

The Avocet



Volume 31 no.1 Feb 2018

35th Annual Monte Vista Crane Festival March 9-11, 2018

The Keynote Talk is on Saturday at 7:00 pm in the Vali Theatre. Dan Collins and Dave Olson, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service office of Migratory birds will present: Sandhill Cranes and Cinnamon Teal and the importance of the San Luis Valley to these species. Dan reports that the Rocky Mountain Population of the Greater Sandhill Cranes have recovered from low number in the early 1900s of about 200 to over 21,000 cranes by 2008. The San Luis Valley is a critical area for the Sandhill Cranes during migration events due to its proximity to breeding and winter habitats. His project objectives were to identify and link movements and habitat use to managed and unmanaged lands to understand their role in the larger landscape. Dan is the Southwest Region Migratory Bird Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Albuquerque. Dave will talk about the history and importance of waterfowl and wetlands in the SLV. Specifically, he will focus on the Cinnamon Teal research the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and partners have been doing since 2012 across the Intermountain West which includes the Valley. Dave is based in Denver and is the regional migratory game bird coordinator for Region 6 for the USFWS.

All bus tours to the Zapata Ranch, Elephant Rocks, and the Hawks Aloft Valley Raptor tour, and the Photography Workshop, were filled almost as soon as the website went up with the 2018 tour schedule. There are plenty of other activities to be involved in, however. These include the sunrise and sunset bus tours, the Birder's Breakfast on Saturday from 6-10am, Saturday talks about prairie dogs and the unique wetlands of the San Luis Valley. Two movies at the Vali Theatre this year feature: Wings of Life on Friday night at 7:30pm and Million Dollar Duck on Saturday afternoon at 3pm. Don't forget the Craft Fair all three days at the Ski Hi Building.

For more information about the 35th Annual Crane Festival, the website is mvcranefest.org or call 719-852-2731.

Help staff the Monte Vista refuge office the weekends before, during, and after the Crane Fest. This is a fun opportunity to meet, talk with and answer questions for some of the many people who come through the area to see the cranes.

The Friends group is also looking for volunteers to help staff the Friends Booth at the Ski Hi Building.

If you would like to help, contact Brian Underwood: 719-587-3207 or sundogprints@gmail.com

The San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex continues to place a high priority on invasive species management. Over the last year, the refuge staff have hosted two workshops to work with our partners on refining our priorities and planning for future inventory, management and monitoring needs. The work we have completed so far in prioritizing invasive species threats to the refuges and the surrounding landscape has been summarized in a draft report and we will be hosting one more workshop with our partners to review the draft and work towards finalizing the plan. Please call the Refuge Headquarters for more information at 719-589-4021.

Unless noted, all photography by Lisa Clements

Friends Officers and Board Members

President:
Tim Armstrong

Vice President:
Jenny Nehring

Secretary:
Lisa Clements

Treasurer:
Don Thompson

Board Members:
Deb Callahan
Linda Cozart
Peter Schlegel
Membership:
Kay Crowther

Refuge Liaison:
Suzanne Beauchaine

Newsletter Editor:
Lisa Clements

Historian:
Diane Underwood
Website:
www.slvrefuges.org
Email:
friendslvnwr@gmail.com

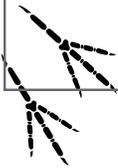


Thank you O&V for continued support



Volume 31 no.1 Feb 2018

O&V Printing Inc.
SINCE 1975!



President's Message - Tim Armstrong

I read a disturbing article in the October issue of *Science* on “digital nature” that raised the question whether field trips are a thing of the past. It seems that 13 years after the publication of *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* by Richard Louv, which ignited a campaign to get children outdoors to experience nature, that there are new video games that allow us to experience nature digitally without leaving the comfort of our own homes. Apparently, one can hike around Walden Pond, go Scuba diving on a coral reef, or go virtual birdwatching in Spain (produced by Swarovski Optic). Given the advances in animation and artificial intelligence, perhaps we should not be surprised. I have only looked at the birding game so I'm no expert, but these games present an alarming trend to me.

The advantages of this new technology cited in the article are the ability to reach new audiences and expand environmental education beyond the classroom. Perhaps. The disadvantages as I see them are that students are sitting in front of a screen, and that they would experience a sanitized version of “nature” limited by the digital interface.

These new games would benefit someone whose mobility or finances are limited, but I struggle to understand how they would be a good choice for most children. How can a child fall in the water or get muddy if they're sitting in front of a computer? How can a child experience the wonder of thousands of Sandhill cranes and waterfowl taking flight as an eagle soars overhead? Or the simple wonder of a wildflower in bloom?

