

The Mountain Chickadee

Newsletter of the Sangre de Cristo Audubon Society
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Photograph by Tom Taylor

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Sage Thrasher
Photo by Sharon Lindsay

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.

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A Precarious State of Birds

A newly released, comprehensive report on the status and population trends of 259 bird species in the U.S. identifies 70 “tipping point” species – including 17 found in New Mexico – that have each lost 50 percent or more of their populations in the past 50 years, and are on a track to lose another half in the next 50 years if nothing changes. Though not yet endangered, these birds could be next in line to face extinction.

The [State of the Birds 2022](#) report, produced by 33 leading science organizations, federal agencies and conservation groups, including Audubon, shows birds in the U.S. are declining in nearly every type of habitat – forests, grasslands, deserts and coastlines. Yet the report goes beyond simply pinpointing these troubling declines. Using a hopeful trend – waterfowl show strong, long-term increases where investments in wetland conservation have taken place – it outlines key steps for restoring “tipping point” species in a variety of habitats.

Broad regional partnerships may be key to protecting birds and their habitat. See the related article on Page 7.

The new report used five sources of data, including the North American Breeding Bird Survey and Christmas Bird Count – underlining the contributions of citizen scientists in tracking the health of breeding birds in habitats across the U.S. It found that grassland species are among the fastest to disappear, with a 34% loss since 1970. One of these is the Chestnut-collared Longspur, a species whose boldly marked breeding males perform fluttering displays in early summer. Other tipping-point species in our state include breeding birds like the high-altitude Brown-capped Rosy-Finch and the secretive Black-chinned Sparrow, as well as migrants like the bossy and entertaining Rufous Hummingbird that frequents backyard feeders in summer. The Pinyon Jay, a grayish-blue bird found year-round in noisy flocks in northern New Mexico, is also on the list.



Chestnut-collared Longspur
Photo by Joshua Galicki

In contrast, waterbirds and ducks across the U.S. have increased by 18 percent and 34 percent, respectively, in recent decades. And therein lies the key to helping all birds rebound, the report says. “The North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Federal Duck Stamp Program, grants from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, and regional partnerships are all part of a framework that has a proven track record with restoring and protecting wetland-dependent species,” said Martha Williams, director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “Now we want to use that precedent to restore (other) bird populations and conserve habitat.”

(Continued on P. 7)

New Trails and Land Restoration in the Galisteo Basin

In October, the [Santa Fe Conservation Trust](#) held a grand opening for its Conservation Homestead, a 300-acre parcel in the Galisteo Basin that features four miles of new public trails open to hikers, bicyclists and equestrians. The property - bordering the 9,500-acre Galisteo Basin Preserve and surrounded by nearly 6,000 acres of contiguous conservation easements - also expands an important wildlife corridor between the Sandia and the Sangre de Cristo mountains. But beyond providing wildlife habitat and public recreation, the trust plans to use the property as a demonstration site to showcase land restoration techniques that will lessen the effects of climate change on this and similar landscapes.



Locals enjoy the outdoors at the grand opening of the Conservation Homestead

The Conservation Homestead is the former ranch headquarters of the Thornton Ranch, which many people called the Thornton Homestead. But the land is steeped in history going back thousands of years. It's the unceded territory of the Tewa and Tano people, who were the original stewards of the land, and is home to many native plants and animals. In March 2020, thanks to the support of the Eugene V. and Clare E. Thaw Charitable Trust, the SFCT was able to purchase the property, forestalling potential

development of a housing cluster in what is otherwise a wide-open landscape.

Originally the idea was to purchase the property with the help of the Thaw Charitable Trust, protect it with a conservation easement and transfer it to a public agency for open space. But after the purchase, the SFCT's board

and staff realized they had the opportunity not just to protect the landscape but also to use it as a demonstration site for conservation work, and to show how the group's focus on connectivity and landscape-scale conservation can help mitigate both climate change pressures and the biodiversity crisis.

