



The

Valley Harrier

Newsletter of the
Arkansas Valley
Audubon Society
(Colorado)

Volume XXXVI Issue

March 2010

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

“Watching Nature’s Firsts”

by Marilyn McBirney

Spring is a great time to get out and explore your world! If you think Spring isn't "sprung" yet, look again. Life is growing; you just need to look for it. Buds are swelling; plants are growing – sometimes sending out unseen roots while other plants are already sprouting. In early spring it takes a careful observer, but if you look closely and listen you can feel it building. Birds are singing to establish territories and attract mates, and then continue their vocalizations as they prepare their nests. It is fun to watch for the return of firsts in my yard and compare to other years. It amazes me how consistently Mr. Robin would appear in the cottonwood by the barn in mid January each year, then I wait and watch to see when the Mrs. would appear, usually weeks later.

Watching the patterns of nature unfold and comparing their timing from year to year isn't just for fun, it's a science, the science of phenology. An example of phenology in science was illustrated at our February meeting concerning the flammulated owls and how phenology factors such as the date the first egg is laid are being noted. Since this bird species has been studied at the same site since 1981 it has shown that date of first egg lay is now 7 days earlier! This has been linked statistically to increasing temperature.

Observations of changes like this with birds and plants are related to climate change. Is this really such a problem? Since the flammulated owl's food source is primarily moths, how the moths are reacting to these temperature increases is critical to the owl's success. Fortunately these moths are on the same cycle, but in other species where the prey develops a disjointed pattern from their predator, it can become a fatal blow

(continued on page 3)

MARCH PROGRAM

Messages in Stone

For our March program we are partnering with the Nature and Raptor Center of Pueblo, Pueblo City-County Library District, and the Pueblo Zoological Society to feature an exciting program that will share information about our own rocky surroundings. Vincent Matthews is the State Geologist of Colorado and Director of the Colorado Geological Survey. His excellent, informative, and dynamic presentation will leave you passionate about our geology.

Friday night's lecture at the Pueblo City-County Library will provide a pot-pourri of this rich geology. On Saturday, we are also offering a field trip to Pueblo State Park for some spectacular examples of faults, folds, and ancient shoreline deposits.

This is a special educational presentation and field trip for the public and features free admission. Don't miss this interesting presentation at the **InfoZone News Museum on the 4th floor of the Rawlings Public Library, 100 East Abriendo Ave, Pueblo on Friday 12 March at 7:00 p.m. and the field trip on Saturday 13 March at Pueblo State Park.** See you there!

****Note New Locations!****

Be sure to check www.socobirds.org for updates!

CONSERVATION NOTES

by *SeEtta Moss*

—Responsible bird feeding—I suspect that a good portion of AVAS members do at least some bird feeding. The benefit of supplemental bird feeding on the health of birds is debatable, but there is no doubt that it provides a lot of enjoyment to many. It brings birds closer so that we can more readily enjoy them. As we get the chance to see birds more easily, it is vital that we 'do no harm.' Keep feeders clean so that birds don't get poisoned. Place feeders so they do not draw the birds to crash into windows.

Inappropriate foods should not be given to birds—bacon drippings should not be fed to birds (too much of a long term risk according to the Cornell School of Ornithology). Jelly has a much higher sugar concentration than their natural foods so it should be given in limited quantity, to reduce nutritional problems as well as to avoid birds fouling their feathers, and only during cold spells in the spring for limited periods of time.

Cornell warns that jelly feeding should be stopped if the birds are bringing their offspring in to it more than one time each day. Young birds need more protein (from insects) than sugars. For more information go to the Cornell bird feeding web pages at <http://www.allaboutbirds.org/netcommunity/Page.aspx?pid=1142> (This is a long URL so highlight with your cursor, copy it and paste in the address bar.) It has a lot of great tips about types of seed and other foods to feed, kind of birdfeeder to use, where to place birdfeeder and more.

Don't forget to take your birdfeeders down this spring when the bears

come out. Research has shown that bird feeding can kill bears, according to the Colorado Division of Wildlife. "Studies show that a big meal of tasty, nutritious seeds—a natural food for bears—is often the first reward a bear gets for exploring human places." Read more at <http://wildlife.state.co.us/WildlifeSpecies/LivingWithWildlife/Mammals/LivingWithBears.htm>.

I hope you participated in the Great Backyard Bird Count in February. I did, both with birds around Cañon City and those at my birdfeeders. Like many in Colorado, most of the birds coming to my birdfeeders are Pine Siskins, Dark-eyed Juncos, House Finches and chickadees (I have Mountain Chickadees in my yard).

