

The Avocet



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38TH ANNUAL MONTE VISTA CRANE FESTIVAL GOES ONLINE

The 2021 Monte Vista Crane Festival is rolling with the times and will be an online event you can enjoy from your living room. The event will bring the cranes and the Monte Vista Refuge to you; no need to brave snowy roads.

The regular 2021 Monte Vista Crane Festival is cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the uncertainty of COVID-19 and Colorado state regulations on gatherings, the planning committee decided not to invest the money, time, and energy in planning an in-person event that is unlikely to happen. The planning committee did not make this decision lightly as we understand how important this event is to our community and its importance economically to the entire SLV region. As we think back to the 2020 Crane Festival, for many of us it seems that the festival was the “last normal thing that happened” before the world changed with the COVID-19 shut down in Mid-March.

The online festival will be a pre-recorded, approximately two-hour online event available Friday, March 12th at 7PM and then on-demand through March 17th. It will feature a “Cranes of the World” presentation by crane naturalist Sandra Noll; a presentation by professional photographer Ed MacKerrow on wildlife and landscapes of the San Luis Valley; short video productions about cranes and SLV issues as well as short interviews with refuge staff and local community members. Please plan to join us for this event. Tickets (\$15) and more information can be found on the Crane Fest website:

mvcranefest.org

We look forward to an in-person 2022 festival and once again engaging our community with events at the Vali 3 Theater, and the brand-new Ski Hi Event and Conference Center.

Stay safe, stay well!

~ Monte Vista Crane Festival Committee ~



Artist rendition of new Ski Hi Event and Conference Center



@ David C Jones

Cranes At Sunset

Friends Officers and Board Members

President:
Deb Callahan

Vice President:
Jenny Nehring

Secretary:
Lisa Clements

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Diane Underwood

Board Members:
Linda Cozart
Peter Schlegel
Tim Carden
Tim Armstrong

Membership:
Jerry Jones
Refuge Liaison:
Suzanne Beauchaine

Newsletter Editor:
Lisa Clements

Historian:
Diane Underwood

Vol. Coordinator:
Brian Underwood

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Thank you O&V for continued support



President’s Message—Deb Callahan

Happy 20-year Anniversary to the Friends of the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuges. Wow, time flies. It’s already been a year that I have been President of the Board. It’s been a different year, in that we have not been able to do all that we have done in the past, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But the Friends have continued to work to support our local refuges. Great news is that we were awarded a grant by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The grant is for \$15,000.00. We plan to provide better parking for the 8 South pullout and making it a safer experience for the visitors during the Sandhill Crane migration. In recent years, more and more people and cars arrive to watch the cranes. The additional parking will keep folks from parking and walking on 8 South. We also will put up a kiosk providing visitors information about the refuge and its wild visitors. Finally, we plan to try out some wildlife cameras which will provide us close-up photos and short videos with audio of cranes. This will allow us to share this wild experience with folks at home in almost “real-time”.

I also want to take time to acknowledge the long history of our Friends Group. The Friends were formed in 2000 by a small dedicated group of folks lead by Tim Armstrong. Twenty years later, we are still going strong and working with our refuges to fulfill their mission. To date, the Friends have contributed to the building of the Meadow Lark Trail on the Monte Vista NWR, the Discovery Room at the Alamosa NWR, many years of Kid’s Crane Festivals, and Fishing days (alas, fish disease and drought has stopped this activity). We also assist the refuge with the yearly Friends and Neighbors Picnic that brings the neighbors of the refuge up to date on the refuge happenings. Friends members worked hard to advocate for the establishment of the Baca NWR in 2005. Friends volunteers, Diane and Brian, stock and staff the bookstore at the Alamosa Refuge. Many Friends members have participated in the Monte Vista NWR Christmas bird count with Lisa Clements. Lisa also publishes these beautiful newsletters. Since 2015, Jenny Nehring, Vice President of the Friends, has been the lead organizer of the Monte Vista Crane Festival. And each year we have workdays on one of the refuges. I hope the organization remains strong for the next 20 years and continues to work to keep our refuges vigorous and healthy.



