

# The Avocet



Volume 41 no. 1 Feb 2024



Get ready for the 41st Annual Monte Vista Crane Festival March 8-10, 2024! This much-anticipated event shines a spotlight on the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuges, drawing nature enthusiasts from near and far to experience the beauty of Colorado, and the majesty of the spring sandhill crane migration.

While most of our special tours are currently sold out, there's still plenty to experience with our regular morning and evening crane tours. These tours are a festival staple, offering breathtaking views of cranes, waterfowl, raptors and more. In addition to taking in the abundant wildlife at the refuge, there's also plenty of time to browse the works of local artisans at the Monte

Vista Chamber of Commerce's Craft & Nature Fair, which runs throughout the festival. Finally, be sure to check out the full agenda for Saturday's lineup of fabulous speakers, headlined by the inspiring Aimee Roberson, Director of the Southwest Region for American Bird Conservancy, who will present **Lessons from Indigenous Lifeways and Values**. Sharing compelling stories from her life, career, and culture, Aimee Roberson will discuss how these things are interconnected and why she believes that an understanding of Indigenous lifeways and values can help us envision and create a better future for all of us — birds and people alike. This keynote speech promises to be an enlightening and thought-provoking experience.

For the full festival agenda and to order tickets, visit our website at [www.mvcranefest.org](http://www.mvcranefest.org). Also, the Friends need volunteers to staff the Friends booth at the craft and nature fair as well as staffing the Visitor's Center at the Monte Vista Refuge. If you're interested in volunteering at the Friends Booth at the craft fair, please email Linda Cozart, [coz@gojade.org](mailto:coz@gojade.org) or text 719-480-0498. Join us in celebrating the beauty of nature and community spirit at the Monte Vista Crane Festival! Volunteers are also needed at the MV Refuges' Visitor Center, the weekends before, during, and after the Festival.

Friends Officers  
and  
Board Members

**President:**

*Mike Blenden*

**Vice President:**

*Tim Armstrong*

**Secretary:**

*Lisa Clements*

**Treasurer:**

*Linda Warsh*

**Board Members:**

*Evert Brown*

*Deb Callahan*

*Linda Cozart*

*Barb Kruse*

*Jenny Nehring*

*Peter Schlegel*

*Sandra Varner*

**Membership:**

*Jerry Jones*

**Refuge Liaison:**

*Suzanne*

*Beauchaine*

**Newsletter Editor:**

*Lisa Clements*

**Historian:**

*Vacant*

**Vol. Coordinator:**

*Vacant*

**Website:**

[www.slvrefuges.org](http://www.slvrefuges.org)

**Email:**

[friendslvnwr@gmail.com](mailto:friendslvnwr@gmail.com)



Thank you O&V for  
continued support



# President's Message — Mike Blenden

For those that don't know me, I was the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Refuge Project Leader in the San Luis Valley from 1995 to 2014. During that time I was privileged to be surrounded by a group of enthusiastic, conservation minded people interested in raising the local and national profile of these important national wildlife refuges. Together, we started the Friends of Alamosa and Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuges in 1999, later becoming the Friends of the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuges with the 2003 establishment of Baca NWR. As a retiree I am currently honored to serve as interim president of the "Friends".

It is gratifying to witness this group's evolution. Hosting public information meetings and conducting volunteer work days on refuges were initial projects in the early days. The first self-funded project was planning and construction of the Meadowlark Trail on Monte Vista NWR.

Fast forward to now and the Friends are intimately involved with planning and operation of the Monte Visa Crane Festival, have raised funds to expand wildlife viewing and public access opportunities on all the refuges, host the autumn Kid's Crane Festival, cater an annual Friends and Neighbors Picnic that rotates between refuges and provides an opportunity for refuge staff and neighbors to talk, eat, laugh and get to know each other in a casual setting. The list is longer and we are brainstorming even more activities to help refuge operations and increase public awareness and opportunities. Speaking as a former refuge manager, these kinds of ventures are absolutely crucial for even better management of your national wildlife refuges. Thank you for your support as a member! You have enabled the Friends to grow to a truly important and effective organization. The board of directors and I welcome and encourage you to become even more involved. Consider volunteering for a 2-hour shift at the Monte Vista Visitor's Center or Friends Booth at Ski HI for Crane fest to get involved and learn more about this important volunteer organization. Please contact us to discuss opportunities.

