



Great Blue Herald

Grand Junction, Colorado

Celebrating Earth Day at the Audubon Nature Preserve

Grand Valley Audubon will celebrate Earth Day with a 2-day volunteer project at the Audubon Nature Preserve (610 Dike Rd., GJ) on April 21-22, 2018. Volunteers will work on a number of tasks designed to improve biodiversity of native plants and overall habitat quality at the approximately 60-acre site along the Colorado River in the heart of Grand Junction.

As a thank you, volunteers will be provided with lunches and we are arranging for a short educational/recreational activity for the 22nd. (Details to be revealed closer to the date!) Activities will include litter pick up, invasive shrub removal and caging of cottonwood trees to prevent beaver damage. We will be planting almost 70 native shrubs and trees. Species will include New Mexico privet, three-leaf sumac, wood's rose and golden currant.

Funds permitting, we may also construct a small raised bed pollinator garden on a portion of the property that is visible/accessible from the Riverfront Trail. This garden will focus on

sunflowers, milkweeds and other native perennial species that are beneficial to pollinators and local bird species.

In addition we will be constructing some innovative watering systems to help our new plantings thrive in the absence of irrigation. These may include using recycled plastic barrels donated by a local car wash to construct temporary watering systems for our larger trees and the pollinator garden. We may also try constructing improvised "ollas", a traditional watering system using buried clay pots to water the native shrubs we plant.

Please keep an eye on our website, email and Facebook for more details on times, schedules and possible cancellations due to severe weather. We hope this will be a fun event that will engage members of the community in learning about the different ways plants benefit birds and get more folks familiar with the property.

March Workday Plan: If you walk, bird, do wildlife photography on the Preserve property, you know it's a special place that needs some TLC this time of year. Please come with gloves, hand tools and work clothes to lend a hand for a few hours or all day.

Meet at the Audubon Preserve parking area by 10 am on Saturday, March 10th. We will organize into work groups for a variety of clean up tasks including removal of weeds from parking areas, cutting and bucking up flagged invasive trees to form brush piles for birds, removing/replacing wire wrap around cottonwood trees, pruning shrubs along walking paths, and sweeping shelters.

LUNCH will be provided....but **we need a head count!** Please RSVP with your name to: catwood814@gmail.com and let us know if you plan on attending on March 10,

We Counted the Birds! submitted by Dave Price

Thanks to everyone who participated in the Grand Junction and Grand Mesa Christmas Bird Counts and to Jack Trappett for compiling and submitting the data. National Audubon Society has been conducting counts since Christmas Day 1900. Today 1,745 Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) areas can be found across North and part of South America plus a couple of US Pacific Territories. Data for all CBC's can be accessed at <http://netapp.audubon.org/CBCObservation/Historical/ResultsByCount.aspx#>

Grand Valley Audubon Society began sponsoring the Grand Junction CBC in 1923. A mostly continuous record of observations since that date can be accessed on our website:

<https://www.audubongv.org/2017CBCdata.html>

Many factors can influence the count day results, weather and effort being two. The December 17, 2017 Grand Junction weather was milder than usual and our effort (people and hours) was above average. While the total species was above average, the total number of individuals may be of concern. The mild weather may have kept migrants further north, the dry conditions reducing food availability, and the cumulative effects of habitat alteration and loss all likely contribute. National Audubon Society does in-depth analysis of all 1,745 CBC areas across North and part of South America plus a couple of US Pacific Territories. It will be interesting to see what the scientists have to say about big picture trends.

There were some notable observations this year. Paul & Fran Didier's Appleton team spotted a Burrowing Owl that apparently didn't follow others in migration or came back early. They also recorded twelve, yes 12, Black Phoebes on one pond, a surprise to find that concentration. When all CBC's are in, we'll find out how GJ fared in its standing for highest number of Western Screech Owls. This year Nic Korte's group of counters documented 91 Western Screech Owls.

While not a formal count, the Grand Valley Audubon Tumacacnac raptor field trips provide another source of data <https://www.audubongv.org/tumacacnac-data.html> These trips have been conducted annually since 1987. This year, the five trips were well attended by 58 participants. The total number of raptor species for all five trips was 13 with an average of 56 individuals birds/trip. As usual Red-tailed Hawks (20.2/trip) and American Kestrels (10.6) were most common. More Bald and Golden Eagles were seen but fewer Merlins, Prairie Falcons, and Ferruginous Hawks. A winter migrant, Rough-legged Hawk, has made only limited visits to the valley, much like winter itself.

