GRAND VALLEY AUDUBON

# Great Blue Herald

Grand Junction, Colorado

## 2020: A Big Year For Colorado Rivers

### An evening of community and discussion about Colorado's water future

Clean and reliable water supplies are essential to our way of life in Colorado. All of us depend on healthy flowing rivers: agricultural producers, cities and towns, businesses, recreation, and the environment. 2020 is a big year for Colorado water.

The update of the Colorado Water Plan, the beginning of the renegotiation around the Colorado River, and performance of the Colorado River Drought Contingency Plans, a temporary yet broad agreement to reduce water use and ensure that Lakes Powell and Mead, continue to provide a reliable water supply.

One thing is clear. We all play a role in sustaining Colorado's water future. Find out more and join ***Audubon Rockies***, ***Grand Valley Audubon Society***, ***Business for Water Stewardship***, the ***Colorado River District, Trout Unlimited, the Colorado Water Conservation Board, Grand Valley Water Users Association***, and ***For the Love of Colorado*** for an evening of community, food and discussion about charting Colorado's water future. Colorado thrives when our rivers do too.

When: Wednesday, January 15
5:30 - 8:30 pm

Where: CMU University Center
Meyer Ballroom

Parking Available in
University Center Parking Garage

Registration is required!
www.audubongv.org

See Page 2 for
Program Highlights

## Big Year For Colorado Rivers Program Highlights

5:30 pm: Dinner provided by CMU
6:15-6:30 pm: Welcome & Opening - Abby Burk and Grand Valley Audubon Society

6:30-7:15 pm: Panel Discussion: **Healthy rivers support all of us. The economic importance of healthy rivers to businesses, agriculture and the environment.**

**Panelists:** Molly Mugglestone, Director of Communications and Colorado Policy Business for Water Stewardship; Luke Gingerich, JUB Engineers – Grand Valley Water Users Association; Joe Bernal, Board President Grand Valley Water Users Association; Cary Dennison, Gunnison Basin Project Coordinator Trout Unlimited

7:25 pm: Colorado River District film: *Bound by the River*

7:30-8:20 pm: **2020 A Big Year for Colorado water. We all play a role in Colorado's water future.**
**Panelists:** Andy Mueller, General Manager Colorado River District; Becky Mitchell, Director of the Colorado Water Conservation Board and Colorado Commissioner on the Upper Colorado River Commission; Tim Wohlgenant, Coalition Director For the Love of Colorado

**Please register for this Free Event** at www.audubongv.org

## *Christmas Bird Count Results*

### Christmas Bird Count for Western Screech Owls—How did we do?

More than 40 volunteers counted 75 Western Screech-owls this year—a number that matches our 4-year average, and that is likely to keep us #1 in the world! Happily, 75 is 14 more than last year when cold weather and bad luck suppressed the count. 45 of the 2019 owls were in or near boxes demonstrating that our efforts are maintaining the Grand Valley population. Thanks to all the volunteers!!

### Post Bird Count Chili Supper at the Churchleys

Once again, Barb and Dick Churchley provided a warm and tasty welcome to over 60 CBC participants. Between bowls of delicious elk and vegetarian chili, salad, a birthday cake and wine, various birders shared stories of their avian encounters during a cool and cloudy count day.

According to Jackson Trappett's compilations, 107 species and almost 30,000 total birds were observed. As guests departed many carried a container of chili, two colorful drink coasters and a screech owl card, courtesy of Barbara and Dick's generosity. According to Barb, they absolutely love hosting this event. We thank you!!

## *Birds & Words: Northern Colombia Birding Trip with Cary Atwood*

How lucky I feel holding memories from our recent GVAS-sponsored birding trip to Northern Colombia. Fortunately, 9 other folks, most from the Grand Valley signed on, and together with our knowledgeable and high energy Colombian guide Manuela, we created a relaxed, and memorable birding trip for all.

Our trip traversed just a few of Colombia's 311 known ecological zones. As a biodiversity powerhouse with 10% of all species on Earth, scientists are racing to document and preserve Colombia's shrinking natural habitats. After almost half-century of civil war, peacetime is bringing deforestation, mining, logging and resettlement. Northern Colombia is one of nine targeted hotspots of concern as development continues.

From the large coastal city of Baranquilla, located at the mouth of the mighty Magdalena River, we spent much of our first day in the high heat and humidity of the lowlands not far from the Caribbean. Between a walk along a rural road and wooded wetlands in Salamanca Reserve, we encountered puffbirds, anis, woodpeckers, parrolets, kingbirds and wrens among others. A delicious lunch in Minca allowed us to see a complement of hummers at feeders.