Thanks!

Michael Blenden, Interim President  
Friends of the SLV National Wildlife Refuges



Former Project Leaders Mike Blenden and Sharon Vaughn

Several friends and refuge staff gathered in the beginning of January to wish Sharon and Dean best wishes for their new adventure in California at the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge. Have FUN!



Because who doesn't need a new bag?  
(Almost no one)



Sharon and Dean pose by the crane wall at AWR



# Connections Beyond the Valley

Dear Robert,

I am a board member and past president of the board. On behalf of the entire board, we would like to thank you for your generous donation toward our Education Fund.

We will put your money to good use to educate the public about our three wonderful refuges and the wildlife they sustain in the San Luis Valley. One way we educate is thru programs that engage kids at the refuges and help them learn about local wildlife. We also fund interpretive signs at pullouts on the refuges. We recently funded new signs at the Monte Vista Refuge, which educate the public about Sandhill Cranes.

We would love to do a short feature on our social media and website about your donation. We can keep you anonymous if you would like. We would like to know where you live, how you know about the refuges, and what you enjoy about the refuges. If you would like to provide us with this information and any other information you would like to share, reply to this email. We would also like to offer you a ball cap with either the Avocet or Sandhill Cranes as a thank you. Please provide your mailing address and preference to receive the hat.

Again, a big thank you. Deb Callahan, Past President



Dear Deb,

Thank you for your message about the work of the "Friends", and your words of appreciation for my modest donation.

I do not object to your using information about us on your social media.

I am originally a Colorado boy, having attended Adams State when it was still "College". I am now 82 years old, and have spent most of my professional career working overseas in several countries including Russia, France, and Austria. Today, I live with my wife in Montenegro, where we chose to "retire", although both of us are still active in the family business.

I have a grown daughter in Golden, Melodie, who regularly brings her grandchildren to the Sandhill Crane festivals. I am also proud to have a granddaughter, Christi Krattli, who, with her husband Dallas, has 4 wonderful daughters -- my great grandchildren -- who live in Monte Vista, and regularly participate in the Festival. Christi is well known in the community for her original cakes and cupcakes for special occasions, and her stand on the fairground was quite successful.

This past Spring was my first attendance at the Festival, and I was greatly impressed by the organization -- we attended the primer lecture -- and the attendance, including many people from distant states.

An interesting anecdote: Two weeks after our participation in the Festival, I was with my wife in a large department store in London (Harrods), and while she shopped, I wandered. In an area where expensive glass and ceramic sculptures were on display, I spotted a large ceramic crane, with a red-feathered cap on its head. I stopped to tell the salesman that I was impressed to see a Sandhill crane in his shop, and he thanked me profusely for identifying the bird, about which he previously had no idea.

I think you can count on our family as regular participants in future Sandhill events.

Thank you!  
Robert Krattli





# From the Refuges – Suzanne Beauchaine

Change is in the air! Recently, I've been seeing flocks of ducks and geese in the morning on the way to work. Refuge Staff are preparing to welcome the cranes back soon.

We will also be welcoming John Hughes to the Valley in mid-February. John will be on a 120 day detail into the Project Leader position that Sharon Vaughn left to go work at the Sacramento NWR Complex in California in early January. John is a lead wildlife biologist at the National Black-footed Ferret Conservation Center near Denver.

Another migration happening Feb 20, is Joshua Barnhart who is coming from the NPS in Vermont to Monte Vista NWR as the new Maintenance Professional, the first in 9 years!!! We are excited to welcome both John and Josh to the Refuges!