This year I was delighted to see at one of my thistle feeders a very bright Lesser Goldfinch, a species that should be far south of Colorado at this time of year. Find out what birds were found in your town at <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/>

Lesser Prairie-Chickens in danger in Colorado! This species of prairie grouse are found in limited areas of only 5 states—Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas panhandle, New Mexico and southeast Colorado. The Colorado Division of Wildlife reports of recent surveys show that **"fewer than 300 breeding birds remain" in Colorado.** That's a terribly low number, especially since the birds are mostly in isolated groups spread over hundreds of miles. This limits the available genetic pool necessary for survival. Populations were estimated at 1,000-2,000 birds in 2000.

The main reason for their decline in Colorado, and the others states, is loss of habitat as grasslands

were converted to agricultural and other human uses over the past century. Since 2000 the population has plummeted with other factors involved including a severe drought from 2002-5, then a catastrophic snow storm in 2006. Birds collide with fences, and land use for energy production further fragments habitat. I am a supporter of wind energy but I firmly believe that it, and **all energy production, must be done in a responsible manner.**

The current push in Colorado, and other states, to put in wind farms and the transmission lines associated with them without proper siting requirements is just plain dumb. Research has shown that Lesser Prairie-Chickens, like other grassland bird species, have evolved to avoid nesting near tall structures (such as transmission lines). These structures provide perches for predatory raptors.

Probably, wind turbines plus the roads that accompany them will be avoided by the Prairie-Chickens. AVAS will be participating in a National Audubon Alert to make decision makers aware of the threats to this species from wind energy and the need for siting restrictions. Check



Red-tailed Hawk

Bill Schmoker

SeEtta blogs at <http://Bird-AndNature.blogspot.com>

**AVAS WELCOMES
NEW MEMBERS**

In the past couple of months the following people have become new members of the National and/or Arkansas Valley Audubon Societies. We extend the red carpet to:

- Alamosa:** Mary Sparrow
- Antonito:** Emily Lutkin
- Blanca:** Betty Ford
- Cañon City:** Laverne Long, Pearl Meyers, Paige Stewart
- Colorado City:** Frank Franz & Patrice Fleming
- Crestone:** Virginia Weiss, Pam Gripp
- Del Norte:** Chuck Whitmer
- Florence:** Deborah Crippen, Herbert Stallings, Roman Jacklin
- Howard:** Lynn Young
- La Junta:** Delynn Goodwin-Lasater
- La Veta:** Mary McClean
- Leadville:** Michael Burk
- Penrose:** Juanita Weir
- Pueblo:** Arthur Escobado, Jeanette Meyer, Virginia Whittemore, Mavis Groeneveld, D. L. Steele, Nancy Crafton
- Pueblo West:** Mary Critchett, A. Waller
- Salida:** Angie Scott, Deborah Gaj, Judith Hall
- South Fork:** Susan Warner
- Trinidad:** Linda Frost
- Westcliffe:** Bev Dickenson, Lois Zeller, Mary Chandler
- Wetmore:** Linda Gray, Odessa Francis

Also a very special thank you to the 31 people who have paid to renew their Audubon membership!

It takes National Audubon from one to three months to notify AVAS of updates in our membership. **Join or renew directly with us so we will immediately be on the same page!**

Any questions may be directed to Leon Bright, AVAS Membership Chair, 636 Henry Ave., Pueblo, CO 81005 or call (719) 561-1108, or by email, urraca2@comcast.net.

AVAS LEADERSHIP

AVAS officers and Board members for 2010. All phone numbers are in area code 719.
 President: **Marilyn McBirney** 948-4622
 Vice Pres.: **George McKinnon** 564-1868
 Secretary: **Peg Rooney** 372-3415
 Treasurer: **Mark Yaeger** 543-2724
 Board Members—at-large:
Jim Good 564-6522
Bill McGurn 547-2245 (cell), 252-0928
Margie Joy 251-8916
David Chartier 634-4980 , 761-3782 (cell)
 Fundraising: **Open**
 Programs: **Lura Zimmerman** 543-9508
 Conservation: **SeEtta Moss** 275-8874, 429-3821 (cell)
 Education: **Open**
 Field Trips: **Donna Emmons** 676-5666, 369-9704 (cell)
 Membership: **Leon Bright** 561-1108
 Newsletter: **Harry Rurup** 547-0406, 773-844-5547 (cell)
 Publicity: **Donna Emmons** 676-5666, 369-9704 (cell)
 Representative to Audubon of CO:
SeEtta Moss 275-8874, 429-3821 (cell)
 Web site: **Ben D'Andrea** (303) 987-1066

The *Harrier* is published monthly except for June, July, August and December by the Arkansas Valley Audubon Society, P.O. Box 522, Pueblo, CO 81002. Subscription is free to members of AVAS.

