The Mountain Chickadee

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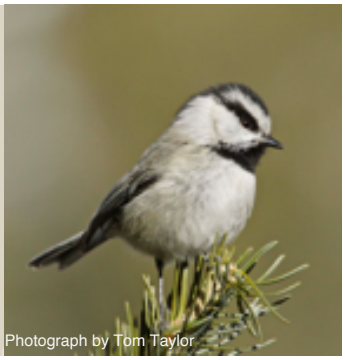
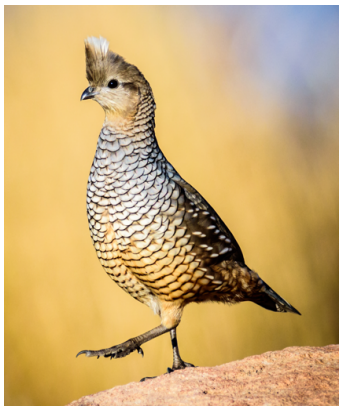

Photograph by Tom Taylor

In This Issue


Scaled Quail/Photo by Jill Smith

The Sangre de Cristo Audubon chapter represents a landscape that has been occupied for millennia by peoples of diverse cultural backgrounds. We honor that diversity and believe that just as we strive to protect biodiversity, we must include and respect the diversity of the many people and cultures that call northern New Mexico their home.

Keep Up on Our Latest Events and Field Trips!
Sign up for Eblasts on our Website

In the Cause of Conservation

In a move that could reverberate around local and state environmental circles for some time, Tom Jervis is stepping down from his position as president of the Sangre de Cristo Audubon chapter, after 10 straight years at the helm and many more in service to Audubon as well as environmental causes too numerous to count. Tom first brought his expertise and tenacity to the chapter in 1980, but his love for the natural world began percolating when he was a child and accompanied his parents on camping trips in the Adirondacks, near the family's New Jersey home.


Tom Jervis

Birding as a pursuit came later, when, as a graduate student in applied physics at Cornell, he met a fellow graduate student named Carlyn Nelson, who was studying bird behavior. Tagging along on her walks through the woods, Tom began learning and loving to ID birds. With the first Earth Day in 1970 as a catalyst, the two developed a growing awareness of the environment and the need to protect it. They were married that same year.

Tom's search for teaching jobs led them to Franconia, NH; Walla Walla, WA; and later to Las Vegas, NV; he joined the local Audubon chapters wherever they went. But Las Vegas "was not my kind of town," he recalled wryly, and when an acquaintance at Los Alamos National Laboratory offered him a position in semi-conductor research, he took it.

The Sangre de Cristo Audubon chapter had only a few hundred members then, "mostly bird watchers," he said. "There wasn't much of an environmental agenda." Tom soon became an officer and pushed for a more activist stance to complement the chapter's existing field-trip program, educational outreach efforts and mimeographed newsletter. Soon he was embroiled in opposition to the forest service's Mesa del Medio sale of old-growth timber in the Santa Fe National Forest. With strategic help from the New Mexico Environmental Law Center, "we were able to stall it, and eventually the forest service dropped it," he said.

Another victory came after intense lobbying for federal acquisition of the 89,000-acre Valles Caldera National Preserve. With allies that included the Sierra Club, the increasingly active Sangre de Cristo chapter convinced the government to buy the land in 2000. But unrelenting pressure was still needed to overcome a misbegotten designation of the new preserve as a for-profit trust. Valles Caldera – a regional gem for hikers, hunters, birdwatchers and many others - was finally taken over by the National Park Service in 2015.

Tom also played a key role in the development of the Randall Davey

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Threatened, Endangered, Extinct. Forever.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently proposed to officially declare 23 animals and plants extinct, including the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker, a ghostly bird whose long-rumored survival in the bottomland swamps of the South has haunted seekers for generations. Other species pushed over the brink include eight birds, one bat and a plant found only on Pacific islands. The newly extinct species are the casualties of climate change and habitat destruction, and the official declaration exposes what scientists say is an accelerating rate of extinction worldwide.

The Ivory-Billed Woodpecker was one of the first animals recognized in the United States as facing extinction, and its decline helped spur Congress in 1973 to pass the Endangered Species Act. Among the animals the act is credited with saving are icons such as the bald eagle, brown pelican, gray wolf and American alligator.