Friends provided a “poop bag” station at the Alamosa NWR



Discovery Room at Alamosa NWR

Thanks to Deb Callahan for these photos





Refuge Update—Suzanne Beauchaine

The days are lengthening, and we are hearing the call of cranes starting to migrate north into the valley. While COVID-19 has changed how we work with our partners and do our administrative work, our field work stays the same. The cranes don't know there is a global pandemic. We are preparing for the arrival of spring migrants including the Sandhill Cranes and ducks. As many of you know, the first 2-3 weeks in March is an excellent time to view cranes at the Monte Vista NWR. A few weeks prior to the cranes, arrival we will be turning on wells to provide roosting and loafing habitat and begin mowing the farm fields that have standing barley. This year, much of the barley was knocked down during snowstorms that started in early September; we hope that there is still an abundance of grain available this spring.

The refuge staff, along with everyone, are hoping to get back to more normalcy this year. We are working on updating our Fire Management Plan to be able to utilize prescribed fire for habitat management. This is the time of year we plan our wetland and vegetation management for the growing season. Across the Complex, we plan to continue efforts to control invasive plants with staff, volunteers, and Student Conservation Association interns. The refuges all received funding to update directional and boundary signs, so we have a lot of post hole digging to do this summer!

We are excited to continue to work with the Friends to improve the 8 South pullout, now referred to as the Cottonwood Grove Wildlife Viewing Area on MVNWR. The Friends were instrumental in getting funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Federation to kick start the project this winter! That effort led to an important contribution from Rio Grande County to provide the equipment and labor to build up the parking area prior to gravel delivery.

May this year bring you many hours of enjoying wildlife!

Suzanne Beauchaine,

Monte Vista and Alamosa NWR Manager and Friends Liaison

Naked parking area on the 8 South



"A Behind The Scenes tour" with the Friends Group on the MVNWR: reclaiming levees and a well



WELCOME NEW REFUGE STAFF



Dean Lee is an "old timer" on the SLV Refuge Complex, but now he's a "newbie" Wildlife Refuge Specialist (WRS). A WRS serves as an Assistant Refuge Manager for the Complex. He has extensive knowledge of all three refuges since he has been working in a variety of capacities since 2001: Tractor Operator, Biological Science Technician, and most recently, acting WRS at the Baca NWR. As a teenager, Dean grew up in the San Luis Valley and enlisted in the Army after graduating from high school. He attended Adams State University and earned his Bachelor of Arts in Wildlife Biology in 1998. Dean started his natural resource conservation career by working for the Colorado Parks & Wildlife as a technician at Russell Lakes State Wildlife Area in Saguache County, Colorado. From there, he joined the team at the SLVNWRC in 2001. In his free time, he loves to pursue various activities including fishing, hunting, and spending time with family. The refuge staff are excited to pile more responsibilities on his plate because they know he can tackle any new challenge. Congratulations Dean!



Jeremy "Mac" McDonald is our new FWS Federal Wildlife Officer with the San Luis Valley NWR Complex. The Refuge staff and our law enforcement partners are very excited to welcome Mac and his family to the valley. He has been with USFWS for a little over a year. Mac is an Army Veteran of 10 years. They moved from California where he was a DOD police officer working in Twentynine Palms at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, and where he achieved the rank of lieutenant. He spent seven years there until he accepted the job here in the San Luis Valley. His background set him up for success in our intensive training program at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC). All new officers spend about six months at FLETC and then several weeks of field training. He was a couple of weeks away from getting his commission when COVID-19 hit and everyone was sent home. That delayed his move to the valley by several months. He has been married for nine years, has a two-year-old son, and loves spending his days off with his family.