The Thaw Charitable Trust wanted to see the land return to a more natural state, so part of their support helped SFCT reseed the homestead area where buildings used to be, to support habitat for native and migratory birds and other wildlife. Weeds are being kept at bay by occasional herds of goats. Because the property's piñon-juniper terrain is similar to that of many other tracts in the region, workshops and workdays on erosion control techniques were held from early 2021 through this year to teach trail builders and others how to avoid erosion, slow runoff and spread rainwater over the land. Meanwhile, invasive elms and junipers have already been removed from an overgrown wetland, and wicker weirs have been built to force water to meander through the wetland so it can deposit sediments and sink back into the aquifer.

The SFCT's 10-year management goals include finishing an accessible trail for people with mobility challenges, installing wildlife drinkers, improving grasslands, reseeding some areas, continuing to build erosion-control structures and bringing the wetland back to life. The group also plans to install interpretive signage and offer educational programs for people of all ages.

The Conservation Homestead is located at the end of Thornton Ranch Road, off Highway 285 near Lamy, and is open daily from dawn to dusk. To learn more about the preserve and the restoration work going on there, please visit: [SFCT Conservation Homestead](#).



Chapter Activities

New Mexico Christmas Bird Counts December 14, 2022 – January 5, 2023

The National Audubon Society began the Christmas Bird Counts in 1901. These counts provide important information about wintering bird populations. There are close to 30 counts held in New Mexico, and members of the Sangre de Cristo chapter participate in numerous counts in its area. Novices are welcome and are paired with more experienced birders. For a list of counts around the state and other information, check out: [New Mexico Christmas Bird Counts](#).

Please contact the leaders of each count you want to participate in to make count arrangements.

Get the latest news about upcoming field trips, and receive advance notifications and instructions for our programs, by signing up for our [email list](#).

Climate Watch

The winter 2023 season of Climate Watch runs from January 15 through February 15. Birders throughout north-central New Mexico are needed to participate in this Audubon community-science effort. Target species for Climate Watch include bluebirds, nuthatches, goldfinches, and Spotted Towhees. Observers will need to record their sightings at 12 stations in a single day in suitable habitat for one of the target species. Can you take a day to make this contribution to a large, long-term dataset? If you are already participating in Climate Watch, would you be willing to have a new observer join you? For more information, contact Albert Shultz at shultzaw@gmail.com or 505-699-1521.

Like Birds? [Join Audubon!](#)

Audubon Southwest

Randall Davey Audubon Center and Sanctuary

The trails, restrooms and gardens at the [Randall Davey Audubon Center and Sanctuary](#) are open Monday to



Saturday, 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. The visitor's center is typically open 9:00 am to 4:00 pm, but we still have some gaps in our volunteer coverage. We appreciate your patience. Free bird walks are conducted every

Saturday at 8:30 am. **Please note that we are closed holiday weekends and in January.** Watch birds visit our bird feeders, or walk the trails and enjoy the beauty and serenity of the 135-acre wildlife sanctuary. Masks are required for entry into all buildings. 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!

Sangre de Cristo Chapter Seeks Program Chair

The Sangre de Cristo Audubon chapter is looking for a program chairperson to serve on its board. We have a special love for birds but welcome anyone who is passionate about the environment and preserving its diverse plant and animal life. The program chair, with the help of other members of the board, develops ideas for presentations six times year by experts who may focus on birds or a wide variety of other topics about the natural world and our experiences with it. This key role also involves contacting potential presenters and arranging dates and times for them to appear, either in person or via Zoom.

The chapter is involved in many different environmental issues in northern New Mexico, from protecting endangered species and their habitats to promoting dark skies and water conservation. If you're interested in this position or another on the chapter board, or think you might be, please contact Gordon Smith, gordonsmith@sbcglobal.net, 505-270-8866.

Why Is the Colorado River in Crisis, and What Is Being Done About It?

By Haley Paul, Policy Director, Audubon Southwest

Why are the Colorado River and its reservoirs shrinking so quickly?

We use more water than the river provides. The only reason we got away with it for so long was because the reservoirs were full when the climate's shift to hotter temperatures and reduced river flows began 22 years ago. We did not reduce the amount of water we used until recently, and it has not been enough in the face of drought exacerbated by climate change.

What happens if we stick with the status quo?