Here are excerpts from a personal account commemorating the extinction of another North American bird, the Great Auk. The essay, by Daniel Hudon, recently appeared on the website The Revelator:

A few years ago, after traveling more than 1,500 miles by plane, car and boat, I finally found myself on Newfoundland's Fogo Island. I was there to visit the Great Auk - or at least its memory. A gentle and curious diving bird, much like a penguin, the Great Auk once thrived in the North Atlantic and numbered in the millions. Awkward on land, it was a strong swimmer capable of accelerating underwater, then shooting above the ocean's surface onto an island ledge, where it would hop ashore to find a mate. The largest colony was at Funk Island, about 30 miles northeast of Fogo Island.

To know where certain animals thrive is to know something special about our world. The Great Auk I went to visit was a five-foot-tall bronze sculpture created by artist Todd McGrain for his Lost Bird Project. A handmade sign pointed the way to the sculpture, an hour's walk along

Great Auk
Illustration by John James Audubon

a grassy trail, with the sound of terns calling in the wind and waves crashing against granite rocks. For millennia Great Auks swam here, catching fish, resting on the rocks. But when European fishing vessels came to Newfoundland in the early 16th century, they seized on the birds as a source of fresh meat, as well as oil for lamps. Their feathers became pillows and mattresses, and their eggs were collected for food. By 1800 no Great Auks remained on Funk Island, and they were soon gone from Fogo Island, too.

When I arrived at the sculpture, I found myself struck by its elegance. I couldn't help but run my hand over its smooth lines. I thought about the facts that I knew: Great Auk partners both tended to their single large egg laid on bare rock; they took turns going into the ocean to feed; eggs had unique marbled markings. The last pair of Great Auks was strangled off Iceland in 1844 while incubating an egg.

Before leaving I felt I needed something to signify our visit, some sort of ritual. I grabbed my water bottle and poured some water into my cupped hand and let it drip onto the sculpture's head. In that moment, the ritual caught me and suddenly felt significant. It was a moment of honoring the memory of the Great Auk and grieving its loss.

Our grief for lost animals is an expression of our love. It's a reminder that the beauty and diversity of the tree of life should never be taken for granted, and that we, with all our strivings, ingenuity and empathy, still need to understand our own place on the tree.

Sangre de Cristo Chapter Activities

Field Trip to Bosque del Apache & Ladd Gordon Areas - Sunday, Feb. 6, 2022

Leaders: Rick Rockman 505-660-9972,
rockmanrjr@gmail.com
Tom Taylor 505-660-0860,
tn21tay@comcast.net

On this long one-day trip we should see flocks of Snow and Ross's Geese, Sandhill Cranes, a large assortment of ducks and other waterfowl plus raptors. Spotting scopes will be useful. Due to covid considerations there will be no chapter-sponsored carpooling from Santa Fe. Attendees must make their own driving arrangements and will meet the leaders at the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge headquarters at 9:00 a.m. Only Porta-Potties will be available and the headquarters building will be closed. The leaders can be reached by cell during and after the arrival time, and at the start of the tour. The refuge charges an admission fee. The trip back to Santa Fe will allow, if time permits, a stop at the Ladd S. Gordon Waterfowl Complex north of Socorro. Plan on bringing food and water; be prepared for wintry weather conditions. Due to the separate travel arrangements, there is no requirement to finish with the leaders. The birds will dictate the schedule for everyone. Contact the leaders for updates on the trip.

Get the latest news about upcoming field trips, and receive advance notifications and instructions for our Zoom programs, by signing up for our email list.

Audubon Southwest

Randall Davey Audubon Center and Sanctuary

The Randall Davey Audubon Center and Sanctuary is open, with masks required for all indoor spaces. The grounds are open Monday to Saturday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., closed Sundays (and in January). Stroll the gardens as birds visit the bird feeders, or walk the trails and enjoy the natural beauty and serenity of the 135-acre wildlife sanctuary. Bird walks are conducted every Saturday at 8:30 a.m., except in January and on holiday weekends. The Center is located at 1800 Upper Canyon Road, Santa Fe.