These games reminded me of the old posters of rain forests that showed dozens of brightly colored forest animals peeking out of the vegetation. If you have visited a rain forest, then you know that this representation of a rain forest is much different than what you experience in nature. In a real rain forest, you typically hear animals far more often than you see them because visibility is limited by low light and dense vegetation, and most of the animals are nocturnal. But those posters inspired me to want to visit a real rain forest, so perhaps these new computer games may ultimately get children outside.

This essay was prompted by a conversation at a recent Friends meeting. One of our members from Crestone asked if we could do more to get local students out onto the refuges. The Friends incorporated as an educational nonprofit, but our efforts to get local students out on the refuge have fluctuated over the years for a variety of reasons. Our current refuge staff actively encourage student groups to visit, but changes prompted by the No Child Left Behind legislation and high-stakes testing in our K12 schools have made it increasingly difficult for teachers to take a field trip with students. Our fall Kids Crane Festival arose as a way to encourage local students to visit our refuges, but it is a once-a-year event. Our hope has always been that students who enjoy their visit will come back on their own with their families. Last year and this year, we are working with a local elementary teacher to sponsor an art contest during the spring Crane Festival with prizes that included binoculars and VIP family passes for crane tours to raise awareness of our local refuges.

We can do more to get children out on our refuges to truly experience nature. We welcome new ideas and volunteers who have expertise in environmental education or who might be able to help organize visits to our refuges by school groups. Please let me know if you would like to help.

The original article, *Digital nature: Are field trips a thing of the past?*, was written by Douglas McCauley. 2017. *Science* 358:298-300.



Welcome to New Refuge Staff



Andrew Pettibone joined the staff of the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex in January 2017. Andrew's role on the SLV team is to oversee maintenance activities on the Baca Wildlife Refuge. This includes facilities, infrastructure, fleet, and irrigation on all habitats. According to Baca Refuge Manager Ron Garcia, Andrew hit the ground running and has not stopped since. Garcia says they are very excited and fortunate to have Andrew and the energy, background, and expertise he brings.



Andrew grew up in northwest Kansas and had his first experience working in the field of conservation with the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism posting Walk in Hunting Areas. Andrew became a part of the Fish and Wildlife Service in 2009 as a seasonal employee at Bowdoin NWR. After graduating from Fort Hays State University in 2011 Andrew worked on Browns Park NWR as a biology-technician. An avid outdoorsman, Andrew, his wife Jessica, son Hudson, and daughter Eloise have enjoyed making the San Luis Valley their home.



Adrian Potwin is a combat veteran from Manton, MI with 12 years of law enforcement experience and joined the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Team in August 2016. He spent most of the following year in various parts of the country completing the necessary training to obtain his Federal Law Enforcement Credentials, which were issued to him in September of 2017.



Adrian began his career with the U.S. Navy as a Master at Arms then later transferred to the U.S. Marine Corps to serve as Military Police. Upon completion of his enlistments Adrian began working as a Police Supervisor for the Defense Health Agency in the D.C. Metro area while simultaneously pursuing his Bachelor's degree in Environmental Science with a concentration in Fish and Wildlife Management.

In Adrian's role as a Federal Wildlife Officer for the SLV Complex, he is responsible for maintaining the Complex's Law Enforcement Program which has the primary focus of: protection of visitors, employees, natural resources, and facilities. This entails a wide range of Law Enforcement duties ranging from routine patrols to large scale investigations. Also, as part of the San Luis Valley Team he is involved in the Complex Safety Committee and oversees the Complex sign program. Adrian is passionate about community outreach and mentoring underprivileged youth and has been working within the Community on both those fronts.

Adrian truly believes he has the best job in the world and is excited about further developing and maintaining the law enforcement program, and especially excited about developing his "Game Warden" skills. Adrian, his wife Holly, and sons Cody and Austin make their home in Alamosa and enjoy fitness, hiking, camping, mountain biking, and exploring all that Colorado and Northern New Mexico have to offer.





Summer leaf raking at the Baca NWR

Pictures from peter Schegal



Binoculars are fun, especially if you have two pair



Thank you volunteers and Blue Goose



Friends and Neighbors picnic



Guest speaker cowboy poet Peggy Godfrey held everyone enthralled with tales of life as a (girl) sheep farmer and cow ranchers



Refuge staff cooked and served Sloppy Joes (and pie!) to friends and neighbors at the Baca NWR shop



2017 Kid's Crane Festival



Swainson's Hawk Release



Hot dogs, beans, sloppy joes, and cookies! YUM



The play is always the thing!