If we keep doing what we're doing, and take water out of the reservoirs - not because it's wise but because the law allows it - our system as we know it would crash. Water could not be released from lakes Powell or Mead. This is bad for ALL water users in the Colorado River basin. There is also the dreadful possibility of no water flowing through the Grand Canyon, or through the Lower Colorado River along the Arizona-California border. That would mean no Colorado River water for tens of millions of people, and no water for essential habitats, birds and other wildlife.

Why does this matter for birds?

A future without a running Colorado River would impact 400 bird species, including California Condors, Bald Eagles, Southwestern Willow Flycatchers and other wildlife in the Colorado River basin. The Colorado River Delta alone provides habitat for 17 million birds during spring migration and 14 million in the fall, from American White Pelicans to Tree Swallows and Orange-crowned Warblers.

How will New Mexico and other water users agree to the water reductions necessary to stabilize the river?

The short answer: we don't know. A deadline set by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation came and went this past August. It's unclear whether states and other water users will reach their own agreement, if federal officials will decide, or if the courts will be the ultimate decision-makers.

What are key strategies for cutting back water use?

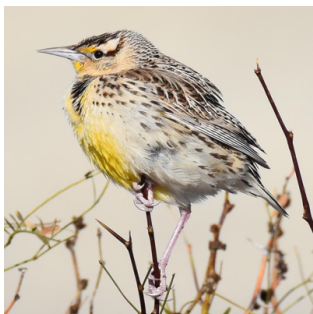
1) Upgrade farming irrigation methods and equipment to grow crops on less water. 2) Provide incentives for farmers to shift from water-thirsty crops like cotton and alfalfa to drought-tolerant crops like guayule and sorghum. 3) Restore degraded meadows and streams to allow for more water retention in the mountains. 4) Manage forests to prevent catastrophic wildfires that erode soils and degrade water quality. 5) Increase the reuse of purified wastewater for outdoor irrigation, groundwater recharge or even drinking water. 6) Boost water-conservation efforts from cities and businesses such as eliminating unnecessary grass and upgrading plumbing. 7) Approve funding to mitigate impacts to communities and to improve habitat. Funding should prioritize multiple-benefit projects and move beyond one-year water deals.

Environment

Meet the Chihuahuan Meadowlark

There's another meadowlark for birders to put on their life lists. The American Ornithological Society's North American Classification Committee recently accepted a proposal to split out a new species - *Sturnella lilianae* - from the Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*).

The bird's official common name will be the Chihuahuan Meadowlark, as part of its range runs within the Chihuahuan Desert from Arizona and New Mexico down into Mexico. The proposal was submitted by Penn State PhD student Johanna Beam, based on her undergraduate research that included vocal analyses and whole-genome sequencing for specimens of Western



Chihuahuan Meadowlark
Jack Parlapiano/Macaulay Lib.

Meadowlark, Eastern Meadowlark and what is now the Chihuahuan Meadowlark. "The genetic data show that Eastern Meadowlark and this new meadowlark... are actually not each other's closest relatives," said U.S. Geological Survey scientist Terry Chesser. "Eastern and Western Meadowlarks are more closely related to each other than to the newly split Chihuahuan Meadowlarks."

The markings of the new species distinguish it from the Eastern Meadowlark, too: The flanks have fewer and thinner streaks, the yellow belly is reduced and does not overlap these dark streaks, it has a smaller breastband and the tail has more white. Beam's research also showed a species barrier among the meadowlarks may exist as a result of their vocalizations. "The vocal differences between Chihuahuan and Eastern Meadowlarks are similarly as strong as those between Eastern and Western Meadowlarks," said Shawn Billerman, a science editor for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Birds of the World. "These vocal differences may be important in contributing to a lack of hybridization between Chihuahuan Meadowlarks and other meadowlarks."

Cornell Lab of Ornithology

World's Most Dangerous Bird May Have Been Domesticated 18,000 Years Ago

The Southern Cassowary is often called the world's most dangerous bird. While generally shy and secretive in the forests of its native New Guinea and northern Australia, it can be aggressive. In 2019, kicks from a captive cassowary mortally wounded a Florida man, and in 1926 a cassowary kicked an Australian teenager in the neck with its four-inch, veociraptor-like talons, slitting his throat.