Thanks again to all leaders, participants, Jack, and a special thanks to Barbara and Dick Churchley for hosting a fun get-together in their home after the GJ count.

Its not too early to mark your calendars for the county-wide Spring Migratory Count on Saturday, May 12. A leader roster will be available by the end of March.

Grand Mesa CBC Results

- 56 Species
- 2,335 Individual Birds

Grand Junction CBC Results

- 100 Species
- 27,928 Individual Birds

CBC 10 Year Average

- 94.5 Species
- 40,206 Individual Birds

The President's Corner with Cary Atwood

Spring's arrival is a few weeks away, but its labor pains are here with today's snow, bluster and rain. There are more furiously feeding Juncos in our yard than I've had all winter, which I'm hoping bodes well for a good storm and much needed moisture. If you're like me, you worry about those long and arduous passages made by songbirds twice a year: often at night, carried by favorable wind currents, guided by the moon, stars and an inner compass. Western Kingbirds, Bullock's Orioles, Swainson's Thrushes and Barn Swallows to name a few, are all birds of the Tropics. We just borrow them for a few months of the year while they nest and fledge their young here. The bulk of their lives are spent elsewhere.

Along with my concerns for their immediate well-being are the long-term effects of habitat fragmentation and loss, climate influences, predation, pesticides and other human caused practices that directly impact bird populations. Calling attention to these challenges, and with somewhat ironic timing, 2018 has been designated as *The Year of the Bird*. Celebrating the centennial of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), this is the most powerful and important bird protection law ever passed.

National Audubon, National Geographic, Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Birdlife International along with hundreds of local organizations have joined forces to draw attention to and commit to protecting birds today and for the next hundred years.

The irony rests with decisions by the current administration to reinterpret the MBTA by eliminating the ability of the USFWS (who administers the act) to hold industries accountable for bird deaths. These mortalities are caused by oil spills (think BP Gulf Oil Spill), oil waste pits, electrical transmission lines and other hazards. Many former Interior officials have voiced their concern to Ryan Zinke, current Secretary of Interior, and to members of Congress. You can do the same and take action by voicing your concerns. An easy way is to go to <http://www.audubon.org/takeaction>. My hope is that we WILL be able to make a commitment to protect birds for the next century.

Thank you and good birding to all,
Cary Atwood

Bike, Bird, Beverage Saturday April 28

Paved bike paths in the Grand Valley go through some good bird habitats. Let's take a leisurely 6-10 mile ride around Fruita, look for birds, and end the day with a refreshing age-appropriate beverage and lunch downtown (bring an I.D. if beer is your choice).

Let leader know in advance if you need a pair of binoculars.

Register with Dave Price 970-640-4508 or djprice50@msn.com

Limit of 10.



A Grossly Important Bird by Cary Atwood

A turkey vulture is a perfect creature. It is neither prey nor predator. It exists outside the typical food chain, beyond the kill-or-be-killed law of nature, although without death it would starve. On six-foot wings it floats above our daily lives, waiting for the inevitable moment that will come to each of us, to every living thing. Then the vulture transforms these deaths into life. It wastes nothing. It does not kill. It is not a murderer. The turkey vulture waits. Waits and wanders on its great wing sails

Katie Fallon in her book Vulture

Beginning the first week of March, one of the earliest sentinels of Spring in our Valley is the arrival of the Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) from their wintering grounds of south Texas and Mexico. To the unpracticed eye, they are often mistaken for soaring eagles. Upon closer observation, you notice their uptilted V-shaped wing profile and tipsy soaring movements as they float for long periods, using their well-developed sense of smell to find and perform the rapid clean up and recycling of fresh carrion. Worldwide, 23

species of vulture exist. Here in North America, Turkey and Black Vultures are present. Though a common presence in our summer skies and the most widely distributed and abundant bird of prey, Turkey vultures lack the charm and beauty of other raptors. Their naked heads, non-musical grunts and hisses, and their habit of vomiting in the direction of a threat are not exactly appealing attributes! Were it not for vultures, however, reeking carcasses would linger, insect populations would boom and disease would spread to people, wildlife and livestock. These effects are being widely felt now in Southeast Asia, where, due to ignorance and cultural beliefs many species of vulture are in serious decline.