Joshua "Kirk" Groves grew up in southern West Virginia and graduated from West Virginia University with a B.S. in Wildlife and Fisheries Resources, and Minor in Conservation Ecology. His career with FWS started in 2013 working as a seasonal employee for the Colorado River Fishery Project (now Grand Junction Fish & Wildlife Conservation Office). During the off-season, he worked for National Park Service and US Geological Survey on fisheries projects in Grand Canyon National Park. From 2016 to 2018, Kirk was the on-the-ground lead Fish Biologist for development and implementation of a hatchery program for endangered suckers in the Upper Klamath River Basin, Oregon. Their team was nominated for and received the USFWS Endangered Species Recovery Champion award for their significant contributions to species recovery. Prior to coming to the SLV, he worked in Region 3 on Pallid Sturgeon and Asian Carp projects. He enjoys spending days off exploring the SLV and surrounding areas with his wife, Rosalee, and their three dogs. They feel very fortunate to live in a place with so many year around outdoor recreation opportunities! Kirk says the most interesting part of his work is the diversity of refuge maintenance. From working on vehicles, to operating equipment, to being in the wetlands in the spring, rarely are two days the same. It is rewarding to see the positive impact refuge management actions are having on the landscape.





Western Meadowlark
Hoar Frost



121st Christmas Bird Count, COVID Style, 2020

The annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count, said to be the largest and longest-running citizen science project in the world, almost didn't happen. To say this time was different would be an understatement. The National Audubon Society is in charge of the CBC and they had concerns about running the count. There was a Zoom meeting with the many compilers and the organizers to discuss the rules for a *physically-distanced* bird count. I don't like the expression "Social Distance" it sounds unfriendly. Audubon had the option to cancel the count completely if the country shut down like it did in March.

Normally, we gather at the Monte Vista Refuge to break into teams, have coffee, visit and give a "safety" talk. Then we scatter to the four corners of our circle and bird for several hours and drop off our data, usually finishing about 1pm.

This year, (63rd annual Monte Vista CBC), there was no meeting and no pastries. I required people to sign up ahead of time and tell me what area they wanted to survey for birds. I created more sections (total 10) to bird (up from our usual four or five), to create a greater opportunity for people to choose where they wanted to bird. Some areas had more than one team birding that area, but that was not a problem, as I took the larger of the two numbers if people counted the same birds. For a very simplified example, Team A saw one Red-tail Hawk and team B saw Red-tail Hawks in the same section, I put down that there were two Red-tail Hawks in that section. Another thing we did differently, thanks to Deb Callahan, was to meet that night at 5pm via Zoom to discuss the finds of the day. Results were emailed to me, so I could get clarification, if needed, about their data. The Zoom meeting worked well, and hopefully we will do that again for the 64th Christmas Bird Count—to be held December 18, 2021. See you then.

We had 19 participants for the 2020 Christmas bird count. We saw 12,134 individual birds and 61 species. That number is extremely close to our record high species number of 63. Between us, we walked two miles and drove 356 miles. Our best birds were Ferruginous Hawk, Northern Shrike, Evening Grosbeak, Common Grackle, and THREE Short-eared Owls !!! Thank you to Jason and Sally, Jan and Don, Evert and Tammy, Diane and Brian, the Rawinskis, Jenny and Pam, Suzanne and Deb, Grant and April, and Mary and Susan.

Below is the results of 63rd Monte Vista Christmas Bird Count. Thank you to everyone that made this unique and interesting bird count possible. Thanks also to the feeder watchers and the "count-week counters". Such a beautiful day, even with the fog that started us off. (Con't on page 8)

Species	2020 Count	Record High Count	Record Year	Species	2020 Count	Record High Count	Record Year
Canada Goose	380	1450	1986	<i>Pied-billed Grebe</i>	4	4	2020
Gadwall	6	275	1956	Great Blue Heron	5	10	2009
American Wigeon	36	75	1978	Golden Eagle	1	14	1975
Mallard	3967	68,000	1960	Northern Harrier	11	63	1995
Northern Pintail	12	3020	2006	Bald Eagle	12	38	1991
Am Green-winged Teal	11	250	1987	<i>Red-tailed Hawk</i>	61	61	2020
Common Goldeneye	12	40	2014	Rough-legged Hawk	15	56	1976
<i>Common Merganser</i>	22	22	2020	Ferruginous Hawk	1	3	1995