But as early as 18,000 years ago, people in New Guinea may have reared cassowary chicks to near-adulthood –

thousands of years before the domestication of the chicken. Excavations of rock shelters on New Guinea have revealed hundreds of fragments of cassowary eggshells that were analyzed to see how far along each egg was before hatching. A large



Southern Cassowary
David Hollic/Macaulay Lib.

number of fragments came from almost fully developed eggs, suggesting people were hatching the eggs and raising cassowary chicks, said Kristina Douglass, an archaeologist at Penn State University. Supporting her claim, some Indigenous groups on the island still raise cassowary chicks from eggs taken out of wild nests (it's only once they reach adulthood that the danger begins).

While collecting eggs and raising hatchlings is an early step in domestication, it's unlikely that cassowaries were ever fully bred in the manner of chickens. But if New Guinea's early inhabitants hand-reared cassowaries, they would have been some of the earliest-known humans to systematically tame birds, Douglass and her team concluded. One scientist not involved in the research said it can be used in other places to further develop our understanding of how important birds have been to humans.

New York Times

Feeder Watch Data Grows in Value

About 20,000 people take part each winter in [Project FeederWatch](#), a joint program run by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Birds Canada. This citizen-science project has a somewhat misleading name, since folks can participate with or without a feeder – reporting birds drawn to special plantings or water features is equally helpful.

Participants make periodic two-day counts from November through April on a flexible schedule, then enter their counts online. The resulting data is analyzed by scientists to draw a picture of wintertime bird abundance and distribution. The data also indicate how many individuals of each species are seen, information that helps measure changes in the winter ranges and abundances of bird species over time.

FeederWatch leader Emma Greig noted that the recently released State of the Birds 2022 report found bird populations in nearly every kind of habitat in the U.S. are declining, making the wealth of data collected by the project even more important. This year's Project FeederWatch began November 1 and ends April 30, 2023. In the U.S. there is a participation fee of \$18.

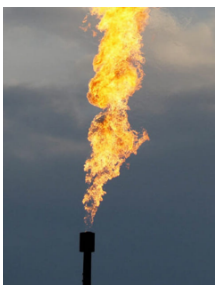
Climate Crisis

Stronger Curbs Enacted as Methane Emissions Continue to Rise

The Environmental Protection Agency recently released a supplemental rule proposal for strong, commonsense protections against methane and other harmful pollution from the oil and gas industry. The proposal improves on a draft rule that EPA issued last November to curb methane from the oil and gas sector, and builds on strong state safeguards already in place in New Mexico. The new rule comes as research has revealed the oil-industry practice of burning unwanted methane is less effective than previously assumed, resulting in new estimates for releases of the greenhouse gas in the U.S. that are about five times as high as earlier ones. Other new research shows a troubling rise in global methane emissions, possibly from agricultural sources.

The quickest way to affect the pace of global warming would be to cut emissions of methane, the second-largest contributor to climate change. It has a warming impact 80 times greater than carbon dioxide over a 20-year period. Scientists are studying whether unusually large increases in atmospheric methane levels in 2020 and 2021 are the result of a “climate feedback” from nature-based sources such as tropical wetlands and rice paddies, or whether they are the result of human activities - or both.

Methane emitted by fossil sources has more of the carbon-13 isotope than that produced from wetlands or cattle. “The isotope data suggest (the rise in atmospheric methane) is biological rather than fossil methane from gas leaks. It could be from agriculture,” said Rob Jackson, a professor of Earth system science at Stanford University. He warned that “it could even be the start of a dangerous warming-induced acceleration in methane emissions from wetlands and other natural systems we’ve been worrying about for decades.”



Methane Flare
Clean Air Task Force

Meanwhile, a study of the three largest oil and gas basins in the United States found that burning unwanted methane in a practice known as flaring often doesn’t completely burn the methane, a byproduct of oil production. In many cases the flares go out and are not reignited, so all the methane escapes into the atmosphere. Improving efficiency and ensuring that all flares remain lit would reduce emissions in the United States equal to taking nearly three million cars off the road each year, the researchers said.

