



# *Great Blue Herald*

*Grand Valley Audubon Society*

*Grand Junction, Colorado*

## *Bird & Words by Cary Atwood*

After a recent two-month hiatus from the Grand Valley hiking and camping in diverse areas of Southeast and northern Arizona, it is a pleasure greeting the birds feasting at my feeder on this wintry day. I've seen (and heard) the spectacle of thousands upon thousands of wintering Sandhill Cranes as well as close flyovers of California Condors, observed Cactus Wrens turning over large stones as they ground forage, and watched Roadrunners scavenging for scraps amongst outdoor diners in Tucson. How grateful I feel to have the presence of birds wherever I am.



As we turn the page to greet a more hopeful and healthier year, I want the members and friends of Grand Valley Audubon to know that I will step down as Audubon chapter president as of May, when officer and board elections take place.

Last May I was prepared to do the same, but COVID had other plans for all of us. We managed to adapt to this new world order with Zoom programs and socially distanced excursions. Despite the challenges we faced, we have accomplished a lot:

- Phase 1 of our wetlands restoration was completed
- Bluebird, owl routes and bird counts continued
- Additional funds for Phase 2 of the wetlands restoration was raised
- Wetlands sign content was written
- Volunteers removed tamarisk seedlings from newly shallowed waters at the Preserve
- A local membership system was implemented
- Our webpage is being updated new sparkle AND
- The board welcomed a CMU student member.

I will continue to be involved with the GVAS Board. If you want to be involved in helping steer the direction and leadership of our chapter, please consider stepping up to join the Board. You can contact any of us for more information. I close with thanks to the Board and our membership for their and your support over the past five years of my tenure.

## *Christmas Bird Counts & Tumacanbac*

Our new volunteer data compiler, Harriet Stephens, has had a busy month compiling, reviewing, editing, and submitting data for our two Christmas Bird Counts (CBC's) and for the Tumacanbac field trips! The CBC count data is sent to the [National Audubon Society CBC](https://www.audubon.org/news/the-120th-cbc-colorado) where it is reviewed and confirmed. Ensuring the accuracy of the information takes time. You can read a summary Colorado's 2019-2020 Count at <https://www.audubon.org/news/the-120th-cbc-colorado>.

This year's Grand Junction Christmas Bird Count resulted in **107 species** and **43,600 total birds**; 11,733 of those were European Starlings! Notable species were Harlan's Hawk, Pygmy Nuthatch and an Orange-crowned Warbler spotted by Leon Thurmon on his chilly float down the Colorado River with Jonathan Cooley.

The New Year's Day CBC in the Upper Plateau Creek Valley and on top of the Grand Mesa yielded **54 species and 1796 total birds**, including one Rough-legged Hawk and one Harlan's Hawk. While the total number of species was four more than in 2019, the total number of birds counted was down by 54%! Hopefully that is not a continuing trend. The birders covering the top of the Mesa were especially challenged trying to find even a half a dozen species and less than 50 birds in total.

**Our Western Screech Owl Numbers Remain High!** We counted 85 Western Screech-Owls during the annual Christmas count. While below our maximum of 99, this was the highest count in the past four years. We had enough volunteers to add two additional morning routes. Those additional eyes and ears provided four owls that may have been missed otherwise.



Photo: Nic Korte

Eighty-five owls are remarkable considering the continued growth in the valley. Our data indicates that an ever-larger percentage of owls are associated with boxes. Thus, GVAS is maintaining and augmenting the population of this little owl in the Grand Valley.

Special thanks to the many volunteers who help with the box program! During January, more than 30 box locations were visited to perform maintenance (replacements, repairs, cleaning) identified during the Christmas count. January volunteers included Mike Campbell, Matt Pfeiffer, Logan Wagner, Mark Vollmar, and Denise Vollmar. Thanks everyone !

**Tumacanbac Results Thus Far:** As of February 9, four Tumacanbac field trips have been completed on mostly pleasant days. So far none of the groups were afforded views of Rough-legged Hawks or Harlan's Hawk which usually visit the Grand Valley from northern latitudes for a few winter weeks. The 4 trips averaged 9 raptor species and 50 total birds/trip which is about what is normally expected after 35 years worth of data for Tumacanbac.

Many thanks to participants and especially the leaders of all the counts and field trips and again to Harriet for compiling the data.