Historic House Tours

Step back in time as you stroll through the old Santa Fe style home of the artist Randall Davey (1887-1964). This docent-led tour will give you an opportunity to view some of Davey's most spectacular works of art, as well as a beautiful collection of Spanish Colonial and European antiques. Tours are held every Friday at 2:00 p.m., with masks required. Cost is $5 per person. Please reserve your spot by calling 505-983-4609 X28, or click here for more details. Thank you and stay healthy!

Calling All Passionate Conservationists

The Sangre de Cristo Audubon chapter is looking for passionate conservationists to serve on its board. We love birds and their eye-catching colors and behaviors, but we welcome everyone who reveres the natural world and is concerned about preserving its diverse plant and animal life. Your skills, expertise and energy could help us become even more effective in any number of ways.

The chapter is involved in a wide variety of environmental issues in northern New Mexico, from protecting endangered species and their habitats to promoting dark skies and water conservation. This is a chance to become involved in a science-based group that takes meaningful steps to protect wildlife and combat climate change - and there's always the opportunity to hone your birding skills along the way!

If you're interested or think you might be, please contact any of the following chapter board members:

Gordon Smith, gordonsmith@sbcglobal.net, 505-270-8866
Albert Shultz, shultzaw@gmail.com, 505-757-2754
Joanna Hatt, joanna.hatt@gmail.com, 802-318-7181
Rick Rockman, rockmanrjr@gmail.com, 505-660-9972

In the Cause of Conservation

(Continued from P. 1)

Audubon Center, the historic artist's compound on Santa Fe's Upper Canyon Road that was donated to Audubon in 1983. With the arrival of David Henderson - whom Tom considered a mentor and inspiration - as the Executive Director in 1985, Tom and David crafted a vision for the center as a place for public education and interacting with government agencies. The center, visited by countless residents, tourists and schoolchildren each year, contributes in a big way to Audubon's high profile as one of the premier science-based environmental groups in New Mexico.

The camping bug that bit Tom early has stayed with him all his life. He and Carlyn have made a habit of wintertime trips to desert locations ranging from southern New Mexico's Organ Mountains National Monument to southwest Arizona and Southern California's Mojave National Preserve. Their pop-up camping trailer has also seen use in Big Bend, Glacier and Rocky Mountains national parks, and they've made regular summer trips to a family cabin in South Dakota's Black Hills. The latter place "is a different world," Tom said, with its dark skies, solitude and herds of buffalo.

In the meantime, the chapter's membership has grown, with a current mailing list of 1,700 for the quarterly newsletter – upgraded to electronic status in recent years and paired with a website. The forest service seems to have taken to heart our longtime advocacy for restoring fire to its natural role in Ponderosa and mixed-conifer forests. The agency's appetite for curbing trespass cattle even seems to be gaining traction, Tom said, with the aid of political allies such as U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich.

Now 77, Tom plans to remain active on the chapter board, and on the board of Audubon Southwest, for the forseeable future. But he sees challenges ahead. For the chapter, the biggest one is ensuring our group has enough active members to keep it viable – an issue many nonprofits face, and one that stems partly from a trend for people to be more involved with their families and less so with volunteering, he pointed out. Beyond that our Audubon chapter, like many others, has struggled to diversify from its traditionally White base, he said, especially to local Hispanic and Native American residents. One positive note: our meetings, conducted by Zoom since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, are attracting larger audiences than our in-person ones did.

Other challenges loom for the ecosystems around us. "Water is the big one," Tom said. "Santa Fe is a desert city, and we just don't have the water resources to deal with climate change." Local forests will likely transform, too, as the climate warms. Stands of spruce and fir will shrink, and Ponderosa and pinyon pines will follow them upslope, leaving behind savannah or oak woodland. "It will take a generation or two," he said, "but it's going to be a very different place."

Can't Find Your Keys? You Need a Chickadee Brain

For the first time, researchers have shown that there is a genetic component underlying the amazing spatial memories of Mountain Chickadees. These energetic half-ounce birds hide thousands of food items every fall and rely on these hidden stores to get through harsh winters in the mountains of the West. To find these caches, chickadees use highly specialized spatial memory abilities. Although the genetic basis for spatial memory has been shown for humans and other mammals, direct evidence of that connection has never before been identified in birds.