121st Christmas Bird Count



Short-eared Owl

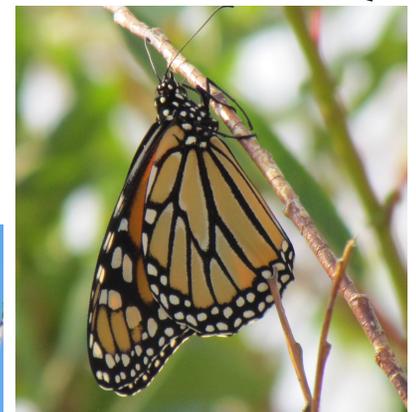
@ John Rawinski 2019



I left my camera battery on the charger the morning of the count. Luckily, I had the iPhone telephoto with me. Kestrel eats a mouse while Red-wing Blackbird watches, Mallards and Green-wing Teal, Red-tail Hawk, and Great Blue Heron



The year 2020 found me with a greater appreciation of walks. Simply put, more walks meant more camera time. I hope you enjoy my photo essay.

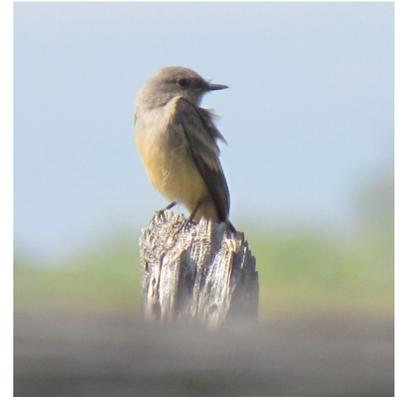


Spent more time in the mountains with Natasha, drove South River Road ALOT, and every weekend found me ambling on the Malm Trail.





Home Lake Great Egret 22 Aug



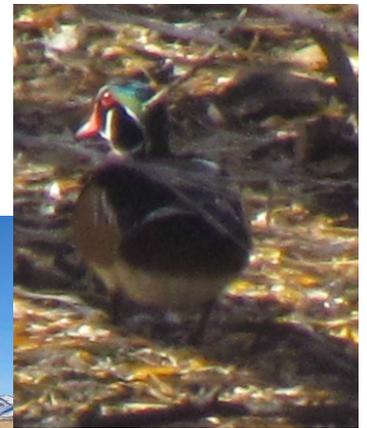
29 Aug— Migration brought interesting birds: Eastern Kingbird and Say's Phoebe: S. River Road. On the Malm Trail: Rock Wren, Lazuli Bunting



July—Bowen Pond Field Trip, synchronized pelican swimming, baby ducks, Slender Spiderflower (locally endemic, globally rare), Hawk Moth



Song Sparrow shows off his field markings



Wood Duck Nov 1 Malm Trail



Conejos River and Bald Eagle at Pike's Stockade. On Thanksgiving Day, a Yellowlegs strutted its stuff on the Malm Trail at the dam (yes, snow)