Turkey Vultures nest and raise their young here in the Grand Valley, using hollow trees, rock crevices, caves or dense thickets as nesting sites. Although they are secretive, we do know both parents play a role in raising their young before departing in mid- October. If you can, spare a little affection, if not love for this most grossly essential avian clean up and recycling crew.

Spring Bird Walks

Join us for our annual Spring Bird Walks on the following Wednesdays and Saturdays. Each trip may have different starting times and locations. Please consult the website or FB page for more specific details.

Wednesday Bird Walks

APRIL

- 7 Leader: Leon Thurmon 8:30 am
- 11 Leader: Cary Atwood 8:30am
- 18 Leader TBA
- 25 Leader: Mike Henwood- 8:30am-meet at Redlands Safeway near ChowDown

MAY

- 2 Leader TBA
- 9 Leader- Cary Atwood

Saturday Bird Walks

APRIL

- 7 Leader: TBA
- 14 Leader: Nic Korte 7:30am
- 21 **Earth Day Weekend Stewardship**
- 28 Bike, Bird, Beverage with Dave Price

MAY

- 5 Leader- Leon Thurmon 8:30 am
- 12 **World Migratory Bird & Mesa Spring Count Day**
- 16 Leader-Nic Korte 7:30am

Media Review by Nic Korte

A new feature for the Great Blue Herald. We encourage you to submit your own reviews of apps, podcasts, or books that you've found of interest to karen.levad@gmail.com.

AMERICAN BIRDING ASSOCIATION PODCASTS:

This is a fun and educational podcast featuring interviews on a wide-range of birding-related subjects. Recent topics included research on rails and on the importance of the Farm Bill. I learned that the likelihood of detecting rails by calling may be less than 10 percent. I've always thought of the Farm Bill as containing too much of the wrong kind of "pork." I didn't know that it also has far-reaching habitat and research provisions that are critical for birds. Podcasts also include identification tips and Rare Bird Alerts. The podcasts can be downloaded from iTunes or accessed with your browser by searching for American Birding Association podcasts.

BOOKS: Instead of a single book, I recommend the works of Bridget Stuchbury, an ornithologist at a university in Canada who has performed fascinating research on both migrant and sedentary species. Her best-known books are [The Silence of Songbirds](#) and [The Bird Detective](#). Don't be put off by the somber title of the former. Dr. Stuchbury presents some sad facts and dire predictions, but she also offers some hope and personal actions we can all take. Both books are also mostly about sex. For instance, "Why do some birds not use small habitat patches that should be large enough for one or two pairs?" Dr Stuchbury reports it is because there are not sufficient opportunities for cuckoldry and polyandry. And yet, sedentary tropical birds mostly have no interest in "playing around." Why not? Read the books and you will learn the answers, plus a lot more about bird behavior that you probably didn't know before.

Spring Migration Field Trip April 23-26

Bear River NWR and Antelope Island State Park will be our destinations in the Salt Lake City area. Shore birds, waders, migrating song birds, and raptors will be our target species.

Day 1 we'll make a couple of birding stops en route to Brigham City. Dependent upon arrival time we may visit Golden Spike Historic Site, view the exhibits and engines, and look for grassland bird species. Overnight in town, checkout early, and spend Day 2 on an auto tour of Bear River National Wildlife Refuge.

We'll relocate to a motel in Layton for the next two nights, spending Day 3 at Antelope Island. The park is a great place for throngs of shorebirds and there are pockets of habitat to find migrating warblers, vireos, etc. We'll also watch for raptors, burrowing and short-eared owls, and mammals, including bison.

We'll start home on Day 4 with longer stops at birding hotspots along the way.

Limit of 12 participants, carpool in 3 vehicles. Group rates at the two motels are \$80/room/night which includes breakfast. State Park entrance fee of \$10/vehicle.

We're asking for a donation to GVAS education programs of \$75/person for members, \$100/person, non-members.

Contact Dave Price, djprice50@msn.com or 970-640-4508 to sign up.

No Sleep Before Christmas: I was pleasantly reading one evening before Christmas when one of my news feeds alerted me to the Trump Administration's new interpretation of the *Migratory Bird Treaty Act*. The new interpretation is that so long as an activity is not performed with the expressed intention of killing birds, the Act does not apply. This is the same as ruling that if I take my shotgun out and use it for target practice, and accidentally shoot someone, I've nothing to worry about, because it wasn't my intent to hurt anyone.