Archery came back this year



Pinecone owls were fun to make

WHICH WAY TO FUN AND LEARNING?



Migration game is always popular



Bike your refuge





2017 Christmas Bird Count - Lisa Clements

The 2017 Christmas bird count was held December 16 with unprecedented number of participants. Sixteen folks from as far away as the Front Range joined the “regulars” at 7:30am for hot beverages and an array of pastries and fruit. We broke into 6 teams and covered the count circle very thoroughly. Temperatures on this day ranged from 8 –38 degrees with partly clear conditions. The snow depth in the undisturbed fields was no deeper than two inches and the still water was frozen. Thanks to Mary Thompson for manning her feeder all day and reporting the woodpeckers and most of the Evening grosbeaks. This year we found Brown-headed Cowbirds—a Valley winter first!!! Very exciting. Best birds, besides the cowbirds, were golden-crowned kinglets, Prairie falcon, Ferruginous Hawk, and all three Rosy-finch. We saw 51 species and 5242 individuals birds. I sent our information to the National Audubon to be included in the National Christmas Bird Count. The website is easy to access and you can see how we have done in years past as far as numbers go. My thanks to everyone who participated; it was a beautiful day.



Grey-crowned Rosy-finch, coastal race.
Photo by: John Rawinski



Amazing volunteers

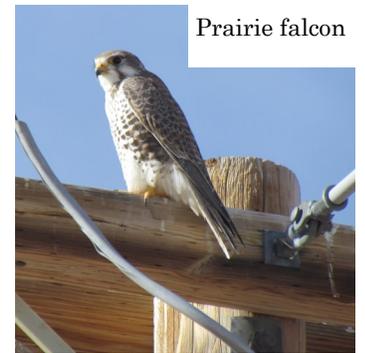
Species list can be found on page 8.



Everyone likes a bath



Mysterious Great horned owl



Prairie falcon

Dickcissel Irruption or Eruption? By John Rawinski

In the summer of 2017, the San Luis Valley saw an irruption of Dickcissels, a small, sparrow-like bird of tall grasslands found across the central part of northern America. This bird is rare in the mountainous areas and basins of Colorado. An irruption is a very rapid or pervasive increase in the numbers of an animal population, in this case, the Dickcissels. This word is not to be confused with eruption, which is a violent explosion of gas, steam, ash or lava from a volcano, such as the formation of our San Juan Mountains.

Across the country, there has been an irruption of this species where more birds are being seen in their traditional habitats. Birds are also being seen in areas where they don't normally occur, like the San Luis Valley. Last year, we exceeded the numbers ever recorded in the San Luis Valley.

For some background information, during the Atlas I breeding bird project (circa 1990), hundreds of blocks were sampled in the SLV over 5 years by many volunteers. Only one block was found to have Dickcissel present. Surprisingly, this was in the same area where we are now finding a dozen or more birds south of Alamosa. Atlas II was recently published (20 years later) and had zero blocks with Dickcissels.



Photo by: John Rawinski

Dickcissels are making an unprecedented showing here in the San Luis Valley. Most of the studies look at northern birds and their irruption into more southerly locations. Some articles claim it to be the result of “climate” but an irruption is usually a short term event. I believe they mean “weather-related” as a year low in precipitation up north may affect seed production of conifers and result in birds seeking food in new areas. So what about birds moving north like the Dickcissels? It may be due to wet years where additional food and cover sources are available where they have been scarce in other years. John could not find a definitive study relating to this northern expansion.

On June 28, 2017, Jerry Poe, Mary Van Pelt, Tom Norbu, Jan Oen, Dennis Lamb, Lynn Miller, Diane and Brian Underwood, and John Rawinski ventured out to see the Dickcissels on Road CC, south of Alamosa. It took them awhile, but once the first was found, many more were found along the way. It is always great to be amongst friends and enjoy a day of birding together. It was a day that erupted with joy over the irruption of Dickcissels.