## *Spring Birding Adventures!*

These adventures are typically limited to 6 people (although Ron Lambeth is allowing up to 10). We do want you to register by contacting the field trip leader via email or phone. We will not carpool and will socially distance. There is no charge for these field trips but donations to GVAS are always appreciated.



Photo: Eric Maatta

### **Sunday March 14: Grand Junction Wildlife Area Leader:**

**John Toolen** This Bureau of Reclamation property located at the confluence of the Colorado and Gunnison Rivers, is one of the most diverse birding hot spots in the Grand Valley. Meet John Toolen (JT) at the parking area on 27.75 Rd at 8 a.m. Take Rosevale Rd to C.5 Rd, then .1 mi south on 27.75 Rd. Be prepared to be out for a couple of hours, walking about 2 miles on unpaved, uneven terrain. To register, please contact JT by email [jtoolen@bresnan.net](mailto:jtoolen@bresnan.net)

### **Tuesday, March 23: Searching for Lingerin Winter Birds & Early Migrants. Leader: Ron Lambeth**

To register call Ron at 970-245-4082 or email [rolambeth@yahoo.com](mailto:rolambeth@yahoo.com). Ron is allowing up to 10 people to join this field trip. The party will meet at 9:00 a.m. at Canyon View Park, north of G Rd, accessed from 24 Road. Birding should be completed by noon.

### **Friday, April 9: Spring Bird Walk in Colorado National Monument. Leader: Cary Atwood - 8**

people are welcome to join as we explore the upland habitat of Lower No Thorofare Canyon to seek out arriving migrants and greet resident birds who call this home. Meet in the Devil's Kitchen parking lot at 8:30am inside the E Entrance gate for a 2 hour walk on uneven terrain. Entrance fees apply. To register, please contact Cary by email: [catwood814gmail.com](mailto:catwood814gmail.com)

**Tuesday April 27 Horsethief Canyon State Wildlife Area. Leader: Doug Diekman** Managed by Colorado Parks and Wildlife, this Bureau of Reclamation/BLM property is located on the south bank of the Colorado River, adjacent to McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area and southwest of Fruita. Over 200 species of birds have been identified at this site. Meet Doug Diekman at the main parking area at 8 a.m. located about 1/4 mile past the Pollock Bench trailhead on the Horsethief Canyon road. Be prepared to be out for about 3 hours, walking about 3 miles on level gravel roads. To register, please contact Doug by email [dadiekman@msn.com](mailto:dadiekmansn.com).

**Monday, May 3 "Birding by Ear" -- Leaders: Ronda Woodward & Dave Price** Early morning is the best time to train your ears to the songs and sounds of birds. Meet us at the East Entrance to Colorado NM, just past the gate turn onto access road on the left. An entrance pass is required. To register, please contact Dave by text at 970-640-4508 or email [djprice50@msn.com](mailto:djprice50@msn.com)

## Getting the Word Out

As technology has advanced, the challenge to utilize the various media options available isn't easy. Each one seems to require a distinct skill set. Some of us remember the day when there was a monthly newsletter sent out; more immediate information was sent out via a "Phone Tree." Those days are long gone!

Name	Description	Contact Person
Great Blue Herald	Quarterly Newsletter available by snail mail, email and on webpage	Karen Levad <a href="mailto:karen.levad@gmail.com">karen.levad@gmail.com</a> 970-250-4134
Members & Friends of Audubon (MFOA)	GVAS email list. Announcement or reminders sent out one or two times each month	Karen Levad
Grand Valley Audubon Website <a href="http://www.audubongv.org">www.audubongv.org</a>	Recently updated website containing information on events and activities. Check out the new Photo Gallery	Tina Wilson <a href="mailto:tinawilson2656@gmail.com">tinawilson2656@gmail.com</a>
GVAS FaceBook Page	Includes announcements and items of interest	Johanna von Waveren <a href="mailto:johannawaveren@coloradonma.org">johannawaveren@coloradonma.org</a>

### A Special Person Needed by Karen Levad

For about 12 years I've edited the GVAS newsletter--originally named the Chukar Chatter--and recently re-named Great Blue Herald. It has been enjoyable work even when deadlines loomed and content was missing. Each edition came together just fine sending out news and updates about the western Colorado birding community and events sponsored by the Grand Valley Audubon Society. I have enjoyed the opportunity to contribute my time to GVAS even after moving to Minnesota 7 years ago to be near grandchildren. Serving as editor kept me in touch with people I respect and an organization that I value. It is time, however, for someone else to step up.

