes near Delta, join a socially distanced Tumacacbac raptor outing or join in for a Zoom programs coming up in January, February and March. Please consider joining us as a local member of Grand Valley Audubon, where every dollar stays in the community to effect local change.

Happy Birding!

*Cary Atwood*

### **Tumacacbac Field Trips 2021**

These popular raptor field trips will be modified using the same guidelines as those for the Christmas Bird Counts. The trips will be shorter in duration (4 hours) and limited to 6 participants.

We currently have three trips scheduled:

- Wednesday January 27, lead by Dave Price
- Tuesday February 2, lead by Mike Henwood
- Saturday, February 6, also lead by Mike Henwood

We will be sending out trip details and registration information soon after the start of the New Year.

## *The Quest for Sandhill Cranes*

In the past, we've conducted field trips down to Delta in search of the several thousand Sandhill Cranes that roost each Winter in the area along the Gunnison River. Alas, we aren't able to conduct field trips this year, but Mike Henwood has provided us with excellent instructions to discover the cranes on our own.

According to Mike, the best viewing is from Thanksgiving through mid- February, although there are cranes present earlier in the fall and into early March (just not as many). Sandhill Cranes roost in shallow water at night and use the Gunnison River in this area to roost for the night. When the ponds and lakes in the area aren't frozen, they will also use them to roost and spend the night. During the day the Sandhill Cranes utilize farm lands and fields to feed traveling up the Uncompahgre River to the Olathe and Montrose areas, up the North Fork of the Gunnison River towards Hotchkiss, and down the Gunnison River to the Grand Valley. Late in the afternoon the Sandhill Cranes return to the Delta area to roost. It is quite a sight to see and hear them returning to the roost area the last hour before dark - 5 here, then 15, maybe 20, another 8 over there...they just keep coming back to the area that last hour before dark. The sights and sounds are awesome and a thing of beauty.

**Directions:** From Grand Junction take Highway 50 to Delta. As you near Delta, you will pass a power line crossing Highway 50. Shortly after this the road curves and there is a right hand turn lane for Delta County G50 Road. Turn right here and follow G 50 Road. You will pass Escalante State Wildlife Area on the south side of the road, a large lake across the road to the north opposite the SWA, then some farm lands, a narrow road (1250 Road) heading north back toward Highway 50, a small pond just east of 1250 Road, and then some farm and ranch buildings before the road curves and crosses the Gunnison River and the Railroad tracks.

There is a large pullout on the north side of the road at this curve, and is the **safest and best place** to view the cranes, although cranes can be seen on both sides of the road between the Escalante SWA and the Gunnison River crossing.

**Caution: The speed limit is 50 mph on this section of G50 Road. It is a busy road without much of a shoulder. Only pull over in areas where there is a wide turnout and you can pull your vehicle completely off the road. Also, this is all private land (except for the Escalante SWA), and the farmers resent folks pulling over on their private land, blocking gates, parking in areas where there is no pullout etc.**

From Delta, take 5th Street past the Delta Sales Yard which then turns into G Road. Follow G Road for several miles until it forks (G Road to the right and Sawmill Mesa Road straight ahead). Take G Road down until it crosses the Gunnison River. The large pullout described above is on your right after you cross the river.

Photo opportunities to see the Sandhill Cranes up close can occur in the mid to late afternoon by driving the roads in the area - G Road, G50 Road, Sawmill Mesa Road.

## *Science & Conservation News* by *Nic Korte*

**THE "'GREAT' AMERICAN OUTDOORS ACT," WHAT WERE WE THINKING?** : Most environmental groups, including Audubon, supported this act which is to provide nearly \$10 billion for upgrading national parks and \$900 million annually for land acquisition. BUT-the money is provided by energy production, for now almost all fossil fuel, from public lands--something we spend the rest of our time fighting.

A spokesman for the Center for Biological Diversity noted: "You have to give kudos to the Republicans for shifting the conversation so far to the right that the premise has been agreed to that we should fund conservation with the destruction of the earth." I agree with those that dissented. I do not see how we can be taken seriously regarding the climate crisis while supporting this funding formula.

**GROUSE:** Greater Sage Grouse have mostly disappeared in my lifetime. I have a friend, in her early 90s, who grew up in NW Colorado. She remembers when the "sage chickens, we called them, darkened the sky." An excellent perspective on the current status is provided by a recent 8-part podcast (google "Grouse" and "bird notes"). This podcast isn't simple reportage. The narrator is part of the story. It is poignant and inspiring when she states that hope is no longer a reason to keep fighting, "what we really need," she says, "is courage."



**NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SACRIFICE AREAS:** I haven't tried to count how many National Wildlife Refuges I've visited. It is more fun to think of my experiences: Whooping Cranes mixed in a flight of Sandhill Cranes at Bosque del Apache in New Mexico, Red-cockaded Woodpeckers drumming near an Osprey's nest at Piedmont in Georgia, a Least Bittern barely missing my car window at Anahuac in Texas. I could go on, and I haven't even visited some of the most famous such as Cape May in New Jersey and Pelican Island in Florida. Congress has neglected funding the refuges for years. The disregard has accelerated under the Trump Administration which opened much more acreage for hunting and will not even discuss the problems on the record. As reported by National Audubon, "The US Fish and Wildlife Service...declined to answer questions...". More than 700 jobs in the refuge system have been cut in less than 10 years. The Great American Outdoors Act will provide only an estimated 5% of what is needed. (This is the conundrum. Was it worth selling our soul for 5%?)

**NO BLEACH NEEDED:** Just above, I spoke above about Greater Sage Grouse going away in my lifetime. If I hang on long enough, I can also add the Great Barrier Reef. All parts of the reef, amounting to more than 60% of the total, and extending for 1500 miles, have been affected by climate change in the past five years. Warming waters cause bleaching which eventually kills the coral.

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## Science & Conservation News *continued*



**GOOD NEWS?** Back in the 70s, scientists talked about exponential growth and forecast nearly all of the environmental problems we are facing. At the same time, recommendations were made to prevent the planet-wide environmental destruction. Unfortunately, society has lacked the political will to take measures that have been possible for decades, and we find ourselves in ever more difficult circumstances.

The GOOD NEWS is there is still time! If you haven't watched the new David Attenborough documentary "A Life on Our Planet," do so immediately. Attenborough's prescription for fixing the problems are familiar: ensure education and access to contraception for every woman, stop nearly all meat

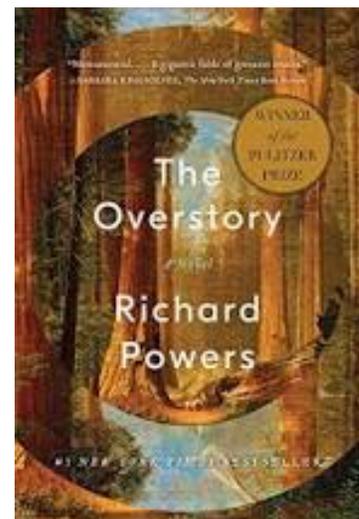
consumption and stop using fossil fuels.

We have to act NOW! Yes, we have to get involved politically. We have to contribute. We have to advocate for the funds even if it means more taxation for ourselves. We have to make personal changes that support these causes (eating less beef, using less fossil fuels). The problems are still solvable, but now the proverbial "window" is almost closed. Humans are remarkably resilient and resourceful. The good news is we can do it—the time, however, is now.

### *Book Review by Nic Korte*

The Overstory by Richard Powers is an unusual novel. Not knowing anything about it, I initially thought it was a collection of short stories: a paean to trees. Then the short stories begin to intertwine. Eventually the complications become overwhelming and unsettling.

As an online review notes, the book examines "the tension between complacency and stridency in the face of existential threats. One character, a deeply conflicted psychologist, dedicates his life to researching 'the personality factors that make it possible for some individuals to wonder how everyone can be so blind.' Who's crazier, he asks, those protesters camping on top of a doomed redwood or the mass of consumers ignoring the flames of their only planet?" The book has no easy answers but does a remarkable job of forcing readers to contemplate their own responses to the "existential threats" we are facing.



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**The Great Blue Herald**

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This newsletter is published four times a year:  
Fall, Winter, Spring, Summer  
by the Grand Valley Audubon Society,  
a chapter of the National Audubon Society.

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, all in person programs, and this year's bird banding program are on hold.  
Watch your email and visit the website often to see when in person monthly programs will begin again

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The Grand Valley Audubon Society strives to foster an appreciation for birds and other wildlife, preserve a diversity of habitats, and provide a sustainable healthy environment through education, research and individual action.