The EPA’s strong new methane rule should help, and will also go a long way toward protecting the air that families who are surrounded by oil and gas pollution have to breathe on a daily basis. The rule, like the New Mexico regulations already in effect, bans routine venting and flaring, and requires oil and gas operators to inspect all wells for leaks on a frequent basis. “For years, methane leaks from oil and gas drilling in the Permian Basin have inflicted damage on the

communities, fragile ecosystems, landscapes and wildlife in and around Carlsbad Caverns National Park and Chaco Culture National Historical Park, and threatened the health of people in New Mexico and beyond,” said Emily Wolf of the National Parks Conservation Association. “By ensuring strong and lasting cuts in methane waste and pollution across the country, the EPA can combat the climate crisis, benefit New Mexico’s economy, and guarantee future generations can experience our national parks.”

Sierra Club

Distributed Solar Would Save Birds

Distributed solar is so far the only form of energy generation that has very limited effects on undeveloped habitats. Installed on buildings and other existing structures, most distributed-solar projects, which use photovoltaic panels to convert sunlight into electricity, do not require the alteration of wildlife habitat – and for many bird species, the threat of habitat loss is critical to their survival. Examples of distributed-solar projects include rooftop solar, solar canopies built over parking lots, and community solar, where a group of community members buy into a nearby solar array.

By contrast, industrial-scale solar projects require several hundred or even thousands of acres of flat, cleared land. They are typically placed on previously undeveloped areas or existing farmlands. Although research is ongoing to see how land occupied by industrial solar could still provide at least some biodiversity benefits, these installations often



Northern Shoveler/USFWS

contribute to large areas of habitat loss. There is also evidence that the massive reflective surface created by the panels lures and kills migrating waterfowl and other birds, perhaps appearing to them like the surface of a lake. These projects often require new powerlines to connect to the electricity grid, too, which create both electrocution and collision hazards for birds.

Until recently, small-scale solar installations have been seen as less practical than utility-scale renewables, partly because of upfront costs. But those costs dropped by 60 percent in the last 10 years and continue to fall. Researchers have estimated that if every rooftop in the world capable of supporting solar power was fitted with panels, it would generate as much electrical power as Earth’s entire human population consumed in 2018 (although whether all that power could actually be harnessed depends on storage technologies and other factors). The U.S. is considered one of the countries with the highest potential for rooftop solar projects.

American Bird Conservancy

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

Lesser Prairie-Chicken Protected Under Endangered Species Act

In a victory for Lesser Prairie-Chickens, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently announced it will protect this iconic grassland bird under the Endangered Species Act. Two populations of the Lesser Prairie-Chicken will be protected by the decision: a Texas and New Mexico population that is being listed as endangered, and a separate northern population in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas and Colorado that is being listed as threatened.

"This is terrific news for these fascinating birds and the overlooked and much-exploited prairies where they live," said Michael Robinson of the Center for Biological Diversity. "We wish that the USFWS hadn't delayed this protection for 27 years, because quicker action would have meant a lot more Lesser Prairie-Chickens alive in a lot more places today. We'll watch closely to ensure there are strong protections for the places where these birds live."



Lesser Prairie-Chicken
USFWS

The Lesser Prairie-Chicken is emblematic of the storied grasslands of the Southwest. It's a species of prairie grouse commonly recognized for its colorful spring mating display and stout build. While historical estimates suggest Lesser Prairie-Chickens may have once numbered in the millions, its habitat has diminished across its historical range by about 90 percent, the result of the degradation and fragmentation of the southern Great Plains.

Aerial survey results from 2012 through 2022 estimate a five-year average Lesser Prairie-Chicken population of 32,210 across a five-state region. Although landowners and the oil and gas industry say they have had success with voluntary conservation measures to protect habitat and boost the bird's numbers, the southern area in New Mexico and Texas where it resides is considered less resilient, and there may be as few as 5,000 birds remaining there. Conversion to crops, cattle grazing, the raising of powerlines and telephone poles, oil and gas drilling, and the incursion of woodlands - as well as drought and high temperatures linked to global warming - all harm the bird.

Center for Biological Diversity

Final Recovery Plan for Mexican Wolf

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently released its final revised Mexican Wolf Recovery Plan with court-ordered measures to lower deaths, including those caused by illegal

killings and vehicle collisions. Mexican gray wolves - one of the most endangered canids in the world - have a binational historic range, but only 196 were counted in Arizona and New Mexico earlier this year.