Russet throated Puffbird

Competent drivers took us up the impossibly treacherous road into the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and to the ProAves flagship El Dorado lodge for the next few days. At this mid elevation cloud forest, the diverse abundance of plants yielded many endemic species found nowhere else. A sunny morning was spent birding San Lorenzo Ridge, in part another protected "reserva natural". In the far distance, the highest glacier in Colombia was visible. Around the lodge, as the mists came and went, guans, hummingbirds, parrots, trogon, brush finch, and magpie jays were visible. One night we interrupted dinner to rush out and see night monkeys and a kinkajou for their nightly banana feeding.

Descending from the cool cloud forest, our remaining time was spent sampling birds of the lowlands of the Guajira Peninsula around the Rio Hacha area. This arid corner, full of acacia trees and shallow wetlands holds a number of birds shared only with nearby Venezuela. A seafood lunchtime feast served by locals powered us up before we set sail in dugouts on the shallows of the Los Flamencos reserve. The sight of 600 Caribbean Flamingos feeding and in flight left us all rather awestruck. Spoonbills, terns, shorebirds and waders rounded out the trip.

In a birding break, we made a foray into a village of families of the local Wayuu, one of the dozens of Colombia's indigenous peoples. As guests, we were welcomed with their distilled sugar cane drink, had our faces painted and learned about the village hierarchy from their "puchipo"-comparable to a lawyer. After a dance performance, we were offered a feast of goat meat and corn patties. Fishing and raising goats, along with the women who weave and sell colorful mochila bags support the 47 families who live a lean life in this hot, challenging environment.

# *Upcoming Events*

## GVAS Programs

**1st Presbyterian Church**
**3940 27 1/2 Road**
**6:30 pm Social 7pm Program**

### February 17

Pete Firmin, Park Manager at James M. Robb Colorado River State Park will present a program on the current and future management of Connected Lakes State Park, current topics and the success of the GVAS/CPW collaboration of the fall bird banding program.

### March 16

Ben Graves, Delta High School teacher of environmental science, will present a slide program about his experiences and adventures exploring Greenland and the Canadian high Arctic. Be sure to ask him about how he has integrated solar panel installation training into his science class to help students learn a marketable trade after high school.

## Delta Sandhill Cranes

Mike Henwood is once again leading field trips to Delta to witness the gathering of the cranes at sunset. There are two opportunities: **Tuesday, January 21 and Thursday, February 6.**

Meet at 3:00 PM at the City Market on Orchard Mesa, west side by the Wells Fargo Bank kiosk. Limit of 10. Car pool to Delta to see Sandhill Cranes flying in the last hour of the day. Return by 7 PM.

Contact Mike at 720-840-5070 or mhawken@gmail.com

## Tumacanbac

A variety of raptors (hawks, eagles, falcons) winter in the Grand Valley, the open fields and desert are their favored habitats. Tumacanbac is a popular field trip conducted annually since 1987. You can sign up online at Audubongv.org or you can call, text or email the leader of the date you prefer.

Limit of 10 participants/trip. Meet at the west parking area at Canyon View Park off of 24 Rd at 9 am, we'll return by 3. Carpools will be arranged from there. Dress for the weather, bring food and drinks. An optional donation to Grand Valley Audubon will be appreciated, $5/person suggested.

Thursday January 23 – **Dave Price** 970-640-4508 djprice50@msn.com

Sunday January 26 – **Mike Henwood** 720-840-5070 mhawken@gmail.com

Saturday February 1 – **Nic Korte** 970-250-8144 nkorte1@hotmail.com

Sunday February 2 - Super Bowl Sunday - **Brett Walker** 406-546-4709 (text message please)

Wednesday Feb. 5 – **Lee Stigen** 970-241-3905 lstigen@gmail.com

The **2020 Grand Valley Audubon Spring Bird Count** is set for Saturday, May 9, 2020, in conjunction with World Migratory Bird Day. Birders of all levels of experience are welcome to participate. Shannon Young will once again be the coordinator. More information will be coming as the day gets closer.

Find out more about World Migratory Bird Day at www.migratorybirdday.org

## *Update on the Wetlands Improvement Project*

The Wetlands Improvement Project at the Audubon Nature Preserve got a big boost at the end of December when the Colorado Basin Roundtable, which reports to the Colorado Water Conservation Board, awarded us $25,000 from the Roundtables portion of the Water Supply Reserve Funds. In addition the Roundtable recommended that the Colorado Water Conservation Board award us an additional $50,000 from the state's pool of Water Supply Reserve Funds.