Welcome New Members and Thank You Renewing Members

The following people have joined or renewed their Friends Membership since our last newsletter:

New Members

Richard Maxfield, Greeley, CO
Heather Scott, Del Norte, CO
Natasha Torres, Crestone, CO

Renewing Members

Tim & Cathy Armstrong, Monte Vista, CO
Carol Bernardin, Monte Vista, CO
Patty Blenden, Columbia, MO
Theresa Breidigan, Colorado Springs, CO
Lisa Brenskelle, Houston, TX
Larry Calloway, Crestone, CO
Christiane Hyde Citron, Denver, CO
Linda & Hugh Cozart, Alamosa, CO
Judy and Batiste Deluca, Crestone, CO
Di and Jim Erickson, Granville, OH
Mike Foster, Lakewood, CO
Donna and Kelvin Heitmann, Crestone, CO
Victoria Hems, Denver, CO
Patricia Henschen, Colorado Springs, CO
Margery Herrington, Pueblo, CO
Debra Callahan & David Jones, Monte Vista, CO
Mina Kidd, Woodland Park, CO

David Lee, Crestone, CO
Ruth Lewis, Del Norte, CO
Ann K. Maddox, Battlecreek, MI
Vera Markgraf, Flagstaff, AZ
James and Barbara McBride, Sante Fe, NM
Donald A. Neeper, Portola Valley, CA
John & Lisa Rawinski, Monte Vista, CO
Steve & Mary Russell, Alamosa, CO
Emmy Savage, Crestone, CO
Peter Schlegel, Crestone, CO
Judy Gilbert and Bill Sutherland, Crestone, CO
Carmin Teeple, Crestone, CO
Jan Oen and Donald R. Thompson, Alamosa, CO
Brian and Diane Underwood, Alamosa, CO
Linda and Howard Williams, Colorado Springs, CO

Tax Receipts: A tax receipt will be sent to donors for all donations of \$250 or more as required by law. Previously, tax receipts were mailed to all donors but to reduce postage and printing costs, receipts for under \$250 will not be mailed, effective for the 2017 tax year. If you need a receipt, please send an email request to jennynehring@hotmail.com

Are your annual membership dues due???????

We value your membership. Please renew today! The month and year when your membership dues are due is printed in **Bold** at the bottom of your address label. Please use the form below when mailing your payment. Thank you!

Membership Application		
Please Check one:	New Member <input type="checkbox"/>	Renewing <input type="checkbox"/> Date _____
Name (Please Print) _____		
Street or P.O. Box _____		
City _____ State _____ Zip _____		
Phone _____		
Email _____		
Make Check Payable to:		
The Friends of the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuges		
P.O. Box 857, Monte Vista, CO 81144		
		Annual Membership Category:
		<input type="checkbox"/> Senior (62+) or Student \$15
		<input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$15
		<input type="checkbox"/> Family \$25
		<input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor \$50
		<input type="checkbox"/> Best Friend \$100+
		<input type="checkbox"/> Life \$1000+



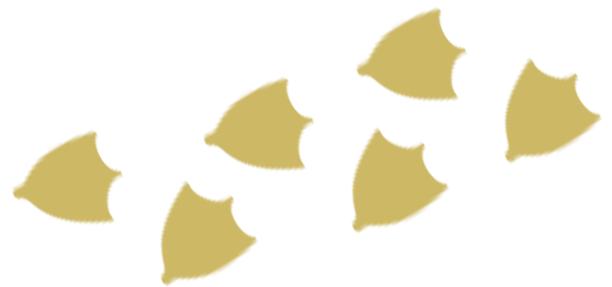


Friends of the San Luis Valley

National Wildlife Refuges

P.O. Box 857

Monte Vista, CO 81144



Christmas Count 2017 continued from page 6

<i>Species</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Species</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Species</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Species</i>	<i>Total</i>
Canada goose	332	Eurasian Collared-dove	127	Horned lark	330	Red-winged blackbird	167
Mallard	227	Great horned owl	19	Black-capped chickadee	4	Western meadowlark	8
Norther shoveler	10	Belted Kingfisher	1	Mountain chickadee	22	Brewer's blackbird	4
Common goldeneye	1	Downey woodpecker	2	White-breasted nuthatch	6	Great-tailed grackle	11
Great blue heron	4	Hairy woodpecker	4	Marsh wren	13	Brown-headed cowbird	25
Northern harrier	17	Northern flicker	8	Golden-crowned kinglet	2	Gray-crowned Rosy-finch	4
Bald eagle	11	American kestrel	15	Townsend's solitaire	2	Black Rosy-finch	1
Red-tailed hawk	51	Peregrine falcon	1	American robin	2	Brown-capped Rosy-finch	200
Rough-legged hawk	21	Prairie falcon	4	European Starling	1100	House finch	337
Ferruginous hawk	1	Black-billed magpie	246	American tree sparrow	64	American goldfinch	61
Sandhill Crane	44	Clark's nutcracker	2	Dark-eyed junco	81	Evening grosbeak	47
Wilson's Snipe	2	American crow	167	White-crowned sparrow	7	House sparrow	958
Rock Pigeon	286	Common raven	98	Song sparrow	34		