Mexican gray wolf
Photo: Robin Silver

The revised plan calls for increasing law-enforcement presence in "mortality hot spots" to address poaching. Between 1998, when the wolves were reintroduced, and 2020, 119 wolves were killed illegally. Scientists and advocates have criticized the service for loaning telemetry receivers programmed to the wolves' radio-collars to ranchers. Two people in possession of the receivers are among the fewer than 10 individuals who have killed Mexican gray wolves and been held accountable.

The revised plan calls for the agency to foster awareness and tolerance of wolves among local communities, ranchers and hunters, and to "implement site-specific livestock conflict avoidance measures" that would include pasture rotations of livestock, fence repair and range riders in areas considered hotspots of wolf predation. Conservationists warned that the service and its partners have a poor track record of avoiding such conflicts. Ranchers using public lands need to remove or destroy the carcasses of non-wolf-killed livestock before wolves begin to scavenge, in order to prevent wolves from being drawn to other vulnerable domestic animals.

The final plan does not alter the agency's low wolf population target numbers for recovery, which are not supported by science. (The service says one criteria for downlisting the wolf from endangered status would be separate populations in the U.S and Mexico that average at least 150 animals over a four-year period.) The plan similarly does not establish metrics for genetic diversity, which environmentalists continue to seek through a legal appeal. "Mexican gray wolves maintain balance in the arid and delicate ecosystem they call home," said Michael Robinson of the Center for Biological Diversity. "We hope the appeals court will require... measures like genetic metrics for recovery and releasing well-bonded family packs from captivity to prevent inbreeding."

Center for Biological Diversity

Will 10-Mile Buffer Protect Chaco?

New Mexico's congressional leaders have introduced a bill to permanently bar oil and gas leasing in a 10-mile zone around Chaco Canyon, while recognizing that the Greater Chaco landscape extends beyond this buffer. A coalition of environmental and Indigenous groups said the bill is a positive step but would have minimal impact on oil and gas extraction. "Much broader measures are needed to protect communities, public health and the climate from the cumulative impacts of oil and gas extraction on the Greater Chaco landscape," the coalition said.

Regional Partnerships: Key to Saving Our Birds?

The State of the Birds 2022 report notes that several projects around the nation effectively restoring habitat for troubled “tipping point” species are being carried out by broad regional collaborations among private conservation groups and public agencies. Often called “joint ventures,” these partnerships can advise, coordinate and focus efforts to conserve habitat across a wide area; they can also access funding earmarked specifically for collaborative efforts.

In New Mexico, the city of Clovis has partnered with [Playa Lakes Joint Venture](#) to restore more than 4,100 acres of playas - shallow, temporary wetlands found in the western Great Plains - and surrounding grassland buffers. The playas are key to recharging the local aquifer and also provide crucial habitat for 185 species of birds, including the Lesser Yellowlegs, a “tipping point” species.

The [Central Grasslands Roadmap](#) consists of 200 organizations from across seven sectors in Mexico, Canada, the U.S. and Indigenous Nations. These groups are collaborating to conserve one of North America's largest, most vital and most threatened ecosystems - grasslands, which span hundreds of million acres. The group is able to make use of grants for the protection of grassland species from New Mexico's Department of Game and Fish and from wildlife agencies in other states.



Pinyon Jay
Photo by Lyndia Radice

Is it time to form regional partnerships to protect and restore habitat for the Pinyon Jay, the Rufous Hummingbird and other “tipping point” species found in northern New Mexico as well? Jon Hayes, executive director of Audubon Southwest, said he and other Audubon Southwest staffers already contribute to several

regional efforts, including the Intermountain West Joint Venture, which encompasses the Rocky Mountain west from California to Colorado, and from New Mexico to Montana. Hayes said the joint venture's longtime focus has been the Greater Sage Grouse, but that members - after much urging - have begun to talk about conservation efforts for the Pinyon Jay, too, since over 90 percent of these birds live within the group's defined geographic boundaries. Audubon Southwest also participates in a broad Pinyon Jay working group convened by the USFWS to draft a conservation strategy for the species.