President's Message

(from page 1)

to that predator species. If the two species can evolve slowly over time, then there's no problem, but often human factors speed up changes and generations can't adapt fast enough.

Note the date when certain migratory birds return or when your lilac first breaks bud.

The USA National Phenology Network, www.usanpn.org, provides opportunities to learn more and even record your observations. This is a great opportunity to satisfy your curiosity or become a citizen scientist, develop your observation skills, and get involved! *M.M.*

JOIN OR RENEW WITH AVAS

Help fund AVAS by paying your Audubon dues *through your Chapter.*

- New member **\$20** National Audubon and AVAS (AVAS receives \$20)
- Renewing member **\$35** National Audubon and AVAS (AVAS receives \$15)
- AVAS membership *only* **\$15**

Total enclosed: \$ _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, ST, Zip: _____

Email: _____

- I prefer to receive the *Harrier* online. Please notify me.

Please make **checks** payable to **Arkansas Valley Audubon Society.**

Mail this form and your check to:
 Leon Bright, 636 Henry Ave.,
 Pueblo, CO 81005
 (Phone: 719-561-1108,
 email: urraca2@comcast.net)

Thank you!



UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

by Donna Emmons

SATURDAY, MARCH 13, WALSENBURG AREA AND LATHROP STATE PARK, 8 AM

– NOON: Dave Silverman, trip leader, will begin the day at Lake Maria, hoping to see a swan or two. On the way to Lathrop State Park we will stop at other sites in search of open water, as waterfowl are highlights of this trip – 20 species counted last year.

If weather allows, there will be some walking in the State Park in search of resident Mountain Bluebirds, Bushtits, Townsend's Solitaires, sparrows, etc.

Dress warmly and bring lunch. Contact Donna Emmons at emmons7@yahoo.com or 719-676-5666(h)/369-9704(c) for re-servations and meeting place information.

SATURDAY, MARCH 27, 4TH SATURDAY BIRDWALK AT THE NATURE AND RAPTOR CENTER OF PUEBLO, 8 – 11 AM:

David Chartier is the leader for this month's stroll along the river trail on watch for waterfowl and other winter resident birds. This is an excellent outing for families and beginning birders are especially encouraged to attend.

Birding is free, but there is a \$3.00 parking fee (Become a member of the Nature Center and avoid this charge!). Contact Donna Emmons at 676-5666 or 369-9704 or the Center at 549-2414 with questions.

For more information regarding this and other AVAS trips and events, visit www.socobirds.org.

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

4th Saturday Birdwalk, Pueblo Nature and Raptor Center, January 23, 2010

by Margie Joy

It was pretty nippy and windy, and everyone had gone home by 9:30. We did see 30 species, which I thought was great. I stayed a bit longer, to check for the Barn Owl (not there) and only saw one more species (the crow).

Birders: AVAS Members Leon Bright, Pearle Sandstrom-Smith, Cliff Smith and Nature Center Staff John Gallagher and Peggy Wesner. Also in attendance were two Grand Junction Audubon members, Harriet and Margaret.

Birds:

Gadwall
Mallard
Green-winged Teal
Bufflehead
Common Goldeneye
Hooded Merganser
Common Merganser
Pied-billed Grebe
Great Blue Heron
Bald Eagle — perched in a tree right across the river when we got there, later stirring up gulls on the pond
American Kestrel — a courting pair
American Coot
Killdeer
Ring-billed Gull
Herring Gull
Rock Pigeon
Eurasian Collared-Dove
Belted Kingfisher
Downy Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
American Crow
White-breasted Nuthatch
American Robin
European Starling
Canyon Towhee

White-crowned Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco
House Finch
American Goldfinch
House Sparrow

FEBRUARY 13 GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT, PUEBLO CITY PARK

by Brandon Percival

Participants: Mark Yaeger, Leon Bright, Cliff Smith, Pearle Sandstrom-Smith, Brandon Percival

Snow Goose (1)
Cackling Goose (15)
Canada Goose (200)
Wood Duck (25)
American Widgeon (80)
Mallard (72)
Sharp-shinned Hawk (1)
Ring-billed Gull (15)
Rock Pigeon (20)
Eurasian Collared-Dove (10)
Belted Kingfisher (1)
Downy Woodpecker (6)
Hairy Woodpecker (2)
Northern Flicker (6)
American Crow (12)
Common Raven (2)
Mountain Chickadee (5)
Bushtit (10)
Red-breasted Nuthatch (6)
White-breasted Nuthatch (2)
Brown Creeper (6)
American Robin (20)
European Starling (15)
Yellow-rumped Warbler (5)
Pine Warbler (1)
Dark-eyed Junco (60)
House Finch (10)
House Sparrow (15)



Nature's World: Pinyon Jays and Townsend's Solitaires: Forest-Propagating Birds

by Susan Tweit

Piñon pine-juniper woodlands, the fragrant expanses of short, spreading trees that grow from northern Mexico through the American Southwest, are sometimes called "the bird forest" because birds play a crucial part in propagating both piñon pines and junipers.