I'm excited to announce the Grand Opening of the new Visitor Center and Headquarters Office for the San Luis Valley NWR Complex, APRIL 19, Friday from 4-7pm (7824 El Rancho Lane, Alamosa). Come see the beautiful new displays, meet the staff, enjoy some food, learn about the refuges, and take a tour around the Wildlife Drive.

We have several habitat improvement projects occurring on all three refuges. Highlights include wetland restoration at Monte Vista NWR at Bowen Pond where many colonial waterbirds nest including white-faced ibis, black-crowned night heron, snowy egrets and eared grebes.

Large Elk/Deer/Beaver Fence Enclosures are being constructed on Baca and Alamosa NWRs. These are being constructed to protect and enhance willow growth for the Rio Grande sucker and chub on the Baca NWR and for the Federally Endangered southwestern willow flycatcher on Alamosa NWR. You can see one of the enclosures from the Rio Grande Nature Trail on Alamosa NWR.

Last fall on Alamosa NWR's Malm Trail, SLVGO rounded up several volunteers to work with Colorado State Forest Service, the Refuge, and the SLVGOATS to plant 250 shrubs and seed the newly constructed flood plain terrace and cage the cottonwoods from beaver, elk and deer browse. We also had our first bald eagle nest on Alamosa NWR last year. That pair successfully raised one juvenile. Very recently, other visitors have observed several other bald eagles fishing at the Chicago Dam just upstream of this photo.



I don't think these are the right GOATS, but they were seen on the Malm Trail



New interpretive displays at the new San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex Visitor Center and Headquarters Office

Photo credit: NWR



Caged cottonwoods along the Malm Trail and river restoration project site



Photo credit: NWR



Levee Repair and bank stabilization on Bowen Pond to reduce erosion and water loss

Photo credit: NWR





# From the Refuges – continued

Matt Putnam grew up in Buffalo, NY and after college he spent several years adventuring and traveling throughout the United States. Matt's first experiences with heavy equipment was during his college job working in his hometown's Parks and Recreation department. Matt is a recent hire at the San Luis Valley NWR Complex in Region 6 and he comes to us from Region 4 Loxahatchee NWR. While there, Matt was part of the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) Strike Team which had him traveling from the Florida Keys to rural Arkansas completing deferred maintenance projects. Matt will be serving on Region 6's GAOA Strike Team as an Engineering Equipment Operator. He has a CDL Class A so he can also assist with hauling equipment throughout the region.



## Friends 2023 Christmas Party at the Roast



Become a more active Friends member and be invited to the annual Christmas party, go on behind the scenes field trips, participate in refuge work days, and the Friends and Neighbors picnic. Find out how you can help create more fun times or to become a Board Member, by emailing us.



Clockwise from left: archeology field trip, a trip to the Brownie Hills, work day at Monte Vista NWR, Friends and Neighbors' Picnic





# 124th Christmas Bird Count – Lisa Clements

The 66th Annual Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge Christmas Bird Count was held December 16, 2023.

Eighteen people (six teams) spent a total of 24.25 party hours and covered over 280 driving and walking miles on the count. Weather conditions during the day were cool with clear skies and no wind. The day started out at 4° below Zero and rose to a balmy 29°F. We covered most all of the 176 square miles of circle.

This year’s numbers were above average. A total of 51 species were documented and 5833 individuals. Sixty-three species is still the record. Best birds were Virginia Rail, Lincoln’s Sparrow, Ferruginous Hawk, Merlin, Sandhill Crane, and Prairie Falcon. During count week, a Townsend’s Solitaire was reported.

I sent our information to the National Audubon to be included in the National Christmas Bird Count. The website, <http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/>, is easy to access and you can see how we have done in years past as far as the numbers go.

Many thanks to Jake Myers, Tim and Cathy Armstrong, Evert and Tammy Brown, Lucie Desmarais, John and Lisa Rawinski, Jason and Sara, Suzanne Beauchaine, Jenny Nehring, Don Thompson and Jan Oen, Jennie Birdsall, Dan Boone and Luanne Baugh for helping to keep the tradition of freezing your butt off to count birds in the name of science. I can not do this without you. The 2024 count, 67th MV count (Audubon’s 125th count) is the 14th of December. See you then. If your home is in the circle of the count, you could be a feeder watcher !