No comparable efforts to protect the Rufous Hummingbird have materialized so far. One issue is that these hummers winter in Mexico, underlining the challenges of developing regional or international partnerships to protect them and other “tipping point” species. “Collaborative efforts (like joint ventures) are big lifts,” Hayes noted. “But in reality, we need to get away from focusing too closely on single species anyway.” Bird habitats often overlap, “so if we promote healthy Pinyon Jay or Gray Vireo habitat, we're most likely helping Rufous, too,” he said.

A Precarious State of Birds (Continued from P. 1)

The report identifies three priorities for bending the loss curve of bird populations in America: 1) legislation that authorizes increased funding for conserving habitat; 2) reducing hazards to birds, including lowering the risk of collisions with buildings through bird-friendly building practices; and 3) expanding planning, collaboration and coordination for bird conservation.

One project under way that is featured in the report is along the Rio Grande in New Mexico. More than a dozen Native American tribes - including the pueblos of Santa Ana, Isleta, Sandia and Ohkay Owingeh - have led an effort to bring back the river's backwaters and oxbows. With the help of federal funding and agency resources, these collaborative projects restored riparian habitat for many birds, including the endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher and Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, while creating fertile meadows for culturally important medicinal plants.

Federal and state agencies do indeed have a vital role in conservation efforts, especially in arid sagebrush and desert habitats, the report points out. Bureau of Land Management lands support almost a quarter of the distribution of all aridland birds, for example. And



Bendire's Thrasher/Sonoran JV

National Park Service lands are important for species such as the Bendire's Thrasher, a tipping-point species whose breeding grounds include the arid cholla- and yucca-dotted shrublands of western New

Mexico. Bird conservation can be compatible with multiple land uses, but management plans for these agencies' vast public holdings need to ensure that long-term measures are taken to protect bird populations against activities that could degrade their habitat, including energy development, grazing and off-road-vehicle traffic.

Why protect tipping-point species now? The report notes that proactive conservation is the fastest, most effective strategy. Once bird species are endangered, they are at greater risk of extinction and require additional funding and decades of work to bring them back. In addition, birds are key indicators of environmental health. Any successful measure of our nation's conservation progress should include evidence of a turnaround in bird populations. Bird-oriented conservation initiatives can also help achieve the broader aims of wildlife biodiversity protection, climate resilience and environmental justice.

Dr. Peter Marra, director of The Earth Commons at Georgetown University, said that what's outlined in the State of the Birds report “is a recipe for how conservation biologists can work with communities... blending new technology and data to pinpoint the cause of losses and reverse bird declines while we still have the best chance.”

Sangre de Cristo Audubon Society
P. O. Box 22083
Santa Fé, NM 87502-2083

Sangre de Cristo Audubon Board of Directors

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Looking for Rare Birds?

As many birders already know, the dial-in Rare Bird Alert for New Mexico, long maintained by the New Mexico Ornithological Society, has become inactive. Most birders now use the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's eBird to keep up with nearby sightings of rare or unusual species. The massive eBird database enables birders to research everything from recent sightings to species occurrence and diversity at more than 127,000 hotspots in the U.S. alone, and it can be searched in ways too numerous to describe here.

If you're interested in recent sightings of rare species in the Santa Fe area, you can find them at [this link](#). However, please note that this info is for the Santa Fe metro area only and does not include nearby areas; for that info you would need to do a separate search on eBird for each area of interest. You can also sign up to receive daily alerts of rare sightings in your area and/or in neighboring locations. To get started, go to [eBird](#) and sign in, or click on Create Account.

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 Cristo 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!

Senator Martin Heinrich
U. S. Senate
303 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
202-224-5521
Toll free 1-800-443-8658
Santa Fe Office: 505-988-6647
<https://www.heinrich.senate.gov/>

Senator Ben Ray Lujan
U. S. Senate
Dirksen Senate Building
Suite B40C
Washington, D.C. 20510
202-224-6621
Santa Fe Office: 505-988-6511
<https://www.lujan.senate.gov/>

Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernandez
U. S. House of Representatives
1432 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515
202-225-6190
Santa Fe Office: 505-428-4680
<https://fernandez.house.gov/>