



Great Blue Herald

Grand Valley Audubon Society
GRAND JUNCTION, COLORADO

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT - 122nd YEAR

Janet Gallenstein

This marks the 122nd 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 through 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 website to learn more about this conservation effort!

What: This year, restrictions for COVID 19 have been eased somewhat; however, Mesa County still has a high rate of COVID infections. Although this year we will be able to have a more usual Christmas Bird Count than we had in 2020, I urge all leaders and participants to take each other and your individual health situation in mind when participating (or not) in this year's Christmas Bird Count on 12/19/21. Many thanks to all of you for getting through last year's count with patience and continued participation. In addition, Nic Korte organizes a special bird count for Western Screech Owls held in conjunction with the Grand Junction count.

Where: We have two areas open for leadership: Orchard Mesa and Redlands West. This year we have several new leaders and we thank Denise and Mark Vollmar, as well as Ron Lambeth for their leadership covering these respective areas over the years. We will miss their experience and expertise in the CBC however, they remain active in other

Grand Valley Audubon MISSION STATEMENT

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



Photo by Bill Kelley, Northern-flicker at Blue Heron Lake, 7-24-21.

important Grand Valley Audubon endeavors! Should you or someone you know be interested in covering either Orchard Mesa or Redlands West, please contact Janet Gallenstein at jagbell2@gmail.com or call/text 413-250-4101.

If you prefer not to participate in a count, there is another way for you 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 Janet Gallenstein at jagbell2@gmail.com or call 413-250-4101 and she will put you in contact with the area leader of your particular location.

Mesa CBC: New Year's Day 2022

The Mesa CBC will be held on New Year's Day 2022. To participate meet at 9 a.m. at the Wagon Wheel Restaurant in the town of Mesa. As usual, CBC area leaders have recruited their own small teams and hopefully will be able to include more participants this year. Thank you so much for your interest and enthusiasm for leading and participating in this year's 2021 Christmas Bird Count!

BIRDS AND WORDS

It was just above freezing on a recent November morning when I joined the monthly Grand Valley Audubon bird walk at the Grand Junction Wildlife Area. Inspired by the leadership of Bruce Ackerman, president of Black Canyon Audubon who leads a walk each month, I knew we had a group of leaders who could do the same here. So far, it's going well ... and thanks to those of you who have stepped up.



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While waiting for arrivals, folks gathered and chatted casually with leader, Logan Wagner. Sometimes, my unending to do list can feel overwhelming. I had second thoughts about attending but I'm glad I chose to come ... And yes, we saw birds. A lone pole-perching Great Blue Heron absorbing the sun's warmth, mixed groups of White crowned Sparrows and Song Sparrows singing and a busy group of Ruby-crowned Kinglets gleaning insects from leaves. The familiar "keew" call of Northern Flickers and the sight of steady, rowing wing beats and the long tails of Black-billed Magpies appeared. No Wild Turkeys today, but plenty of mule deer, their elegant antlers easy to admire.

For me, it wasn't so much about spotting birds on a late Autumn day, but much more about the genial company of



Thank you Judy!!

We say a fond farewell and heartfelt thank you to Board Member and Secretary Judy West. She took this position on seven years ago. In that time, and missing very few Audubon board meetings, Judy generated amazing minutes, capturing every item in great detail. Over these years, Judy went from an accidental birder into a dedicated learner. She attends many field trips, both locally and internationally. We will miss Judy's dedication to detail, asking great questions and willingness to volunteer on our board for so many years. *We appreciate you, Judy!*

a group of people embarking on a casual walk with no agenda other than to enjoy the beauty of the day, the birds, should they appear, and to share stories and company for a few hours. This wasn't a race, a rivalry or a competition. It was a walk like many others I've taken where all could immerse in the simple joy of watching birds, perhaps deepen their knowledge, spark their enthusiasm and be part of a shared experience.

Join us for one of our monthly bird walks, or take on the larger challenge of participating in our Christmas Bird Count on Sunday, December 19th. It's part of a long running, nationwide community science project event. This year marks the 122nd CBC year. Visit our website to sign up or see our E-news about upcoming events at www.audubongv.org. Good birding to you!

~ Cary Atwood



Tumacnabac Field Trips 2022

Dave Price

We currently have five popular raptor field trips:

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Thursday Jan. 27 | lead by Dave Price |
| Saturday, Jan. 29 | lead by Brett Walker |
| Sunday, Jan. 30 | lead by Erin Jones |
| Wednesday Feb. 2 | lead by Mike Henwood |
| Sunday Feb. 13 | Super Bowl Sunday,
lead by Ron Lambeth |

The trips will be modified due to on-going COVID concerns. This years' trips will be shorter in duration (4 hours) and limited to 6 participants. GVAS will be sending out trip details and registration information after the start of the New Year.

