

The Mountain Chickadee

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

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Northern Harrier
Photo by Diana Rebman

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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City's Lost Habitat Could Be Found By Robert Guenther

The alarms first sounded last fall when Santa Fe birders noticed that a swath of cottonwoods, willows and Russian olive had been cleared from the embankment surrounding an irrigation pond at the Marty Sanchez Links de Santa Fe, a city-owned and managed golf course on Caja del Rio Road.

The concern was understandable. This roughly 8-million-gallon pond (only a chip shot from the golf course's parking lot) is an oasis for birds - and birders - in a water-scarce region. The pond's popularity is readily apparent on eBird, Cornell University's citizen-science website, where Santa Fe birders have reported 200 species on nearly 1,000 checklists for the pond and surrounding area.

Fears grew as it became clearer that all the pond's vegetation, particularly important for attracting migrating passerines, was destined to be removed. Sangre de Cristo Audubon promptly voiced objections in phone calls to Mayor Alan Webber and the Municipal Recreation Complex's (MRC) management. The city halted further clearing until our chapter could meet with the complex's managers.

On November 4, Tom Jervis, past president of Sangre de Cristo Audubon, and myself as the chapter's conservation chair, met with Jonathan Weiss, manager of the golf course and sports complex, and Avery Young, environmental scientist with the Ground Water Quality Bureau of the New Mexico Environment Department, to ask that the clearing be stopped permanently. Local birders T. Jay Adams and Tad Dale were also there.



Trees were cleared around this pond at Marty Sanchez golf course
Photo by Robert Guenther

Water issues in New Mexico are always complicated. At the meeting it became clear that the vegetation's growth had put the city in violation of its wastewater discharge permit, issued by the state. Under the permit, the city is allowed to use as much as 3.4 million gallons daily of treated wastewater from the Santa Fe Wastewater Treatment Facility to irrigate 134 acres of golf course and playing fields. This "reclaimed" water is stored in bentonite-lined ponds at the MRC until it's used.

Because the reclaimed water isn't fit for human contact due to residual levels of substances such as dissolved nitrates and phosphates, the state imposed conditions to keep it from leaching into the groundwater. One condition requires the impoundment to be clear of all vegetation, in order to prevent root growth from ripping the impoundment's liner (much as tree roots can heave a section of concrete sidewalk), and allowing the reclaimed water to seep through.

(Continued on P. 7)

The Harsher the Winter, the Smarter the Mountain Chickadee

A growing body of research on Mountain Chickadees shows that when it comes to surviving the harshest of winters, spatial memory - the ability to store and recover food - is a more crucial factor than so-called "intelligence" in deciding whether a chickadee lives to raise babies and pass on its genes, or perishes in the snow.

Chickadees have a habit of caching seeds, storing them away in nooks and crannies when food is plentiful and retrieving them later. Vladimir Pravosudov of the University of Nevada has studied Mountain Chickadees, tiny, conifer-loving birds with rakish white eyebrows who live in high-elevation coniferous forests across western North America, usually between 5,000 and 11,500 feet. Pravosudov theorized that chickadees from different elevations in the same mountain range, experiencing more severe winter conditions as they ranged upslope, might also have cognitive differences.

As it turned out, they did. Brought into the lab, Mountain Chickadees that lived at 8,000 feet performed better on tests of their caching behavior and spatial memory than chickadees that lived at 6,200 feet. The higher-elevation Mountain Chickadees also tended to have larger hippocampi (brain regions associated with learning and memory) than their lower-elevation neighbors.

To confirm the findings on birds in the wild, Pravosudov and his colleagues devised an ingenious setup consisting of eight "smart" feeders arranged in a square. Birds were fitted with leg bands containing tiny transmitters, each of which beamed out a code unique to its wearer. Feeders were then equipped with receivers that could be programmed to admit only specific chickadees. How quickly a chickadee



A Mountain Chickadee at a feeder in a spatial memory test. Photo: Pravosudov lab at Univ. of Nevada

learned which feeder it could access, and how well the bird could recall this information later, provided a measure of its spatial memory abilities.

Research by one of Pravosudov's former grad students, Carrie Branch, has

also shown that high-elevation female Mountain Chickadees prefer high-elevation males, and that females invest more resources in raising babies fathered by males with greater spatial memory abilities. And research by geneticist Scott Taylor of the University of Colorado has identified a long list of genes tied to chickadees' performance on the feeder test, confirming that the differences in the brains and abilities of Mountain Chickadees are not rooted in their experiences, but hardwired by natural selection.