There is a bit of skill required for this volunteer position so this opportunity isn't for everyone. If you are someone who is comfortable with a computer, likes to do some word processing, can cut and paste content, doesn't mind nagging folks on occasion to get material sent in, then you ought to consider becoming the new GBH editor.

**I'm hoping to lure in a new person to take over this job!**

The Great Blue Herald is a quarterly 8 page newsletter sent out to nearly 700 members of the Grand Valley Audubon Society. Content typically includes field trip information, upcoming programs, Christmas and Spring bird counts, news from the GVAS president, science and conservation news. It takes about 10 -12 hours 4 times a year to get on issue off to the printer.

I generally don't need to do any writing; if I do it is because I've got a little bit of empty space that needs filling. Or because I want to lure in a new person to take over this job.

For more information please contact me at [karen.levad@gmail.com](mailto:karen.levad@gmail.com).

# *Costa Rica with Grand Valley Audubon*

*September 1 - 8*

*Spaces Still Available! Deposits Due May 4*

Accompany Grand Valley Audubon and Holbrook Travel on a birding excursion in the Osa Peninsula to seek out the spectacular abundance of avifauna, flora, and wildlife inhabiting the primary and secondary rainforest. Hike through Corcovado National Park—the largest national park in Costa Rica—and observe the area’s richness in biodiversity, learn about conservation initiatives, explore Caño Island, and search for water and shore birds along the Tárcoles River on this 8-day journey through a natural hub for wildlife and beautiful scenery.



## **Program Highlights**

- Go birding in the primary rainforest of Corcovado National Park.
- Visit Caño Island Biological Reserve and watch for Osprey, Cattle Egret, black hawk, and phalarope.
- Enjoy a whale watching tour with a local expert from the KETO foundation.
- Search for white-faced capuchin and spider monkey in the Barú National Wildlife Refuge.
- Look for Double-striped Thick-knee, Roseate Spoonbill, jacanas, and ducks along the Tárcoles River.

Further information can be found at the Grand Valley Audubon’s website: [www.audubongv.org](http://www.audubongv.org) under “Events”.

## *Getting Acquainted*

This edition of the GBH names several people who are contributing to the birding community. Here are two of them: Tina Wilson & Shannon Young are involved in several cool projects!

**Tina Wilson** has been a graphic designer of print and web for over 30 years in a variety of businesses. Before moving to GJ 5 years ago, she and her husband Tim Carter were the creators and publishers of a glossy coffee-table magazine called Grand County Living. At the same time she owned an advertising agency called Firebird DesignWorks. They lived in Granby for over 20 years. They are now enjoying what the Grand Valley has to offer – cross-country skiing, hiking and cycling. And their bird feeder is always open to fly-bys!

**Shannon Young** is a recently retired federal employee who has been a birder throughout her life. She has been a ranger and a nature interpreter all over the western United States. She is the Coordinator for the Grand Valley Audubon Spring Bird Count, which is held on May 8 of this year, in coordination with World Migratory Bird day. Shannon is also the Trip leader for this year’s trip to Costa Rica, which benefits the Grand Valley Audubon.

## *Science & Conservation News*

**HOW THE WOODPECKER GOT STUCK-OR DIDN'T:** Take a piece of dead wood and hit it repeatedly with a kitchen knife, or a screwdriver. What happens? Your tool gets stuck. You have to wobble it or pull against the wood to remove it. Has it ever occurred to you to ask why woodpeckers don't get stuck? By analyzing high speed video, scientists learned the answer: "Once the bill hits the wood, [the bird's] head rotates slightly to the side, and the top part of the beak moves independently from the skull. This action creates space between the beak tip and the wood inside the hole, allowing the bird to easily retract its beak.....Until now, scientists thought woodpecker bills would need to be rigidly attached to the skull."



encyclopediaofalabama.org

**LEAD AMMUNITION BANNED:** Most of you are aware of the toxicity of lead ammunition. A single pellet can kill a Mourning Dove. The deadly effects on raptors and the inhibited recovery of the Condor are well documented. California has already banned lead. Denmark has now become the first country to ban lead ammunition entirely. Apparently, a ban is now being considered by the European Union. Denver Audubon has printed a brochure promoting use of non-lead ammunition. GVAS has some copies. Please contact me if you have an event or an organization where copies could be distributed.