Each kind of tree depends on a particular bird: piñon pines rely on pinyon jays (botanists spell the pine's name in the original Spanish; ornithologists use the English transmogrification). Junipers depend on Townsend's solitaires.

Most pines disperse their feather-weight, winged seeds on the wind; piñons opted for plump, wingless seeds instead. So piñons, rooted in place, enlist flocks of birds to "fly" their seeds to new sprouting sites.

How does the tree entice the bird to cooperate?

Bribery. Piñons grow upward-facing cones at the end of stout branch tips, positively inviting a bird to land and probe for seeds. And what seeds they find!

Piñon nuts are more fat-rich than Ben and Jerry's, weighing in at a whopping 3,000 calories per pound. Unlike ice cream though, piñon nuts remain viable for months or years when buried in the cool environment below the surface of the soil.

Hence their appeal to the gregarious jays that live in flocks of 25 to 100 birds and range a hundred or more miles in search of food. Pinyon jays nest and raise their young communally, and stash their communal larder of food (mostly piñon nuts) in the soil at their nesting ground.

When a pinyon jay flock locates piñon pines with ripe cones, the birds land, pry open the cone scales with long, sharp beaks, and test each nut for soundness, shaking and tapping it carefully before stashing it in their crop.

After packing in up to 60 pine nuts, a pinyon jay flies

to the communal larder, stashes its seeds, and then returns to harvest more. A flock can store 4.5 million nuts a year; uneaten seeds sprout, growing into new piñon groves.

Junipers enlist birds to distribute their progeny as well. Instead of enticing birds with plump seeds, they surround their miniature cones with carbohydrate-rich flesh.

In order to protect the fragile seeds inside from being ground up by the teeth of foragers like mice, deer, or people, junipers poison the flesh with terpenes, fragrant compounds that render it virtually inedible. In winter, when the seeds are ripe and ready for dispersal, terpene levels drop, and the flesh turns from green, a color

birds do not distinguish, to a more bird-eye-catching bluish-purple hue.

Flocks of robins and bluebirds sometimes converge to eat juniper berries, but the tree's most dependable partner is a slender gray, solitary thrush with a white eye ring, the Townsend's solitaire.

In summer, solitaires eat insects in high-mountain forests; in winter, they move downhill to feed on juniper berries, digesting the starchy flesh but not the seeds, which pass out encased in a protective layer of bird scat, ready to germinate.

Hence the bird forest, a woodland whose main tree species depend on avian partners to propagate the very trees that provide the birds' food.



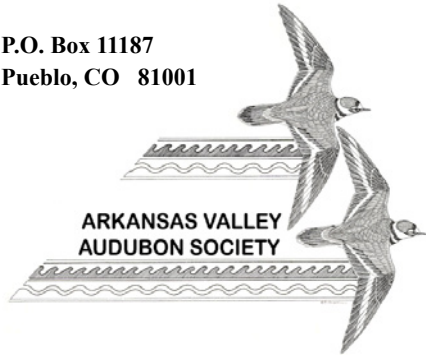
© Ben D'Andrea

Copyright 2010 Susan J. Tweit

Award-winning writer Susan J. Tweit is the author of 12 books, and can be contacted through her web site, susanjtweit.com or her blog, susanjtweit.typepad.com/walkingnaturehome

The Valley Harrier

P.O. Box 11187
Pueblo, CO 81001



OUR MISSION:

AVAS exists to promote the conservation of nature through education, political action and field activities. Our focus is on birds, other wildlife, and their habitat in Southern Colorado.

MARCH CALENDAR

2010

Monday, March 1, Board meeting 7:00 pm
Pueblo main library

Friday, March 12, 13, Monthly program-
"Messages in Stone" jointly with Pueblo
Library and Nature and Raptor Center of
Pueblo (see p. 1 for full details)

Saturday, March 13, 8 A.M. to 12 Noon,
Field trip to Walsenburg and Lathrop State
Park (see p. 4)

Saturday, March 27, 4th Saturday Birdwalk
at Nature and Rapture Center, Pueblo
(see p. 4)