Pravosudov next wants to study any shifting in the relationships among high-elevation and low-elevation Mountain Chickadees as the climate changes. When tested in a lab setting, high-elevation chickadees, although they have superior caching abilities, are slower to explore new environments than their low-elevation counterparts, and are less aggressive. "So hypothetically," says Pravosudov, "there's good reason to think that if everything gets warmer and the snow melts, the smart birds will disappear."

Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Chapter Activities

Field Trips

Los Luceros Historical Site Sunday, April 2

Leader: Ken Bales, kbales2003@gmail.com or 402-213-4040

This trip affords easy walking past historic buildings and through fields, an orchard and the bosque along the Rio Grande. We might get some early migrants and should see a relatively large number of year-round residents, including Lewis's Woodpecker. Entry is free for New Mexico residents on this, the first Sunday of the month, and \$7 for nonresidents. Limited to 10 participants. Meet at 7 a.m. at DeVargas Mall in front of Starbucks, or at the visitor center at Los Luceros at 8 a.m.

Upper Los Alamos Canyon Saturday, May 6

Leader: Rene Laubach, renelaubach@gmail.com

We will walk 3.8 miles from scenic upper Los Alamos Canyon to Los Alamos Canyon Reservoir and back. The service-road grade is fairly easy and permits good group viewing. We will be seeking Red-naped Sapsucker,

flycatchers, vireos and warblers as well as resident species such as Acorn Woodpecker and Steller's Jay. Limited to 8 participants. Meet at 8 a.m. at the junction of West Road and Omega Road (just east of the Los Alamos County Ice Rink), where there is ample parking.

Evening Program

White-tailed Ptarmigan in New Mexico Wednesday, April 19 - 7:00 pm

Speaker: Dr. John Bulger, Terrestrial Recovery Coordinator, NM Dept. of Game & Fish

Dr. Bulger will discuss the history of White-tailed Ptarmigan conservation in New Mexico. The presentation, at Randall Davey Audubon Center on Upper Canyon Road in Santa Fe, will provide an overview on the life history, habitat needs and distribution of the species, as well as recent recovery efforts.

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

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 in it. There's room to put your individual stamp on this key role, which also involves contacting potential presenters and arranging dates and times for them to appear 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.

Priorities for New Mexico's Ongoing 2023 Legislative Session

By Judy Calman, Director of Policy

This year a continuing surplus of billions of dollars will likely create the largest budget New Mexico has ever had, with major investments expected in education, crime prevention, conservation and more. Audubon Southwest is working on several bills this session as well as advocating for more spending on environmental issues through the budget process.

Our biggest project is the creation of a trust fund for conservation, which we have worked on for several years. It's now called the Land of Enchantment Legacy Fund, and we are thrilled that this year, for the first time, there is widespread agreement among conservation groups, many agriculture and industry groups, legislators, agencies and the governor's office to create this fund, which will generate consistent revenue to 10 programs that do not usually receive it through the regular budget process.

New Mexico is one of the only states that does not have a dedicated source of revenue for conservation. Our conservation programs currently rely on state agencies' general budgets or on one-time appropriations in individual legislative sessions, which is inconsistent and unreliable year-to-year. We are now poised to create a trust fund with a significant endowment that will generate financial returns for use in future years, ensuring ongoing revenue for programs which do not have consistent funding. Part of the fund will also be available for those programs to use in the next fiscal year. The fund will include the Environment Department's River Stewardship program, which focuses on riparian restoration projects, and endangered species work at the Game and Fish Department.

Other issues we'll be hard at work on include significant funding for the Strategic Water Reserve - an existing program within the Interstate Stream Commission's office which allows the state to purchase or lease water for two purposes: to protect endangered species, and to help the state comply with its Rio Grande Compact obligations. We'll also provide continued support of a bill to limit the use of neonicotinoid pesticides in the state, which can harm insects and leach into rivers creating impacts to all riparian-dependent species. This year's session ends March 18; stay tuned for updates.

Ferruginous Hawk: Audubon SW's Latest Bird of the Month

The largest buteo in North America, it has a wingspan of 4½ feet. The upper wing and back feathers are fringed in rufous and the lower belly and underwings are a ferruginous color.