HISTORY OF THE GVAS WESTERN SCREECH-OWL COUNT

Nic Korte

The Grand Valley Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is unique with respect to our counting of Western Screech-Owls (WESOs). We have led the world (WESOs are found in Mexico and Canada) with our high counts 10 of the last 11 years and have been among the high counts for three decades. How did this come to pass?

It all started when the “Screech-Owl” was split into two species: Eastern and Western in 1983. Although morphological differences are minor, their calls are quite distinct, and, hybridization apparently occurs only in a narrow contact zone. At that time, the birding “brain trust” of GVAS was embodied in Coen Dexter and Rich Levad two of the most skilled and careful birders I have even known. Both were high school teachers and when Rich retired he obtained employment with what was then the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, now known as the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies. Rich quickly became well-known for his meticulous observations and careful note-taking.

Each year, Rich and Coen put a lot of effort into increasing the species count for the Grand Valley CBC. The “screech-owl” was usually added by another long-time member, Edgar Muhr, who lived at 19 and L roads. Indeed, Edgar’s owl was the “tick” for the CBC for many years and the GV CBC reported one or two most years.

Those familiar with the current appearance of the 19 and L road corner should be aware that probably 20 large cottonwoods were removed from both sides of L road 10-15 years ago. This area which provided one or more owls for probably more than thirty years has not produced an owl for the CBC the past three. Loss of habitat such as those trees is what we are trying to offset with our box program.

When the WESO became its own species, Rich was curious about which species we had and how many. It should be noted that the Eastern Screech-Owl is found in almost as many Colorado counties as is the Western. Thus, our count circle is near the eastern edge of the bird’s range.

Enlisting his friend Tom Moran, Rich played a tape next to a large old cottonwood in the Riverside area. An owl not only appeared, but landed on the tape recorder. Thus began Rich’s love affair with WESOs, which he referred to as the Grand Valley’s “signature bird.”

Rich had an unmatched passion for rising early, and calling for owls. There were years when he apparently called as many as 100 mornings. He enjoyed finding them, and then “following them home,” as he put it, so he could map the cavity they were using.



Western Screech Owl, by Tim Avery, www.allaboutbirds.org

Eventually, his interests spilled over into trying to obtain a higher Christmas count. He had also started the nest box program motivated primarily to create opportunities for capturing and banding.

Rich made it known that he would like some help so I became one of his volunteers. During a couple of CBCs in the early 1990s, Rich, Tom, myself and a few others did some calling, and I was given a list of cavities where Rich had recently seen owls. My job was to spend the day driving from cavity to cavity to count owls that “popped up” to sun themselves. I was also instructed to play a call in hopes one might answer from inside or would be enticed to peak out. These efforts resulted in some double-digit counts (10-20) which were very exciting at the time.

Sadly, in the early 2000s, Rich was diagnosed with ALS from which he passed away in 2008. I began organizing the WESO effort for the CBC and managing the box program as Rich had to withdraw.

Rich already had the first prototype camera for looking in boxes. I was already driving all over the circle looking for sitting owls so it occurred to me that I could start checking all of the boxes on count day with the camera. This led to counts in the 30s and 40s. On one of Rich’s last counts, we met late in the day and celebrated having an unheard of 50—until I went home and found three double-counted – only 47.

Read the full story on www.AudubonGV.org/More/History

www.AudubonGV.org

AUDUBON PRESERVE – WETLANDS UPDATE FALL 2021

Report by Mike Campbell, Preserve Committee Member



Mike Campbell (L) and Larry Collins (R) installing posts for new wetlands interpretive signs.

Visitors to the Audubon Preserve property last summer were greeted with the sights and sounds of large dirt moving equipment. One short year later, the same visitors experience a new wetland teeming with life. Great egrets, killdeer, black-crowned-night herons and white-faced ibis were just a few of the species to discover the new habitat south of Dike Road. It is both exciting and encouraging to see how quickly plants and wildlife respond when given the opportunity. In addition to the habitat improvements, the Preserve Property subcommittee and hard-working volunteers accomplished a number of tasks this summer and fall including:

- installation of four new interpretive signs explaining the importance of wetlands
- clearing the cut into the pond north of Dike Road
- removal of invasive plants such as Tamarisk seedlings
- regular clearing of clogged inlet culvert
- installation of new fencing to direct foot traffic, as well as trail and bird blind maintenance

The final project planned for this fall will be construction of an outlet to vary the water level in the wetland. This will discourage unwanted plants such as cocklebur and cattails and encourage aquatic vegetation such as barnyard grass, sedge and other preferred avian food sources. Plans for 2022 and beyond, as we continue to raise needed funds, will focus on using fill to lessen the deep and steep banks to produce healthy and productive seasonal wetlands.