This additional $75,000 in grant funding will allow us to convert more acreage of the ponds south of Dike Road into shallower wetlands-similar to the pond north of Dike Road. Currently these ponds don't provide very good habitat for waterfowl and wading birds.

Construction on these wetlands–which will involve digging up fill dirt on portions of the property near the driveway and filling in the ponds–was scheduled to begin in late winter of this year. There is a possibility that construction may be pushed back until we receive these newly awarded funds in early summer.

In the short term, construction will be unsightly, but in the long run these wetlands will provide much needed habitat for migrating waterfowl and wading birds in the Grand Valley. Prior to dams and irrigation diversions, the Colorado River naturally created wetlands, but it no longer does so. For the past 100+ years, agricultural land has provided substitute wetlands along leaky irrigation canals and in flood irrigated fields. Now more and more agricultural land in our area is being converted to residential developments and irrigation practices are becoming more efficient. We are gradually losing our substitute wetlands.

Converting our stagnant former gravel pit ponds to wetlands will help offset this loss and provide excellent bird watching opportunities for our community. We are working closely with engineers and biologists from Ducks Unlimited who are experienced with this type of project. There will be some awkward phases in this process but the end result will be a big benefit for birds and a great use of the Audubon Nature Preserve. If you have any questions, please email our volunteer Wetlands Project Coordinator, Meredith Swett Walker: mbswett@gmail.com.

## *Richard Levad Award Given to Two Western Colorado Birders!*

Sue Hirshman, Karen Levad, Carolyn Gunn

*I*n 2005 The Bird Conservancy of the Rockies established the Richard Levad Award in recognition of his contributions to the field of ornithology and his gift for enthusing others in appreciating birds. Since then, 10 individuals have received this award. This year two more remarkable individuals were selected.

For over two decades, Sue Hirshman and Carolyn Gunn have been tireless champions of Black Swifts and efforts to conserve this mysterious species. Combined, this dynamic duo have logged thousands of hours studying and observing Black Swifts and sharing their work with others through outreach, engagement, and presentations at professional meetings. Their passion for this work involves trekking into remote locations well before dawn, enduring cold and wet conditions amid the waterfalls and cliffs that these birds call home, and countless hours of observation, recording and rigorous scientific analysis and research. Karen, Rich's wife, noted that "it was a pleasure and an honor to recognize these two women who Rich loved and respected!"

## *Science & Conservation News by Nic Korte*

**A Chemist's View:** Each week I read the trade journal of the American Chemical Society, Chemical and Engineering News. It is terribly disheartening to read of the actions of the current administration when we are facing conservation crises that will require our best science to resolve. For example, a recent issue noted a portion of the chemical industry which over a 10-year period in the 2000s had ~60 deaths, ~17,000 injuries, evacuation of 500,000 people and property damage of more than $2billion.

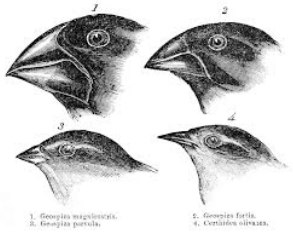
The EPA announced the following modifications of federal rules governing such facilities: (1) removal of 3rd-party audits of companies after an accident, (2) elimination of root-cause accident investigations for companies with poor safety records, (3) elimination of provisions allowing the public to access hazard information for community emergency planning in case of an accident.

If the previous paragraph sounds difficult to believe, how about this? The same issue of Chemical and Engineering News reported that in 2019 "a wave of studies tied air pollution to an expanding range of health problems." Most studies focused on small particulate pollution. Negative effects were found for fertility and fetal health, (these particulates can cross the placenta). The studies supported previous work which showed cardiovascular risk in adults and mental effects in children. The EPA once had a review panel to advise legislation and rulemaking regarding particulate pollution, but the panel was dismissed in 2018.

EPA is also pushing a "Transparency Rule," too complicated to explain here, but the idea led to an editorial in Science, the journal of the American Association of Science, the most prestigious scientific organization in the US. The editorial noted that the new rule "unquestionably excludes key science from policy-making."