[\(Read more\)](#)

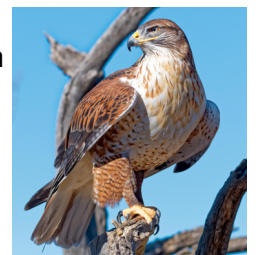


Photo by Schlomo Neuman

Environment

New Tech Revolutionizes the Tracking of Small Migratory Birds

Not long ago, scientists couldn't seriously consider tracking a bird smaller than a Mourning Dove through its migration. The typical tags were just too big and bulky. In the last decade, however, a new research network called the [Motus Wildlife Tracking System](#) - consisting of tiny "nanotags" weighing no more than a pine nut, and a collection of stations built specifically to pick up their signals - has revolutionized migratory bird tracking in North America. And it's giving conservationists unprecedented insights into the habitat they need to protect and restore to help save struggling migratory bird populations.

There aren't many tagging options that are lightweight enough to fit on a warbler while transmitting data to enable real-time tracking. Geolocators and GPS loggers are lightweight but only store data; they don't transmit it. That means scientists have to recapture tagged birds to get information, which only happens in a small fraction of cases. Meanwhile, satellite tags can transmit data but are too large to put on anything smaller than a meadowlark. With Motus (Latin for "movement"), once an individual or organization acquires the appropriate state and federal permits, they simply need to purchase the radio transmitters that emit the right frequency and affix them on their study subjects. Then, biologists can just sit back and wait for existing towers to "hear" the pings sent out from their bird's transmitter, which receivers can pick up from up to 10 miles away.

Placing new receiving stations is also relatively straightforward. Pretty much anyone can put up a receiver station if they have suitable funding and a site with a clear line of sight for the radio antennas. Already there are hundreds of Motus stations in the U.S., Canada and dozens of other countries; some are located on wildlife refuges, zoo grounds and even private ranches. Large areas of the western and southeastern U.S. are still sparsely covered, however. A newly appointed Motus director will work closely with the system's regional coordinators to help the tracking system grow more strategically and efficiently over the coming years.

American Bird Conservancy

The Magic of Bird Wings

The origins of birds' wings date back to the time of dinosaurs, but the cause of their development remains a mystery. Some scientists theorize that birds' ancestors may have lived in trees, gliding between branches before gradually developing the capacity for true flight. Others

posit that early bird-like dinosaurs evolved as fliers after developing the ability to hop into the air to evade predators. Regardless of how they originated, wings (and flight) are a key part of what makes birds so entrancing.

Birds have the same basic bones inside their wings that we have in our arms. But in birds, natural selection has modified these bones for flight, and birds' "hand" bones have shrunk and merged over time. Bird bones are also filled with tiny air pockets, making them lightweight yet very strong. Even so, birds need powerful muscles in their chests and wings to make flying possible, and their hefty flight muscles attach to a bony plate with a ridge called a keel running down the middle of their breastbone.

Bird wings come in a variety of shapes.

Elliptical wings enable owners to maneuver in tight spaces and fly quickly in short bursts, but they're not very efficient for staying airborne for long periods of time. This type of wing is common in birds that don't migrate long distances; examples

include doves, woodpeckers and sparrows. **Active soaring wings** are long and narrow, and are especially common among seabirds such as albatrosses. This shape lets birds glide on air currents with little effort, traveling long distances while rarely needing to flap their wings. **Passive soaring wings** are somewhat shorter and wider, making takeoffs easier. The primary feathers on birds with this type of wing fan out, with "slots" in between, making them great for catching rising columns of air. Big inland-flying birds such as eagles and vultures often have passive soaring wings. Meanwhile, **high-speed wings** are slender and pointed, enabling birds such as falcons to fly incredibly fast.

Penguins, although flightless, have developed short, stiff wings for "flying" underwater. Essentially, their wings function like a pair of flippers. Penguin wing bones are actually fused together, which facilitates this flipper functionality, but the resulting rigidity also makes these birds the only ones that can't fold their wings. Some other seabirds, such as auklets, guillemots and puffins, also use their wings to propel themselves underwater, but these birds' wings are also capable of flight. The longest wings in the bird world today belong to the Wandering Albatross, which has a wingspan up to 12 feet. But *Pelagornis chilensis*, an extinct predatory bird that lived 5 to 10 million years ago, holds the all-time record - its wingspan measured an incredible 17 feet.