On Page 7 you will find a summary of species seen and past record high numbers.



Brewer's Blackbird



Heron Rookery



sparkly hoar frost



Great Blue Heron

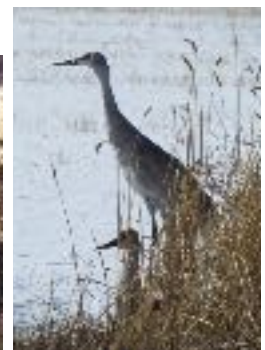


Prairie Falcon

Secretive and shy, the Virginia Rail



Red-tailed Hawk



Sandhill Cranes. Did they overwinter? or early arrivals





Species Name	#	Record High / Count #	Species Name	#	Record High / Count #	Species Name	#	Record High / Count #
Canada Goose	109	1450 / 87th	Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon)	165	440 / 121st	Brown Creeper	1	6 / 83rd
Mallard	130	68,000 / 61st	Eurasian Collared-Dove	112	237 / 116th	Marsh Wren	3	12 / 118th
Northern Shoveler	1	100 / 71st	Mourning Dove	2	30 / 62th	Townsend's Solitaire	CW	7 / 107th
Am Green-wing Teal	5	250 / 88th	Great Horned Owl	15	24 / 96th	European Starling	1554	3500 / 87th
Ring-necked Duck	3	8 / 115th	Belted Kingfisher	1	4 / 107th	American Tree Sparrow	8	900 / 87th
Common Goldeneye	10	40 / 115th	Downy Woodpecker	2	6 / 122th	Dark-eyed Junco	30	400 / 87th
Great Blue Heron	4	10 / 110th	Hairy Woodpecker	1	4 / 199th	White-crowned Sparrow	22	22 / 124th
Golden Eagle	1	14 / 76th	Northern Flicker	13	13 / 124th	Song Sparrow	94	361 / 78th
Northern Harrier	7	63 / 96th	American Kestrel	10	23 / 116th	<i>Lincoln's Sparrow*</i>	1	3 / 77th
Bald Eagle	9	38 / 92nd	Merlin	1	6 / 121st	Red-winged Blackbird	646	5111 / 96th
Red-tailed Hawk	28	61 / 121st	<i>Prairie Falcon*</i>	1	6 / 121st	Western Meadowlark	27	52 / 121st
Rough-legged Hawk	1	56 / 77th	Black-billed Magpie	142	1080 / 62nd	Brewer's Blackbird	522	1100 / 61st
<i>Ferruginous Hawk*</i>	3	3 / 124th	American Crow	74	270 / 72nd	<i>Common Grackle</i>	10	20 / 110th
<i>Virginia Rail*</i>	1	6 / 62nd	Common Raven	188	212 / 120th	Brown-capped Rosy-Finch	2	306 / 121st
American Coot	15	60 / 106th	Horned Lark	669	2500 / 61st	House Finch	88	337 / 118th
<i>Sandhill Crane*</i>	2	355 / 110th	Black-capped Chickadee	2	35 / 112th	American Goldfinch	26	143 / 113th
Killdeer	4	8 / 57th	Mountain Chickadee	15	16 / 123rd	House Sparrow	1053	1660 / 95th
			CW = count week			<i>unusual species*</i>		

# Accipiters

Northern Goshawk    Cooper's Hawk    Sharp-shinned Hawk



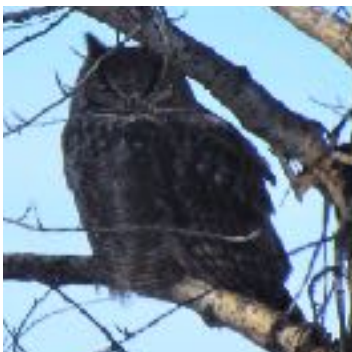
Ever have trouble knowing if that unidentified flying bird is the size of a Robin? or bigger? This might help



2023 CBC Ferruginous Hawk ©Evert Brown



Turkey Vultures have an excellent sense of smell, but Black Vultures aren't nearly as accomplished sniffers. To find food they soar high in the sky and keep an eye on the lower-soaring Turkey Vultures. When a Turkey Vulture's nose detects the delicious aroma of decaying flesh and descends on a carcass, the Black Vulture follows close behind. Turkey Vultures are larger than it's cousin, the Black Vulture.