**PLASTIC AND PAPER BAGS BANNED:** When I began my career assessing contaminated sites, there was a joke that went like this: "Did you hear, they've now found a fourth repository for hazardous waste? Besides air, water and soil, there's the State of New Jersey!" New Jersey did seem to be a leader in hazardous waste sites, but their legislature has now incorporated the following into law "it is no longer conscionable to permit the unfettered use and disposal of single-use plastics in the state." Besides the obvious environmental impact, the law is expected to be a boon for the state's nascent hemp industry which hopes to be a "significant force in creating biodegradable raw materials that can be turned into hemp-based bio-packaging." Perhaps, we can convince some Colorado leaders to follow New Jersey's example.

**WHY THE SALMON WERE DYING:** For decades, scientists have been trying to determine why up to 90% of adult Coho Salmon would suddenly die in certain streams following rainstorms. Deaths continued, despite restoration of the streams. Recent research finally solved the conundrum. A chemical used to protect tires from ozone leaches out of the particles that tires shed onto pavement. Minute amounts are fatally toxic to salmon. Tire wear has long been a recognized source of increasing concentrations of toxic chemicals in the environment. This is another example of how current regulations permit running unintended experiments as insufficiently tested chemicals are released in the environment. It is also an example how the expanding population increasingly affects wildlife.

### *Join Grand Valley Audubon Today!*

100% of your dues stays local and directly benefits GVAS activities!

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

## Science & Conservation News *continued*

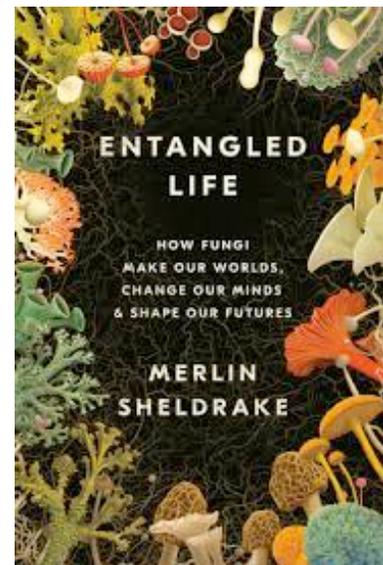
**GLOBAL TEMPERATURE 2020 VERSION:** Despite decreased emissions because of the pandemic, 2020 tied 2016 as the hottest year ever recorded. Moreover, 2020 was a *La Niña* year, which was expected to have a cooling effect. A few of the specifics are particularly concerning: Portions of Siberia were 7°C warmer than in pre-industrial times, warm Atlantic waters were penetrating into the Arctic Ocean and melting sea ice from below, Phoenix AZ, had its hottest summer ever resulting in heat deaths hitting a new record for the fifth straight year. At this rate, the targets in the Paris Climate agreement will be exceeded by 2035. There is no time to lose!

### *Book Review by Nic Korte*

I kept asking myself, “Do I really want to read a book about fungus?” Yet, I kept seeing reviews recommending *ENTANGLED LIFE* by Merlin Sheldrake.

All I can say after reading it is, “I had no idea!” I had no idea that fungi had so penetrated our economy by providing everything from packaging to building materials. I had no idea how rapidly one part of an enormous system of brainless fungus can communicate with another part.

I thought I knew a lot about plants and roots. Well, there was a lot more to learn because 90% of plants rely on fungi for their growth. If any of that sounds dry, the book also describes “zombie fungi” which take over the brains of insects. You can also learn about hallucinations from psilocybin-containing mushrooms.



Fungi are an overlooked facet of the natural world. This book provides an educational and entertaining correction to that oversight.

**World Migratory Bird Day May 8, 2021** is a world wide campaign to track and monitor migratory bird conservation around the globe. GVAS has linked their annual **Spring Bird Count** with this event which is always held on the 2nd Saturday in May. Mesa County count is divided into 12 areas, with a trip leader for each area, and providing varied habitat. Shannon Young is coordinating the count, and can be reached [mtngirl1111@gmail.com](mailto:mtngirl1111@gmail.com). Harriet Stephens has stepped up to receive and compile the count data.



We're not able to accept additional volunteers for this year's event. But next year? We will welcome your participation!!

More about **World Migratory Bird Day** can be found at <https://www.migratorybirdday.org>

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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

**GVAS Who's Who**

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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.