American Bird Conservancy



Elliptical wings enable Mountain Bluebirds to fly quickly in short bursts and maneuver in tight spaces.
Photo by Jeff L. Wooden



A Cerulean Warbler fitted with a Motus tag on its back.
Missouri Dept. of Conservation

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Climate Crisis

Bees Get Their Own Vaccine

A biotech company in Georgia has received conditional approval from the U.S. Department of Agriculture for the first vaccine for honeybees, a move scientists say could help pave the way for controlling a range of viruses and pests that have decimated the global population. It is the first vaccine approved for any insect in the United States. The company, Dalan Animal Health, developed a prophylactic vaccine that protects honeybees from American foulbrood, an aggressive bacterium that can spread quickly from hive to hive, turning larvae dark brown and making the hive give off a rotting smell. While American foulbrood is not as destructive as varroa mites, it can easily wipe out colonies of 60,000 bees.

Scientists long assumed that insects could not acquire immunity because they lacked antibodies, the proteins that help many animals' immune systems recognize and fight bacteria and viruses. Once researchers understood that insects could indeed acquire immunity and pass it to their offspring, they realized they could cultivate immunity in a bee population with a single queen. But



Honeybee/ Photo by
Kathy Keatley Garvey

don't try to imagine a tiny syringe being inserted into a bee. The vaccine - which contains dead versions of the American foulbrood bacterium - comes in the form of food. It's incorporated into royal jelly, a sugar feed given to queen bees. Once they ingest it, the vaccine is deposited in their ovaries, giving developing larvae immunity as they hatch.

The introduction of a vaccine comes at a critical moment for honeybees, which are vital to the world's food system but are also declining globally because of climate change, pesticides, habitat loss and disease. Honeybees pollinate about one-third of the food crops in the United States and help produce an estimated \$15 billion worth of crops in the United States each year. Dalan hopes to use the American foulbrood vaccine as a map to produce vaccines for other diseases that affect honeybees.

New York Times

Tragic Bird Die-off over New Mexico Possibly Due to Climate Change

Scientists at Los Alamos National Laboratory are investigating the mysterious deaths of thousands of migrating birds over the state in 2020 in an effort to explain the tragic event. The potential culprit? Climate change.

Jeanne Fair, a Los Alamos National Lab scientist and one of the researchers studying the September 2020 incident, said the birds experienced three different extreme weather events simultaneously. Extreme high temperatures in parts of Colorado and New Mexico, combined with an extreme cold front and smoky conditions created by catastrophic forest fires, pushed the typically resilient migrating birds to

their limit. And she believes it could happen again.



Large numbers of Wilson's Warblers were among the birds killed in the 2020 die-off. Photo by Mike Cullivan

Tim Wright, a New Mexico State University professor who is spearheading a new academic program focusing on disaster ecology - a partnership between NMSU and the Los Alamos lab - said climate change is increasing the frequency and severity of these weather-related events. Recent studies by NASA and other bodies have agreed that climate change could be causing large-scale disruption to bird migration.

Some of Wright's students will revisit the 2020 mass bird die-off to better understand how climate change affects migratory birds. The research could one day help predict future weather disasters, he said. Fair said that migrating birds are a particularly important indicator of weather-related stresses, because they are affected by these phenomenon all along their migratory paths.

OneGreenPlanet.org

Building Technology Key to Combat Climate Change

Just about everybody understands that getting off fossil fuels is central to our climate goals. But we won't be able to do it without fundamentally changing our buildings, which consume an average of about 40% of U.S. energy. Even if local governments require residents to "electrify everything," with power coming from a grid increasingly supplied by renewable sources, a plausible path to decarbonization would require acreage for wind and solar power equal to the total land area of Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Ohio, Rhode Island and Tennessee combined.

"Energy-efficient technology" is a powerful way for buildings to reduce energy needs, especially during peak demand times. Air-quality sensors can be used to deliver air only when and where it's needed, rather than dumping it into empty rooms. "Energy recovery ventilation" transfers already-warmed air to the incoming air supply, rather than simply exhausting it out of the building.

These and other methods of "efficient electrification" can significantly reduce the need for future energy, even from renewables, and make transitioning away from fossil fuels much more achievable.

This article was excerpted from an [op-ed](#) in the Washington Post by Joseph G. Allen of Harvard University's T.H. Chan School of Public Health; Parichehr Salimifard of the College of Engineering at Oregon State University; and Jonathan Buonocore of Boston University's School of Public Health.

Let Your Representatives in Washington Know How You Feel!