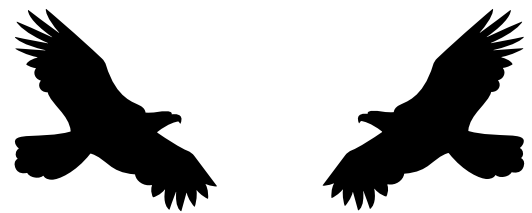


2023 CBC Great Horned Owl



Ferruginous Hawk - can you see the feathers on the leg?

Sora at the Malm Trail



Common, yet not, this Short-eared Owl posed for Rachael at the Monte Vista NWR

©Rachael Cheslock



Wilson's Snipe near Pike's Stockade







# Welcome New Members and Thank You Renewing Members

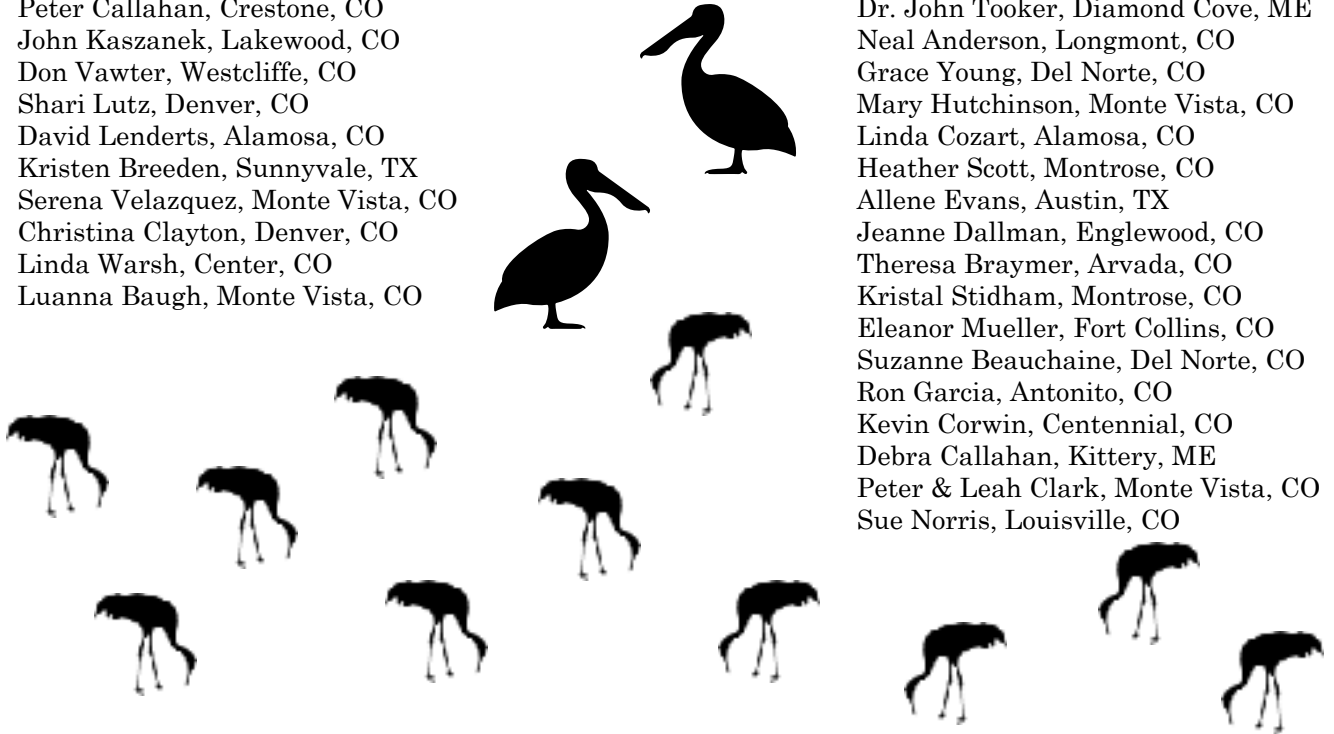
The following people have joined or renewed their Friends Membership since our last newsletter:

### New Members

Sandra Varner, Monte Vista, CO  
 Peter Callahan, Crestone, CO  
 John Kaszanek, Lakewood, CO  
 Don Vawter, Westcliffe, CO  
 Shari Lutz, Denver, CO  
 David Lenderts, Alamosa, CO  
 Kristen Breeden, Sunnyvale, TX  
 Serena Velazquez, Monte Vista, CO  
 Christina Clayton, Denver, CO  
 Linda Warsh, Center, CO  
 Luanna Baugh, Monte Vista, CO

### Renewing Members

John Jordan, Gunnison, CO  
 Dr. John Tooker, Diamond Cove, ME  
 Neal Anderson, Longmont, CO  
 Grace Young, Del Norte, CO  
 Mary Hutchinson, Monte Vista, CO  
 Linda Cozart, Alamosa, CO  
 Heather Scott, Montrose, CO  
 Allene Evans, Austin, TX  
 Jeanne Dallman, Englewood, CO  
 Theresa Braymer, Arvada, CO  
 Kristal Stidham, Montrose, CO  
 Eleanor Mueller, Fort Collins, CO  
 Suzanne Beauchaine, Del Norte, CO  
 Ron Garcia, Antonito, CO  
 Kevin Corwin, Centennial, CO  
 Debra Callahan, Kittery, ME  
 Peter & Leah Clark, Monte Vista, CO  
 Sue Norris, Louisville, 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](http://slvrefuges.org) **Thank you!**

### Membership Application

Please Choose One:      New Member            Renewing            Date      \_\_\_\_\_

Name (Please Print)      \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address      \_\_\_\_\_

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 \$25
- Individual \$30
- Family \$40
- Sponsor \$75
- Best Friend \$125+
- Life \$1000+





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

## What Makes a Songbird a Songbird?

Listen to the fluted chorus of a Swainson's Thrush, a beautiful song known to inspire artists and enliven Rocky Mountain forests each summer. Now hear the gruff squawk of an American Crow. Which is the songbird? If you said both, take a bow.

"Something can be a songbird and not be an impressive singer," says *Audubon* field editor Kenn Kaufman. So, if singing ability doesn't make a songbird a songbird, then what does? That question is actually a lot trickier to answer than it might seem.

The general public might throw the term around loosely, but for scientists, "songbird" has a more detailed meaning: It refers to a specific suborder of birds. All songbirds are perching birds, an order called passerines that share a distinct toe arrangement that helps them grasp branches. Passerines are separated into three suborders, the largest of which is *Passeri*. Birds in the *Passeri* suborder are called oscines, or songbirds. The suborder includes more than 4,000 species that range from the compact Golden-crowned Kinglet to the much larger Common Raven. While most perching birds can produce their song from instinct alone, songbirds learn theirs. Research shows that songbirds hatch with a rough template of a song but need adult tutors to become expert vocalists.

Find out more about songbirds online at the Audubon website: [https://www.audubon.org/news/what-songbird-exactly?ms=digital-eng-email-ea-x-engagement\\_what-songbird&utm\\_source=ea&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=engagement\\_&utm\\_content=what-songbird](https://www.audubon.org/news/what-songbird-exactly?ms=digital-eng-email-ea-x-engagement_what-songbird&utm_source=ea&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=engagement_&utm_content=what-songbird)



Common Crow



Swainson's Thrush