The research is a collaboration among scientists from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the University of Colorado Boulder, the University of Nevada Reno and the University of Oklahoma. "We all use spatial memory to navigate our environment," says lead author Carrie Branch at the Cornell

Mountain Chickadee
Photo by Vladimir Pravosudov, University of Nevada, Reno

Lab of Ornithology. "Without memory there's no learning and an organism would have to start from scratch for every task. So, it really is life and death for these birds to be able to remember where they stashed their food. We've been able to show that natural selection is shaping their ability to remember locations."

If natural selection (survival of the fittest) is shaping chickadee memory, certain criteria have to be met. There has to be variation in the trait: some chickadees are indeed better than others at re-finding their stores. There has to be a fitness advantage: birds that perform better on a spatial memory task are more likely to survive and produce offspring. Importantly, variation in the trait must have a genetic basis. "Environment does still matter a lot in terms of shaping behavior, but our work here suggests that genes may create the brain structures, and then experience and learning can build on top of that," Branch explains.

How do you measure a chickadee's memory? Senior author Vladimir Pravosudov and his team at the University of Nevada, Reno, designed arrays of "smart" feeders to measure memory in a population of wild Mountain Chickadees in California's Sierra Nevada mountains. Each feeder is equipped with radio frequency identification sensors. The 42 birds tested were fitted with leg tags the size of a grain of rice which give off an identifying signal. Each bird was assigned to one of the eight feeders in each array. The feeder sensor reads the bird's ID tag and if it's the matching feeder for that individual, a mechanism opens the door, and the bird gets a seed. The scientists then tracked how many tries it took before the birds consistently went to the correct feeder.

"This is an effective system to test spatial learning and memory in hundreds of wild chickadees in their natural environment," said Pravosudov. "We have previously shown that even very small variations in performance are associated with differences in survival."

Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Meet the Potoo

A potoo is a bird once famously described as "little more than a flying mouth and eyes." Despite looking like they just stepped out of the Muppets, potoos (pronounced POE-toos) are a real family of nocturnal birds found in Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean. There are seven different species, all cousin to nightjars (a family that includes nighthawks and whip-poor-wills).

In addition to oversized eyes, these birds have large heads, short necks, long bodies, and small, curved bills. During the day, potoos hide by perching in trees and relying on their resemblance to broken-off branches to keep from being noticed. It works because they hold perfectly still and are covered in gray and brown plumage, which looks like tree bark. Unique slits in their eyelids let them keep tabs on their surroundings even with their eyes closed.

Common Potoo

After hunkering down during the day in tropical forests and savannahs, they spend the night catching flying insects (and occasionally bats and small birds!) in their gaping mouths. You might be able to spot these birds at night by looking for their eyeshine, which reflects back in the beam of a flashlight, but you're more likely to hear the eerie sounds these birds make. Each potoo species has its own unique call, given on moonlit nights, which range from the reverberating roar of the Great Potoo, and the melodic, descending song of the Common Potoo, to the guttural shriek of the Northern Potoo.

Although not considered threatened, all seven species of potoos are experiencing population declines. In some cases, we know that habitat loss is responsible. The American Bird Conservancy and its local conservation partners have created and expanded 38 bird reserves in 10 countries that provide habitat for all potoo species.

American Bird Conservancy

Climate Crisis

Birds and the Offshore Winds of Change

The nation's first offshore wind facility, off Block Island, Rhode Island, allowed the island to shut off the diesel generators that supplied its energy for many years. This seems like a solid step toward addressing the climate crisis. But as I toured the facility two years ago and watched the blades spin on the 600-foot-tall turbines, I couldn't help but think about Cory's Shearwaters, common in the area.

Cory's Shearwater
Photo by Warren Cooke

Virginia recently installed two turbines in federally owned coastal waters. Off Massachusetts' coast, Vineyard Wind 1 has been approved to be the country's first large-scale offshore wind project, with up to 84, 800-foot-tall turbines. And in the pipeline are more than two dozen other offshore projects as the Biden administration has committed to a total of 30 gigawatts generated by offshore wind by 2030.