**Reflections from the Galapagos**: I had the good fortune recently, to spend eleven days in the Galapagos. Despite having read extensively on the subject, the diversity from island-to-island is simply stunning. It isn't just tortoises that are big. How about 35-foot tall prickly pear cactus? And, then there are the finches. I identified 13 of the 17 varieties found in the Galapagos. The most significant variation from finch to finch is the shape and size of the beak. Seeing birds with the same basic body build in nearly every habitat niche is as remarkable now as it was in Darwin's day.

Besides the beauty and diversity, the other striking element was the extent to which humans have altered the ecosystems. Introduced pests have eliminated the ability of the giant tortoises to successfully reproduce. They are hatched in nurseries and released when large enough to survive. There is hope that natural reproduction may resume on some of the more remote islands. One of the finches is nearly extinct, unable to reproduce without human intervention because of an introduced parasite. Large areas of vegetation restoration are also part of the islands where one can see water collection systems and cages to prevent plants from being devoured. Despite the wonderful time I had, I wonder, have I contributed to "loving this place to death."



**Is it already too late to save "more than half,"?** A recent issue of the Nature Conservancy News contained an article, written in a very hopeful tone by a Nature Conservancy lead scientist, that explained various models used to predict the earth's near future. In the "sustainability scenario," the article notes "we still keep over half of nearly all the world's habitat types intact…" This seemed to be the best-case and was described as one "where people and nature thrive." The caveats on getting to this best-case scenario: "we need to get started immediately," and "we need to ramp up clean energy on lands that have already been developed or degraded."

## *Science & Conservation News continued*

**Five items condensed!** I save articles to use in this column and other communications. There isn't room for all of it. Here are interesting leftovers with a brief comment:

"Drought slays iconic Hawaiian silverswords." (A rare plant, found only on Maui has lost 60% of its population since the 1990s.)

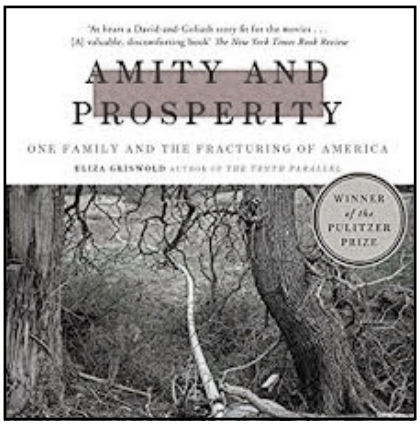
"The Amazon Ablaze" (44% increase in fires, huge increase in deforestation. Brazil's president calls the data a "lie," and fired those responsible for reporting it.)
"Bird Counts Dwindling." (North America has 3 billion fewer birds since the 1970s. Waterfowl and raptors are doing ok—nothing else is.)

"Shutdown of fishing season for Pacific cod in the Gulf of Alaska" (A fisheries biologist commented, "It just got really warm. That means the eggs didn't survive.")

"Pervasive human-driven decline of life on Earth points to the need for transformative change." (An article written by professional scientists that appeared in Science, the journal of the most prestigious US scientific organization).

**Good News!** Yes, there is good news. Every scientific study says the same thing: we have at our disposal, right now, all the tools we need to solve our climate and conservation dilemmas.

## *Book Review by Nic Korte*




Amity and Prosperity: One Family and the Fracturing of America by Eliza Griswold won the 2019 Pulitzer Prize for General Non-fiction.

What if you were a supporter of energy development because of the economic benefit to your community? What if you didn't profit personally but found your property contaminated and your children and animals sick? That's the premise of this well-written book, relevant to Western Colorado because it does an especially good job of showing that, despite the money individuals receive from fossil fuel energy development, societal costs can be very high yet difficult to prove. With fracking continuing to be controversial locally, this book provides excellent background for anyone wanting more education on the issue. The unfortunate lesson learned was that despite heroic efforts by several individuals, the length and cost of litigation heavily favors the energy industry.

## *Your Financial Support Needed and Appreciated!*

We rely on the generosity of folks like you who love birds and the outdoors and who believe in our mission to protect the habitat. Contributions to GVAS help support our educational and conservation efforts.

To donate go to www.audubongv.org and click on Support GVAS. We are particularly grateful to those who have chosen to become Sustaining Members donating on a monthly or quarterly basis. That provides us with a consistent source of income.

And we always welcome checks. You can mail your tax deductible donation to Grand Valley Audubon, PO Box 1211, Grand Junction, Colorado 81502-1211. Thank you!

Grand Valley Audubon
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Grand Junction, CO 81502-1211

Website: www.audubongv.org

**The Great Blue Herald**

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GRAND VALLEY AUDUBON

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.