For more than 50 years the Act has been the only tool for reducing bird deaths caused by industrial activities. Now toxic waste ponds no longer must be covered. Wind energy sites do not have to worry about bird migration patterns. Thanks to the law, Exxon paid \$125 million in fines for the deaths of more than 36,000 birds caused by the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989, and BP paid \$100 million for the deaths of between 65,000 and 102,000 birds resulting from the Deepwater Horizon spill in 2010.

Now only intentional killings, such as poaching, are covered by the Act. I wonder how they will distinguish poaching from accidents during target practice? Industry kills vastly more migratory birds than poachers--as many as 1.1 billion a year, according to Brad Bortner, who was chief of migratory bird management at the Fish and Wildlife Service until December. No wonder I didn't sleep that night. What can be done? Nothing. Only a change in administration can fix something like this.

Where Have All the Insects Gone? This is the disturbing title of a recent article in the journal SCIENCE. Monitoring at 100 nature reserves in

Germany shows an 80% loss in insect biomass in the last quarter century. Loss of insect biomass has not been studied in the US, but the declines in Honeybees, Monarch Butterflies, and Fireflies are well documented. Similarly, many insectivorous bird species in the US are also declining: Olive-sided Flycatcher-down 81%, Common Nighthawk down 61%, Violet-green Swallows down 28% (Partners-in-Flight data available at allaboutbirds website).

Are these bird declines caused by insect declines or are both caused by habitat loss and careless use of chemicals? No one knows, but these trends are more disturbing because these species just lost most of their protection by the new administrative rule regarding the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Sagebrush-off: In 2015, the Department of the Interior completed conservation plans to protect the Greater Sage-Grouse (population down more than 80%) while preventing the need for an Endangered Species Act listing. This was a historic collaboration involving Colorado and the other affected Western States, the Bureau of Land Management, The Forest Service, and The Fish and Wildlife Service. The final plan was supported across the political spectrum. Now, Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke has announced his opposition and supports a new approach—including captive breeding. The latter is almost certain-to-fail because genomic research has shown that Sage Grouse are not very adaptable to change. You can act by writing a letter to the administration and our local elected officials. For more information, check-out the National Audubon website (<http://www.audubon.org/magazine/fall-2017/zinkes-new-conservation-plans-will-hurt-not-help>).

Volunteer Opportunities

Spring Count Coordinator: GVAS contributes annually to World Migratory Bird Day by conducting a county-wide inventory of bird species and numbers.

The coordinator

- maintains records and files
- prepares announcements and newsletter articles
- recruits area leaders
- assists leaders in forming teams
- works with data manager to distribute checklists and other materials
- follows up with leaders to ensure that data is submitted in a timely manner

The Coordinator does not need to be skilled at bird identification but a geographic knowledge of the county is helpful. Time commitment: about 20 hours between mid-February and late-May and all day on count day which is usually the second Saturday of May.

Grand Mesa Christmas Bird Count Coordinator

An annual event held on New Years Day.

The coordinator

- maintains records and files
- prepares announcements and newsletter articles
- recruits area leaders
- assists leaders in forming teams
- works with data manager to distribute checklists and other materials
- follows up with leaders to ensure that data is submitted in a timely manner

The Coordinator does not need to be skilled at bird identification but a geographic knowledge of the count area centered near the town of Mesa is helpful. Time commitment: about 8 hours between October and end of January plus all day on New Years Day.

Contact Dave Price at 970-640-4508 or djprice50@msn.com for information/training for either Coordinator position.

Become a Member! Invite a Friend!

The Grand Valley Audubon Society Local Membership Application

Please enroll me/us in the Grand Valley Audubon Society!

Name/s: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

_____ Individual \$35 _____ Family \$40 _____ Student \$20

_____ I want to donate more to support the mission of Grand Valley Audubon Society! Please accept my tax deductible donation!

Make checks payable to GVAS and mail to PO Box 1211, Grand Jct. CO 81502 or apply on-line at www.audubongv.org.

Join or donate to National Audubon Society directly and receive the AUDUBON Magazine! Call 1-844-428-3826 or go online to www.audubon.org. Use chapter code D04.

Grand Valley Audubon
PO Box 1211
Grand Junction, CO 81502-1211

Website: www.audubongv.org

Check your expiration date!

Renew today!



The Great Blue Herald

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by the Grand Valley Audubon Society,
a chapter of the National Audubon Society.

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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.