COSTA RICA TRIP WAS A SUCCESS *by Shannon Young*

This September I led a Grand Valley Audubon international birding trip to Costa Rica's remote Osa Peninsula. Locations included Drake Bay, snorkeling near Cano Island in the Pacific Ocean and hiking Corcovado National Park, the largest national park in Costa Rica. We visited Baru National Wildlife Refuge, and also swam near the waterfall at Uvita.

The Tarcoles River was teeming with species, including Boat-billed Herons and American Crocodiles. Holbrook Travel provided all of the 12-person group's needs, including the guide, food, hotel and flight arrangements. Costa Rica felt very safe because each citizen wore masks and washed their hands. They were slowly bringing their vaccination counts up as we visited their country.

Costa Rica Trip con't on page 5



A brilliant Blue Dacnis observed on the Costa Rica Trip.

BACK TO BIRD BANDING - FALL 2021 *By Cary Atwood*

After a long pandemic hiatus, fall bird banding returned in mid-September much to the oft expressed joy and appreciation by teachers and students alike. Alicia Bachman, experienced bird bander and traveling nomad injected energy and enthusiasm into what can be a lonely task, especially on dark, cold (and wet!) mornings. Day one began with a "run in": mule deer fawn meets and punctures mist net. Such can be the unpredictable day in the life of a bird bander. Thus began a month of avian captures, recording and education for about 850 Grand Valley 4th graders along with CMU students, assorted home schoolers and the general public.

Banding season begins long before mist nets are set. We contract and pay Bird Conservancy of the Rockies for a certified bander and work closely with Colorado Parks & wildlife who provide materials storage and a banding station locale within Connected Lakes State Par. We really missed having longtime educators Tracy & Renee with us, but we were

very fortunate to have volunteer, retired teacher and GVAS board member Mike Campbell and retired teacher Nancy Slipka with us. They brought dedication, ideas and engaging activities focused on migration, adaption and the science of bird banding volunteer Karen Manuell organized and scheduled all volunteers needed for the net runs and the recording all the data Alicia collected on each netted bird. They, and all who made the season possible deserve a massive and heartfelt THANK YOU for another successful fall bird banding season!!

Finally, a word or two about the birds: A total of 190 species were netted over the course of the month. Eighteen species were banded with high numbers of Gambel's White-crowned Sparrows, Orange-Crowned Warblers, Spotted Towhees and Bushtits (no surprise). One Western Flycatcher and a single Woodhouse's Scrub Jay were both exciting captures, along with 18 previously banded birds recaptured.



Alicia Bachman gives a demo on birdbanding.



Left to right: Karen Manuell, Birdbander Alicia, Mike Campbell, Cary Atwood



Birdbander Alicia explains what birdbanding is all about to a group of 4th graders.

Costa Rica Trip from previous page...

Ten members of the group were from Grand Junction, and two other from Hawaii and California. They were a welcome addition, because they both had been to Costa Rica before, and were avid birders. We were also very fortunate to have an excellent guide. Leo Garrigues was very knowledgeable and energetic, but also very patient with our group, and made sure that each one of our particular needs were met.

The highlights of the trip were seeing the humpback whales and false killer whales. One night, members of the group were fortunate to spy a Baird's Tapir wandering the shoreline. My avian highlights of the trip were seeing a Streak-chested Antpitta, a

Black-throated Trogon and a Lesson's Motmot, due to the skill of our sharp-eyed guide. There were the daily



Southern Lapwing.

flights and raucous calls of Scarlet Macaws, and the always entertaining monkeys. Of particular delight were the leaf-cutter ants on their tiny highways on the ground.

I hope the next big trip will be in 2023, and am considering locations such as Iceland, Alaska, birding trips to the Andes, or Patagonia: perhaps Chile? I'm thinking of cooler climes for this one, but I would love to know where members of Grand Valley Audubon might like to travel.

For destination dreaming, go to www.holbrooktravel.com



Grand Valley Audubon Society
P.O. Box 1211, Grand Junction,
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WINTER 2021

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January Zoom Program: What is Chytrid Fungus and How Can We Help?

January's GVAS Program presenter is Denita Weeks, assistant professor at CMU in the department of biological sciences. Weeks earned a Ph.D. while studying this fungal disease of amphibians and how the bacteria living on the skin of amphibians can protect them.

Weeks plans to present research she has been working on with CMU students on the Western Slope. The chytrid fungus infects the skin of amphibians and has been incredibly detrimental to their populations across the world. This fungus is present on some Western Slope amphibians, too. Part of her research focus is creation of a database of amphibian diversity in the valley, monitoring for the presence of chytrid fungus, and working with local agencies in conservation efforts. In January, she plans to discuss some newly-initiated citizen science projects in hopes of enlisting interest from members of our Audubon chapter.

Stay tuned for ZOOM details on the website or GVAS E-News.

PLEASE NOTE: Due to the evolving COVID-19 restrictions, all in-person programs are on hold. Watch your email and visit the website often to see when monthly programs start up again.

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