

The Avocet



Volume 39 no. 2 July 2023

Thank You for joining us for the 40th Anniversary Monte Vista Crane Festival March 10-12, 2023 ! From tours and talks to film premieres and craft fairs, the 40th Anniversary of the Monte Vista Crane Festival was an overwhelming success, and a true testament to the passion of crane viewers and San Luis Valley hospitality. We are grateful for the support from visitors, locals and businesses alike, and we are eager to see what the future holds for this very special festival. Interested in getting involved in the 2024 festival? Email us at mvcranefest@gmail.com
Mark your calendars, the 2024 Monte Vista Crane Festival dates are March 8-10. Planning for the festival will begin this fall so stay tuned. Tickets will go on sale the beginning of January 2024. Keep your eye on the website mvcranefest.org for more information.

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and
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Doug Ouren

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Vacant

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Lisa Clements

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Beauchaine*

Newsletter Editor:
Lisa Clements

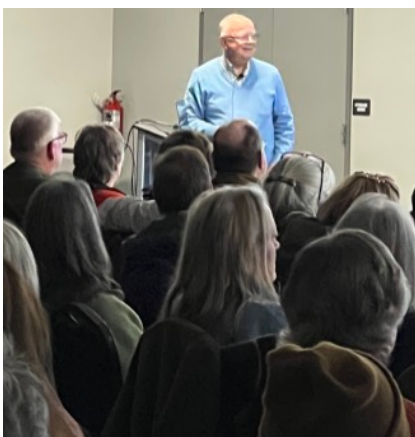
Historian:
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Vol. Coordinator:
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Website:
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Email:
friendslvnwr@gmail.com



Thank you
Peter Schlegel
for pictures
from the newly
renovated Ski
Hi Complex
where the
Craft Fair was
held.



George
Archibald,
keynote
speaker:
*Lessons
Learned From
50 Years of
Crane
Conservation*



Thank you O&V for
continued support



President's Message – Doug Ouren

A lot has happened since our January newsletter. As Deb Callahan mentioned in that newsletter, she moved to Maine, but is still assisting through the transition as a Board member for the next year. We had another great Crane Festival. Fellow board member Evert Brown and I, along with Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge and Alamosa NWR Manager Suzanne Beauchaine and Baca NWR manager Ty Benally, attended the National Friends of Wildlife Refuges Workshop at the end of April. It was great to get more background on how other Friends groups around the country go about their business, and the numerous resources available to all of the Friends groups.

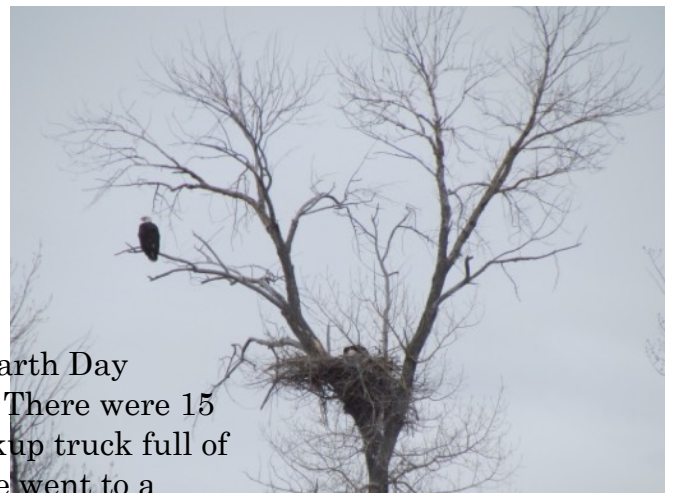
Our Board of Directors, Refuge staff, and two Friends mentors took part in a Friends Mentoring workshop. The workshop lasted for two-and-a-half days with the Friends mentors spending time with Refuge staff, then with our Friends group independently, then with both groups together. The sessions provided additional insight on how the two groups operate and how there could be improved interactions as we move forward.

Speaking of moving forward, we are having a Friends Summit meeting on July 8th, 2023, at the Monte Vista Chamber of Commerce building. The morning session will focus on the future of our Friends group including such topics as recruiting and replacing board members and officers; committee development and planned giving. The Summit session will be followed at 2pm by the members Annual Meeting. We hope you will consider attending — it would be great to have more member input.

In closing, I would like to remind everyone that because of ample winter snowpack and the relatively cool wet weather this spring and early summer, the refuges are all seeing increased water levels. This is accompanied by increased activities by the regular suite of waterfowl and shore birds along with unusual new avian visitors. That means it is a great time to get out and visit your refuge!



The Friends of the San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuges Board is looking for several key Board positions.



Thank you Mark Franchi for the photograph. Earth Day volunteers cleaned up trash on the Malm Trail. There were 15 volunteers that helped with the clean up. A pickup truck full of trash went to the dump. After the trail work, we went to a viewing spot to see the nesting Bald eagles on the Alamosa NWR.



From the Refuges

Refuge Open House



Photo credit: US Fish and Wildlife Service, Sharon Vaughn

Left to Right: Chris Shaffer, refuge hydrologist, Ty Benally, Baca Refuge Manager, and Kirk Groves, refuge maintenance worker. All provided refuge information during the Baca NWR open house on May 13, 2023

On May 13, 2023, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service invited the public to attend an open house event at the Baca National Wildlife Refuge. Refuge manager, Ty Benally said they were excited to meet the public who have been asking him when they will be able to visit the refuge. Informational talks included learning about how the refuge water resources provide habitat to wildlife on the refuge, and learning about the Rio Grande chub and sucker by seeing the species in their habitat in Crestone Creek.