See Contact Info on Page 8

Feral Cattle Removed from Gila Wilderness through Lethal Means

The Gila National Forest recently closed a large portion of the storied Gila Wilderness to remove feral cattle by shooting them from helicopters. The estimated 150 feral cattle in the area have been aggressive towards wilderness visitors and have trampled stream banks and springs, causing erosion and polluting critical water sources in one of the largest and most crucial publicly-owned natural habitats in the southwestern U.S. The aerial shooting – which ended Feb. 26 - was deemed necessary due to the area's remote, rugged topography and the wildness of the feral cattle.

A last-minute lawsuit by the New Mexico Cattle Growers and Humane Farming associations to halt the operation was rejected by a federal judge. Years of roundup efforts and subsequent monitoring have confirmed that feral cows in the Gila Wilderness are unowned, unbranded animals that have been reproducing independently of any ranching operation. There are no ranches or active grazing allotments close to the area occupied by the cattle.

A number of conservation groups applauded the Forest Service operation, which also received support from the Chiricahua Apache Nation Council and the Grant County Commission. The dead cattle will be left onsite to naturally decompose and provide food for scavengers, while Forest Service staff will ensure no carcasses are close to or in any water body or spring, or other sensitive area.

Wood Storks Are Latest ESA Success

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently announced that it's proposing to remove the Wood Stork from the endangered species list because the bird has recovered. Wood Storks were down to only 5,000 nesting pairs in the U.S. in the 1970s, but there are now more than 11,000 pairs across Florida, Georgia and other states.

The move comes during the Endangered Species Act's 50th anniversary year and underscores that legislation's paramount importance in preventing the extinction of plants and animals, and enabling them to recover. The ESA originally became law on Dec. 28, 1973.

Wood Storks were protected in 1984 after the species had declined from approximately 20,000 nesting pairs in the late 1930s. The decline was largely due to the draining and development of wetlands. After the species was designated as endangered, work began to preserve and restore wetlands and protect nesting areas. Today, the Wood Stork's range includes north Florida, Alabama,

Georgia, Mississippi and the Carolinas. Where few or none had existed in these areas historically, multiple breeding colonies now exist today.



Wood Storks
Eric Horan USFWS

But the Wood Stork's Everglades habitat remains threatened by poor water-management practices, which have greatly changed the natural flooding and drying patterns of the ecosystem. Wood Stork nesting has crashed in Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, which was once the largest Wood Stork nursery in North America. The stork's fate in South Florida underscores the need to protect and restore naturally functioning wetlands for the species who depend on them.

Center for Biological Diversity

Will Jaguars Return to New Mexico?

Jaguars could roam again in New Mexico if a recent petition to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to reintroduce the big cats to the Southwest is successful. The largest cat in the Americas was put on the endangered species list 50 years ago, but because of federal inaction, only a single known wild jaguar now survives in the U.S.

The petition from the Center for Biological Diversity requests reintroduction of jaguars to the Gila National Forest, which includes the Gila Wilderness and adjoining Aldo Leopold Wilderness. It also calls for the designation of critical habitat for jaguars' recovery in New Mexico and Arizona, including space to facilitate safe cross-border movements between the U.S. and Mexico.

Returning jaguars to the American Southwest would help save the largely isolated population in northwestern Mexico, which has low genetic diversity. Climate change adds urgency for the jaguar to be able to expand its range to the north. Scientific studies have found the Gila National Forest and the broader Mogollon Plateau have excellent jaguar habitat; the forest harbors abundant deer, elk and javelina that are jaguars' preferred prey.

Jaguars evolved in North America millions of years ago before expanding their range southward. Explorers and colonists encountered jaguars from California to the Carolinas, yet the animals were killed one by one without concern for their ecological importance. The last known female jaguar in the U.S. was shot in 1963 in Arizona, in the Apache National Forest that adjoins the Gila National Forest. She had elk remains in her digestive system. The only jaguar known to live in the U.S. today is a male photographed repeatedly in Arizona's Chiricahua Mountains. He was almost certainly born in Mexico.

