Big anniversaries deserve to be celebrated in style. The Crane Festival Committee is very excited to announce that for our 2023 keynote speaker, we will be hosting a speaker from an organization that is also celebrating a hallmark anniversary. The International Crane Foundation is celebrating their 50th anniversary, and we are pleased to announce that ICF Co-Founder Dr. George Archibald will be the keynote speaker at this year’s Monte Vista Crane Festival.

We hope you will join us as Dr. Archibald reflects on the successes, failures, and lessons learned from 50 years of crane conservation. He will share stories of the innovative and exciting ways we can work together over the next fifty years to save cranes, ourselves, and our world.

In 1973, when cranes were in a perilous situation and many were on the brink of extinction, George Archibald, along with fellow graduate student Ron Sauey, established the International Crane Foundation in Baraboo, Wisconsin, as the world center for the study and preservation of cranes. His dream was to save the world’s cranes and that notion has been his driving force ever since. Dr. Archibald’s visionary leadership in international conservation over the last fifty years has given flight to extraordinary grassroots recovery efforts across the globe.

George Archibald is renowned for his energy, optimism, and for stimulating new ways of thinking about seemingly intractable problems. He leverages the charisma of cranes to unite people from diverse cultures and backgrounds to work together to solve problems facing our fragile planet. He has recruited, inspired, and mentored countless individuals worldwide in the name of cranes. By focusing on the magic of cranes, people eagerly engage in the protection and restoration of entire ecosystems.

Dr. Archibald recently completed the book, My Life with Cranes: A Collection of Stories. For more information and tickets, please visit https://mvcranefest.org
President’s Message — Deb Callahan

I will be stepping down as President as of April 2, 2023. Why not April 1, 2023? Unfortunately this is not an April’s fools joke. I am trading the wilderness of the mountains for the wilderness of the sea. I am moving to the southern coast of Maine and closer to family. I hope to keep volunteering for the refuge system by volunteering with the Rachel Carson NWR near my new home. I am going to miss the great people with the Refuges and the Friends. You make this valley great. A special thank you to the Friends board members who have supported me during my tenure as president. I am sure I won't be able to stay away from the San Luis Valley and all that makes it special. So I'll see you in the future out watching the cranes. Deb

The Friends Group applied for and received a grant for a project on the 8 South for a parking area and three Interpretive Signs. The parking area was completed last summer (2022). We hired Kelly Ortiz to create the signs. The Friends Group hopes to have the panels (well, the posts) in the ground by the March 10-12, 2023, Monte Vista Crane Festival.

Following is a preview of the interpretive panels:

The Language of Dance

Sandhill Cranes dance year round and can resemble giant marionettes pulled up toward the sky. Their dance is a beautiful display that helps strengthen bonds with their mate and to tell other cranes they are getting to close. Cranes partner for life once they find their special mate who appreciate their moves!

- Wing-spread-thrust: It often used to introduce the dance or invite partner to dance.
- Jump cakie: It is an aggressive move to threaten other cranes.
- Run Nip: This move is used to gain speed before flight, threaten intruder, and the expression of joy during dance.
- Wing spread hold and jump: A dance for courtship and may reflect high spirited behavior or play.

Greater Sandhill Cranes spend their winter in and around New Mexico and arrive in early spring on the Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge by the thousands to feed and rest.
Rather than using energy to flap wings, riding thermals is a highly efficient way to travel. In fact, Common Cranes, a different species, are so good at using thermals, they have been seen flying over Mount Everest!

Many birds migrate from parts of Canada, Mexico, Central and South America and make a stop here in the San Luis Valley to breed or to rest and eat before continuing their migration. This area in front of you provides important habitat for these birds to survive at different times of the year.
Kid’s Crane Fest — Oct 2022

Thank you Peter Schlegel and others, who provided pictures for KCF

Migration Game

Archery with CPW

Grill Master Peter

Dissecting owl pellets

 Displays

Cranes made from paper plates

Looks like a nice day for lunch and Kid’s Crane Fest

www.slvrefuges.org
On January 4, 2023, Colorado U.S. Senators Michael Bennet and John Hickenlooper celebrated the reauthorization of Colorado’s three National Heritage Areas (NHA), ensuring they continue to receive National Park Service (NPS) funding through 2037. Previously, the National Heritage Area designations for Cache La Poudre, Sangre de Cristo, and South Park were set to expire in 2024. The reauthorizations now head to President Biden’s desk for signature after Congress passed a package of more than 45 NHA reauthorizations earlier. According to Bennet, people come to Colorado’s National Heritage Areas to learn about the rich and diverse history of our state. Ensuring these National Heritage Areas continue to receive funding through the National Park Service will preserve our state’s story and culture for future generations. In March 2022, Bennet and Hickenlooper introduced the Colorado National Heritage Areas Reauthorization Act to ensure our state’s three NHAs continue to receive National Park Service (NPS) funding through 2036.

Colorado’s three NHAs were first authorized in 2009 following years of grassroots organizing from stakeholders in their respective regions. NHAs leverage federal NPS funds for historic and cultural preservation projects with the support of counties, tourism, and historic preservation organizations. Colorado’s National Heritage Areas have all completed notable projects since they were authorized in 2009. Within the Sangre de Cristo NHA, funds have helped share the story of the first desegregation case in the nation, Mestas v. Shone.

Thanks to the Alamosa Citizen and the SdCNHA for the map and story.

The Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area encompasses 3,000 square miles in Alamosa County, Conejos County, and Costilla County, (including all three San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuges) with 11,000 years of documented human habitation. It is among 55 congressionally designated national heritage areas in the U.S., governed through nonprofit boards.
The Friends Annual Christmas party in 2022 was again held at the Roast in Alamosa. A Joyous Season!

The Friends and Neighbors Picnic was held at the Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge in late September. It began with a tour of the almost completed new Refuge Complex Headquarters. The office is similar of the Baca office building and is located just inside the refuge. Refuge Project Manager Sharon Vaughn conducted tours. Dinner was catered by Cavillos and was again delicioso! It was a very good turnout of forty-eight Friends members, and neighbors of all three refuges. The new Baca Refuge Manager, Ty Benally, was there and introduced himself. Friends Board Member Doug Ouren presented *Elk and the SLV Refuges: What’s Going On Out There?* It was well received. Thank you all for a fun night.
Alamosa NWR Rio Grande Restoration

Last fall, the Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project (RGHRP) partnered with the City of Alamosa, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to stabilize streambanks, restore riparian areas, and enhance aquatic habitats along the river on the Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge.

The RGHRP is a non-profit organization founded over 20 years ago with a mission to restore the Rio Grande River and watershed health. The group works to improve the function of the Rio Grande and provide high quality water throughout the river, support existing agricultural lifestyles, and contribute to groundwater recharge.

In September, 2022, the FWS removed and hauled away 24 old cars, 20 household appliances, numerous tiers, and tons of concrete from the river. According to Emma Reesor, executive director of RGHRP, the group had previously worked with the city in restoration efforts along the river in the Alamosa Riparian Park. After that successful effort, they studied the river downstream and began work on the site near the wildlife refuge. Cooley and Sons Excavating of Mosca was retained for excavating, channel and bank shaping, and the installation of rock and habitat structures. The company planted young willow trees along the river.

Both the native Rio Grande chub and Rio Grande sucker will benefit from the restoration efforts. The sucker was largely extirpated from its historic range and has since been re-introduced. The area is also home to the endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher.

The area is open to the public and can be accessed by the Toivo Malm trails off South River Road in Alamosa. The Refuge staff says there will be an opportunity to plant additional shrubs and cage some willows to protect from beaver, on April 22, Earth Day, in the area.
The 121st Audubon Christmas Bird Count saw us meeting in person at 7:30 am at the Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge offices. It’s been a couple years since we have been able to do that, so it was fun to see everyone gathered, chatting about birds and eating cookies. After a brief safety talk, and handing out the circle assignments (and a couple more cookies), we headed out into the 8 below temperatures.

It was a bluebird day - blue skies, no wind, no ice, no snow, no birds. Oh, wait, there’s a Raven. And a Red-tail and is that a Meadowlark? By the end of the day, the temperature had warmed up to 31 degrees and a total of 228 party miles were driven. Counting the two Count Week birds, we netted 47 species and a total 2378 individuals. Best birds were Northern Shrike, Ferruginous Hawk, Yellow-headed Blackbird, and a count week Yellow-rumped Warbler. We missed several species we normally see: Hairy and Downey Woodpeckers, Robin, and Northern Pintail. I wonder where they were spending their Christmas holidays?

Many thanks to the Rawinski family, Brian and Diane Underwood, Suzanne Beauchaine, Beth Kinney, Linda Cozart, Margaret White, Jenny Nehring, Deb Callahan, and Jan Oen and Don Thompson for helping with the 65th Annual Monte Vista Christmas Bird Count. A fun day of birding together separately. This year’s results can be found on the last page of this newsletter.

Next year’s count is December 16, 2023. I posted the results on the Audubon CBC website. Also, if you are interested they have a new tool called Where Have the Birds Gone.

Thank you, John Rawinski, for the extra sharp photographs of Red-tail Hawk and Red-breasted Nuthatch. Other photos by Lisa Clements

House Sparrow is ready for his closeup

Male Northern Harrier surveys his territory

Brewer’s Blackbird keeps an eye on me

Red-wing Blackbird braves the ice for a drink
Welcome New Members and Thank You Renewing Members

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

New Members
Mary Hutchinson, Monte Vista, CO
Mark & Luanna Hutchinson, Monte Vista, CO
Sylvia Villarreal, MD, Rancho de Taos, NM
Bill Davis, Denver, CO
Kristal Stidham, Montrose, CO
Doug & Leah Clark, Monte Vista, CO
Molly McLean, Monte Vista, CO
Kevin Corwin, Centennial, CO
Jama Crawford, Durango, CO

Peter Clark, Monte Vista, CO
Suzanne Beauchaine, Del Norte, CO
Michael Gallagher, Englewood, CO
Ron Garcia, Alamosa, CO
Diana Biggs, Canon City, CO
Susan Putnam, Aurora, CO
Deb Callahan, Del Norte, CO
Sue Norris, Louisville, CO
Jim Bailey, Lakewood, CO
Nancy Bowsher, Nathrop, CO
Donald Thompson, Alamosa, CO
Peter Schlegel, Crestone, CO

Renewing Members
Linda Cozart, Alamosa, CO
Heather Scott, Montrose, CO
Jim Thompson, La Junta, CO
Allene Evans, Austin, TX
Christie Barton, Moffat, CO
Tim Carden, Lafayette, CO
Theresa Braymer, Arvada, CO

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 or in your email. Please use the form below when mailing your payment or pay online at slvrefuges.org Thank you!

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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:
- Senior (62+) or Student $15
- Individual $15
- Family $25
- Sponsor $50
- Best Friend $100+
- Life $1000+
### 121st Christmas Bird Count results, continued from page 5

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CW = Count Week