What threat does the new offshore wind industry pose to our declining bird populations? With only a handful of turbines so far installed in U.S. waters, environmental impact analyses have largely relied on predictive modeling and human judgment to evaluate risks. But studies from Europe show that offshore turbines can both displace birds and cause collisions. For some species, displacement - when birds avoid areas that they would otherwise use - is the most concerning. It basically equates to habitat loss, and it can have a large footprint: One study found that Red-throated Loon avoidance of operating wind facilities can extend up to nearly 10 miles. Collisions are more difficult to assess, since carcasses rapidly disappear in the marine environment.

The good news? Offshore wind could be a real game-changer in the fight to reverse climate change. And we know that mitigating climate change is critically important to protecting birds long-term. So how do we move forward? We need to start gathering data. There have been some small but encouraging steps: Vineyard Wind 1 installed acoustic monitoring devices and radio-telemetry towers on their turbines, and will fund a small number of nanotags to study bird movement in the facility. They will also conduct bird surveys within the project footprint. We can and must harness marine winds to transition to clean energy. We must also do so in a way that keeps Cory's Shearwaters aloft for the next generation of visitors to Block Island.

Joel Merriman, American Bird Conservancy

Habitat Restoration: Setting Priorities

Conservation isn't just about preserving pristine natural habitats. To thoroughly address the climate and extinction crises, we also need to restore ecosystems that have been degraded or converted to other uses. But where to start?

The benefits and costs of restoration vary substantially across the world. The amount of carbon that would be captured by restoring a site differs depending on habitat and location, and the biodiversity value of locations also varies. Added to this, habitat restoration is much cheaper in some locations than others. So, which locations should have priority over others?

Dr. Stuart Butchart collaborated with other scientists to calculate the optimal distribution of restored sites under three criteria - minimizing extinctions, mitigating climate change and minimizing costs - using 1,200 different scenarios. Priority areas for restoration varied wildly depending on which of the criteria they focused on. But overall, they found that restoring 15% of converted lands in priority areas could avoid 60% of expected extinctions while capturing 30% of the total CO_2 increase in the atmosphere since the Industrial Revolution. This highlights the importance pursuing climate and biodiversity goals simultaneously.

While all biomes have an important role, priority areas tended to be concentrated in wetlands and tropical and subtropical forests. These sites typically had high carbon stocks, high species diversity and considerable loss of natural habitat. The study's authors said that their methods and results can help nations develop efficient plans that ensure restoration efforts deliver maximum benefit for biodiversity and climate change, while minimizing costs.

Birdlife International

Climate Watch

As winter approaches, so does the winter season for bird counts in Audubon's Climate Watch program, from January 15 through February 15. Like the Christmas Bird Counts, Climate Watch is a community science project – it relies on volunteer participants who count birds. Over time these counts will provide a meaningful dataset for use by experts who are tracking how bird populations respond to climate change across the country.

All it takes to participate in Climate Watch is a half day of birding, either alone or with one or two other people, any time during the month-long season. Each individual or team counts birds for five minutes at 12 locations in a 10-kilometer square. Our target species are bluebirds, nuthatches, goldfinches and Spotted Towhees - chosen because they're easy to find and ID, and are potentially sensitive to a changing climate.

To join Climate Watch, contact Albert Shultz, Climate Watch Local Coordinator for Sangre de Cristo Audubon:

Email: shultzaw@gmail.com
Phone: 505-757-2754(h), 505-699-1521(c)
Regular mail: PO Box 339, Glorieta NM 87535

Let Your Representatives in Washington Know How You Feel!
See Contact Info on Page 8!

Debate Over Prescribed Burns Explodes in Santa Fe

A simmering debate over whether prescribed burns are beneficial or destructive to the ecology of national forest lands exploded in recent weeks, ahead of a deadline for commenting on an environmental assessment for the Santa Fe National Forest's proposed Santa Fe Mountains Landscape Resiliency Project. The project would use prescribed fire and other methods to thin trees on about 36,700 acres of forest land, within a 107,000 acre landscape in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains that the forest service says is at great risk of large, high-severity wildfire and post-fire flooding and debris flow. The risk stems directly from more than a century of fire suppression that has created unnaturally dense stands of pines and other conifers.