Center for Biological Diversity

Finding Birds and Ancestors at Nanih Waiya, the Mother Mound

Editor's note: Aimee Michelle Roberson is an enrolled member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, and the southwest regional director for the American Bird Conservancy. The excerpt below is from an article for ABC in which she outlined "the four R's" - relationship, responsibility, reciprocity and redistribution – core values common to many Indigenous cultures that can guide all of us humans in treating our relatives, whether human, bird or tree. She also recalled how, growing up away from her tribe's traditional homelands, it was only recently that she journeyed to visit Nanih Waiya, the Mother Mound in Mississippi that is the central place of creation and emergence for her people:



Nanih Waiya mound in Mississippi
Photo by Ditch Fisher

The Nanih Waiya. Holitopa Ishki (Beloved Mother). My mouth finds the words as I speak softly to the Earth. Her waters call me, speaking of life and death. My heartbeat quickens as she comes into view, cloaked in green, yellow, and red grass. Nanih Waiya, Holitopa Ishki. Coming home to a

place I've never been. Nanih Waiya, Holitopa Ishki. Climbing slowly, I have feelings I have never felt before. I step gingerly as I reach the top. Nanih Waiya, Holitopa Ishki. Bright rays of sunshine break through the moody clouds, piercing the fog, illuminating my mind.

Scanning the landscape, my heart delights to see Fvkit (Wild Turkeys) walking across the field below me. I drop to my knees to watch them and feel the softness of her - Holitopa Ishki. My hand touches Mother Earth, a ray of light from Hvshtahli (Father Sun) catches my eyes, and my heart bursts into flames. Holitopa Ishki. The Fvkit call to each other, slowly walking across the field toward the river. Fala (American Crow) calls from the trees. Tishkila (Blue Jay), Bishkommak (Northern Cardinal), and Hattak Lhiposh (Red-shouldered Hawk) respond. Biskinik (Yellow-bellied Sapsucker), the news bird, is drumming, announcing my presence. My heart sings. I am home.

Holitopa Ishki. A part of me lives here with my ancestors. I pull some strands of hair from the back of my head and press them into the Earth so they will not forget me. I will not forget this home. Holitopa Ishki. I lay on my back, making full contact with her. With them. My body relaxes completely. Peace washes over me. I am - we are - Earth. Holitopa Ishki. Chahta sia hoke. (I am proud to be Choctaw.)



Biskinik (Yellow-bellied Sapsucker) - The News Bird
Photo by Marti Phillips

City's Lost Habitat Could Be Found (Continued from P. 1)

Young of the NMED indicated that the only way to halt the vegetation removal without jeopardizing the city's use of the reclaimed water would be for the city to seek an amendment to its permit, requiring public hearings by the state and additional expenses for the city. Young added that it was far from guaranteed that the state would approve such an amendment, since other golf courses around the state have similar conditions on their use of reclaimed water.

Weiss, who took over as manager of the MRC last April and is a birder himself, stated that he wants birds and birders to use the MRC. He suggested that birders might be interested in a water feature on the Marty Sanchez Links that fell into disrepair some years ago and has potential to be a refuge for birds and birders. The water feature has two ponds connected by a waterway that has not been functioning for years. In addition, the feature's water pump is in disrepair and the condition of the underground piping that circulates water from the lower pond to the upper pond is unknown. Since these ponds and stream would not be used to store reclaimed water, vegetation could be allowed to grow alongside them, if the feature is rehabilitated.

On November 17, Weiss and the birders from the first meeting were joined by Deanna Einspahr, Gail Szpatura, Lonnie Howard, and Tom Taylor, our chapter's past program chair, to inspect the water feature and gauge its potential for birds. Getting to this spot requires parking along Landfill Access Road, entering the golf course through a locked gate, and walking on a cart path alongside a tee and fairway to the water feature. Nevertheless, participating birders agreed that the feature could become important habitat. Based on this feedback, Weiss agreed to explore the habitat enhancement with the birding community.

In a recent phone call, Weiss said that as soon as the ground thaws, workers will dig to see if the underground piping is functioning or needs replacement. He then will solicit bids to replace the pump. Once he has firm cost estimates in hand, he said, he would contact the chapter to explore possible next steps in habitat enhancement.

To be sure, even an enhanced water feature would have numerous questions surrounding it. One will be cost and whether the city will pay for the repairs. Equally vexing could be the issue of access for birders and potential conflict with golfers. While the water feature is outside the fairway's rough, birders could be at risk from errant golf balls – as a number of balls in the mud near one of the ponds made clear.

Sometimes when one door closes, another opens. Time will tell whether the potential repair of this water feature is a new door opening for birds and birders at the MRC.

Editor's Note: Robert Guenther is Conservation Chair of the Sangre de Cristo Audubon chapter.

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Looking for Rare Birds?

As many birders 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!

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