Results of the 63rd Monte Vista Christmas Bird Count - CORVID Style

con't from page 5



Species	2020 Count	Record High Count	Record Year	Species	2020 Count	Record High Count	Record Year
Killdeer	2	8	1956	<i>White-breasted Nuthatch</i>	9	9	2020
<i>Wilson's Snipe</i>	3	3	2020	Marsh Wren	3	12	2017
<i>Rock Pigeon</i>	440	440	2020	American Robin	1	331	2006
Eurasian Collared-dove	132	237	2015	European Starling	930	3500	1986
Mourning Dove	2	30	1961	American Tree Sparrow	71	900	1986
Great Horned Owl	11	24	1995	Dark-eyed Junco	61	400	1986
Short-eared Owl	3	16	1966	White-crowned Sparrow	20	22	2006
Belted Kingfisher	2	4	2006	Song Sparrow	44	361	1977
Downy Woodpecker	1	5	2018	Red-winged Blackbird	488	5111	1995
Hairy Woodpecker	1	4	2018	<i>Western Meadowlark</i>	52	52	2020
Northern Flicker	6	12	2018	Brewer's Blackbird	332	1100	1960
American Kestrel	13	23	2015	<i>Common Grackle</i>	27	27	2020
Merlin	1	3	2013	Great-tailed Grackle	11	47	2007
<i>Prairie Falcon</i>	6	6	2020	Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch	3	93	1983
Northern Shrike	1	3	2019	Black Rosy-Finch	1	4	2018
<i>Pinyon Jay</i>	3	3	2020	<i>Brown-capped Rosy-Finch</i>	306	306	2020
Black-billed Magpie	349	1080	1961	House Finch	77	337	2017
American Crow	118	270	1971	Pine Siskin	2	47	1963
Common Raven	199	212	2019	Lesser Goldfinch	1	4	2014
Horned Lark	659	2500	1960	American Goldfinch	37	143	2012
Black-capped Chickadee	9	35	2011	Evening Grosbeak	40	47	2017
<i>Mountain Chickadee</i>	12	12	2020	House Sparrow	1014	1660	1994
Red-breasted Nuthatch	2	20	2005	**Unusually High # Species	Unusually High Count**		



Welcome New Members and Thank You Renewing Members

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

New Members

Evert Brown, Alamosa, CO
 Dorlisa Burkett, Antonito, CO
 Heather Scott, Montrose, CO
 Jan Foster Miller & Bill Miller, Crestone, CO
 Merrilee DeWaal, Colorado Springs, CO
 Diana Biggs, Canon City, CO
 Mary Duell, Denver, CO
 Sue Norris, Louisville, CO

Renewing Members

Steve & Mary Russell, Alamosa, CO
 Dr. John Tooker, Mechanicsburg, PA
 Victoria Hemsli, Denver, CO
 Larry Calloway, Crestone, CO
 Linda Cozart, Alamosa, CO
 Charles Wagner, Monte Vista, CO
 David & Carol Lee, Crestone, CO
 Barbara Kruse, Alamosa, CO
 Sandy McNaechton, Pine, CO
 May Engquist, Saguache, CO

Ron Garcia, Crestone, CO
 Melinda McFarland, Mosca, CO
 Natalie Paynter, El Prado, NM
 David Jones, Monte Vista, CO
 Jim Bailey, Lakewood, CO
 Nancy Bowsher, Nathrop, CO
 Tim Armstrong, Monte Vista, CO
 Donald Thompson, Alamosa, CO
 Virginia Simmons, Del Norte, CO
 Jim & Jane Rhett, Monte Vista, CO
 Suzanne Beauchaine, Del Norte, CO
 Jenny Nehring, Monte Vista, CO
 Jerry & Vonda Jones, Crestone, 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!

Membership Application

Please Check one: **New Member** **Renewing** 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:

__Senior (62+) or Student \$15

__Individual \$15

__Family \$25

__Sponsor \$50

__Best Friend \$100+

__Life \$1000+



Friends of the San Luis Valley
National Wildlife Refuges
P.O. Box 857
Monte Vista, CO 81144



Pileated Woodpecker, American Birding Association's 2021 Bird of the Year!

by Frank Izaguirre

Where did you see your first Pileated Woodpecker? In the deep woods of a protected forest? Within the dense cypress strands of a southern swampland? Or maybe in a parking lot? like where I saw mine.

The Pileated Woodpecker — quite common in the southeastern United States, increasing in other parts of the East, present throughout much of southern Canada, and uncommon in some parts of the West—has adapted to people and disturbed forests as it increases its presence in urban areas. This large and hardy bird can be at turns cryptic, silently working tree trunks and logs while disappearing in the dim light of the understory, or conspicuous, unmistakably gliding through a wooded ravine with its trademark cackle. Its huge form and far-reaching laughter are often the highlight of a day's birding excursion. The ABA is proud that the Pileated Woodpecker, emblem of both the wild woods and the adaptability of birds to anthropogenically altered spaces, is our 2021 Bird of the Year.