The first round of the debate kicked off with a glossy and obviously well-funded eight-page brochure mailed to many local residents that claimed prescribed fires and other "fuel treatments" are not effective in reducing the amount or intensity of wildfires, or in improving forest health. The brochure also said prescribed fires would greatly increase local smoke pollution, including fine particulates. The brochure and the group behind it, The Forest Advocate, caught the attention of local media, and with their coverage the debate expanded. Then an informational Zoom meeting about the landscape resiliency project, co-hosted by the Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition, which supports prescribed fires, was disrupted for a time by radicals who scrawled obscenities onscreen and advised participants that, among other things, covid vaccines are a bioweapon.

Prescribed Fire
Photo by Virginia McDaniel, USFS

The methods described in the forest service's environmental assessment include preserving old-growth trees for endangered Mexican Spotted Owls and other species, thinning only trees of 16 inches or less in diameter, removing non-native vegetation and restoring riparian habitat. Perhaps most importantly, it acknowledges the natural and desirable role of low- to moderate-intensity fires in Ponderosa and mixed-conifer forests, and how it can help diversify and preserve overall plant and animal habitats.

The Sangre de Cristo Audubon chapter has long advocated for these goals and supports the landscape resiliency project as part of a welcome change of direction for the forest service, which in the past has often overemphasized timber harvests and other commercial goals in its management of public lands. Nevertheless, legitimate concerns about prescribed burns linger, among them:

Will these deliberately set fires increase stress on trees and wildlife caused by climate change, in ways that are poorly understood currently? In particular, will they reduce habitat for endangered or threatened bird species and other animals in the short term, possibly hastening their decline? And are some prescribed burns that purport to improve wildlife habitat in fact more of a misguided effort to protect homes and other buildings, which would be better served by stricter zoning, structural alterations and reducing fire-prone vegetation in the 100- to 200-foot zone around them?

The project's environmental assessment addresses some of these issues by stating that areas within a half mile of homes will not be treated, since the goal is not to protect homes but to improve the resiliency of the forest. Without any action, the EA notes, climate change will worsen insect outbreaks and reduce the amount of productive habitat in existing dense forest. And while thinning could have short-term impacts on the Mexican Spotted Owl and other species, the forest service says the risk of severe crown fires stemming from a lack of action is even more threatening.

It could be years before scientific studies provide certainty on these issues. Meanwhile the debate over prescribed burns, already reaching a shrill pitch, will surely continue.

Plan for Mexican Gray Wolves: Flawed

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently proposed a new rule for managing the recovery of endangered Mexican gray wolves. In a major improvement for lobos, the wild population would no longer be arbitrarily capped at 320 wolves. And the service would have more specific objectives for improving the genetic health of the population. Finally, there would be increased restrictions on wolf killings as those objectives are being met.

But wildlife advocates and conservationists remain unconvinced that the rule is adequate to achieve full recovery of the species. Mexican gray wolves will continue to be removed or killed if they re-enter their historic habitat north of Interstate 40, for example.

The service will continue to take public comments on the proposed rule until January 27, 2022. Wildlife advocates hope that the final rule will allow wolves to roam free and protected. The Mexican gray wolf, the rarest subspecies of gray wolf in North America, faces tremendous barriers to recovery in its historical range, including poaching, Trump's border wall and a small gene pool.

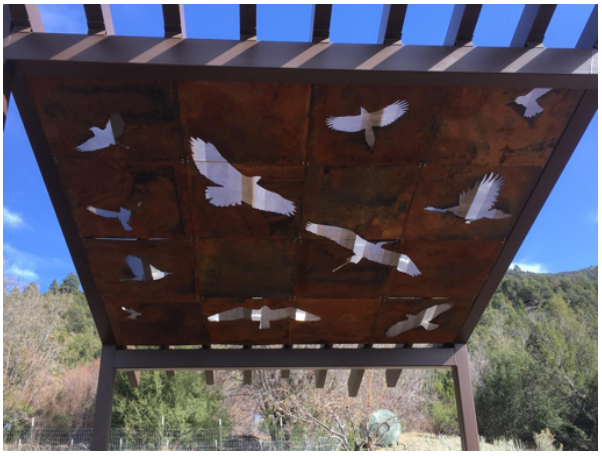
Western Environmental Law Center

President's Column

Tom Jervis

This will be my last column as president of Sangre de Cristo Audubon Society. I've been president since 2011 and prior to that held the office for a number of years in the 1990s. It has been a privilege and an honor to be associated with Sangre throughout, and I cannot express how important the support of the board of directors and the membership has been to me. It has been a great run but the time has come to pass the leadership of the chapter to new folks.

I'm not going away and plan to continue to help Sangre continue its leadership and activism for the sake of the birds and the natural world. Nature gives us so much - sustenance of course, but also respite and places where we can recover the sense of wonder that is inherent in our being part of nature. We humans have not always been kind to the natural world, climate change being only the most recent insult to the integrity of the planet. Although there is a growing realization that we cannot continue to abuse it, there are and will continue to be many skirmishes. Our work as defenders of nature will never end. My hope is that Sangre de Cristo Audubon and its members will continue that work; we really have no alternative.



The solar shade at Randall Davey Audubon Center, funded by a donation from Tom and Carlyn Jervis. Birders can find respite from the sun beneath, while photovoltaic panels on the top generate electricity for the center's David J. Henderson Pavilion.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

—Margaret Mead

The Gila River: Truly Wild and Scenic

A diverse coalition of New Mexicans is applauding the recent reintroduction of the M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act by U.S. Senators Martin Heinrich and Ben Ray Luján, which would protect portions of the Gila and San Francisco rivers and their tributaries as wild and scenic. A groundswell of support for these protections has been growing for nearly a decade from tribes, hunters and anglers, veterans, landowners, small business owners, faith and civic organizations, local municipalities and governments, and outdoor recreation and conservation organizations.

The Gila River

The community-driven act would secure the future of the Gila River by designating nearly 450 miles of the Gila and San Francisco rivers as wild and scenic, ensuring traditional and current uses of the streams while permanently protecting the unique habitat of native species including the Gila trout, the Yellow-billed Cuckoo and the Southwestern Willow-Flycatcher. The Gila and San Francisco, along with their tributaries, make up one of the largest undammed watersheds in the lower 48 states.

Safeguarding America's waterways also has been identified as a critical tool to mitigate the impacts of climate change. Across the country, rivers like the Rio Grande and Colorado are experiencing some of the lowest water levels in decades, affecting communities across the West. Protecting the Gila River watershed will help protect water supplies for southwestern New Mexico.

"The main stem of the Gila is a fantastically special river canyon," said Jon Harned, a property owner in Mimbres. "The wildlife, the fish, the history and incredible diversity of plant life make it one of a kind. Too many times our rivers have been dammed up. Cities and developers inevitably end up with the water. The river gives life. Not just to the plants and animals, but to the people and communities beyond the wilderness boundary. I believe the people of southwest New Mexico are best served by the Gila remaining a free-flowing river."

While the COVID-19 pandemic has hit New Mexico's economy hard, protecting the Gila and San Francisco rivers as wild and scenic could help spur spending in the Gila region. An analysis from the New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division found that outdoor recreation generates $1.2 billion in income and 33,500 jobs annually. Designating the Gila and San Francisco rivers as wild and scenic could contribute to a diversified and robust economic recovery, as protected areas often stimulate the formation of new businesses in nearby communities. New Mexicans are now calling on Congress to pass this legislation this year.

Gila Wild and Scenic Coalition

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Tom Jervis
Gordon Smith

New Mexico Rare Bird Alert
is on the Web

New Mexico Rare Bird Alert

Matt Baumann, Compiler
mbaumann22@gmail.com

Report sightings to
505-264-1052 (leave a message) or contact the compiler

Audubon en Español

Audubon ha lanzado su sitio web en español para conectar con las audiencias hispanas y disfrutar juntos de la naturaleza y la protección de las aves y sus hábitats. Visita Audubon en Español (http://www.audubon.org/es).

Es de nuestro reconocimiento que la Sociedad Audubon de Sangre de Christo es digna representante de un precioso pedazo de tierra que ha sido ocupado durante milenios por personas de raíces culturales diversas. Respetamos profundamente dicha diversidad y creemos que del mismo modo bregamos por la protección de biodiversidad, debemos incluir y honrar la diversidad de los muchos pueblos y culturas que reconocen el norte de Nuevo Mexico como su propio hogar.

Contact your Congressional Representatives -
Let them know that protecting the environment is important to you!

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