Tours were also offered of the historic buildings near the refuge headquarters and the Baca National wildlife Refuge Nature and Heritage Trail that was completed in 2020. Another trail is in the works to extend the existing trail to the Crestone Kiosk.

About 50 people shared the morning at the Baca Refuge Open House.



Photos from Peter Schlegel



Fire: Nature’s Way of Recycling - Wildlife Refuge Specialist Dean Lee

Prescribed burns on the Alamosa and Monte Vista Refuges totaling 1,437 acres (455ac. Alamosa, 982ac. MV) were conducted on April 11th, 2023, in an effort to A) restore native vegetation to the refuge’s wetland habitats and B) to re-set the succession of cattails and other tall emergent plants. This two-pronged objective will help refuge managers meet the habitat needs for local wildlife such as mallards, cinnamon teal, elk, and even sandhill cranes. These species are dependent on quality vegetative habitats for breeding, nesting, resting, foraging, and offspring rearing.

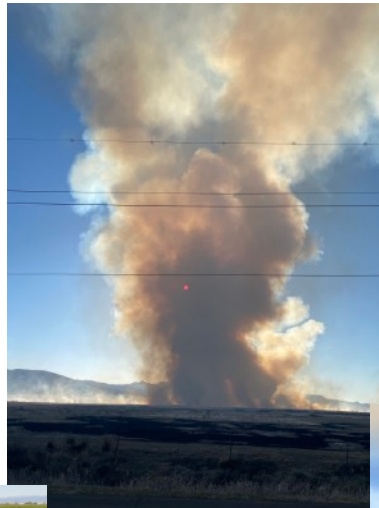
Over time, wetlands can become overgrown and decadent, making areas susceptible to invasive species such as white-top, knapweed, and thistle. Cattails, which are used as a major nesting and safety cover, can become so thick and overgrown, that little use is made of it by wildlife. This is where fire comes into play. By removing decadent and overgrown vegetation, a recycling of nutrients will occur, helping new healthy and vigorous plants to grow. This new growth will have immediate benefits to various wildlife species. High quality forage is probably the biggest benefit from this new vegetative growth. After a season or two, the vegetation will become thick enough to support nesting habitat for numerous bird species, like Western meadowlarks, Savannah sparrows, Wilson’s phalaropes, and various other birds.

Refuge Management plans to continue the use of prescribed burns in the future, as well as other tools, to assist with vegetation disturbances to help with this natural recycling process.

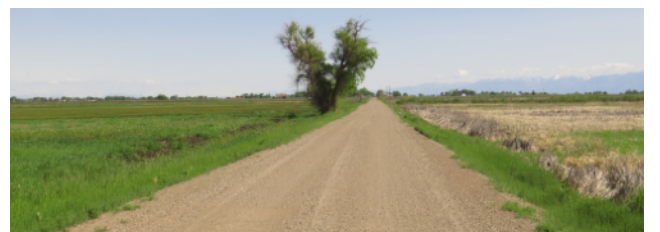
For more information about refuge habitat management or if you’d like to talk to Refuge Management, please call 719-589-4021. Also visit their [Facebook page](#) and Refuge [Websites](#).



Dramatic plumes rise from the Monte Vista and Alamosa refuges



New green growth provides a nice vista and some deer food



San Luis Valley Visitors



White-rumped Sandpiper © John Rawinski



Blue-grey Gnatcatcher © Evert Brown

Yellow Warbler



Stilt Sandpiper © John Rawinski



Black-throated Blue Warbler



American White Pelican



Hooded Merganser © Evert Brown

Great Egret



Plumbeous Vireo © Evert Brown





Common Grebes of the San Luis Valley – Evert Brown

Grebes are an odd aquatic bird. They are common to our region but still odd in my book. They have lobed toes, not webbed. Their feet are back on the body offsetting their balance. The genus name *Podilymbus* of the Pied-billed and Eared Grebes means ‘feet at the buttocks’. There are South American members of this group which are flightless. Grebes are what I consider lake-pelagic, meaning they spend their time living on water. They are divers and forage on water, they court on water, nest on water platforms, and raise their young on water.

Maps show Western, Clark’s, Eared, and Pied-billed grebes breed in the San Luis Valley area. Others species may migrate through our area. Below are some pictures of the four common grebes of the San Luis Valley.

At a quick glance in the field, the most likely two grebes to confuse would be the Western verses the Clark’s. Until 1985, these two were considered the same species. They are about the same size and general shape. They appear together on the same bodies of water. On these two, bills are similar, long and pointed although there is notable difference between males and females. Both have a darker body and a black streak on the back of their neck. The best field recognition to tell these two apart is to look for where the white is on the side of the head. The throat of both is white but look where the white comes onto the head, whether it goes above the eye or below the eye. Courtship of these birds is spectacular, worthy of being on one’s *bucket list*.

The other grebes are characteristic of their names. The Eared Grebe displays golden wisps of feathers that fan out from behind the bright red eyes. Almost the entire population of Eared grebes flies to Mono Lake for the fall. Migration occurs only at night. The Pied-billed Grebe

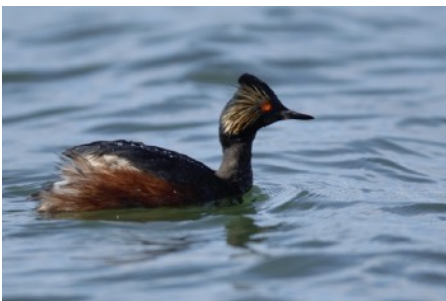
has a dark band around its bill. Like other grebes the Pied-billed eats large quantities of its own feathers. In the stomach, this helps prey parts from passing into the intestine.



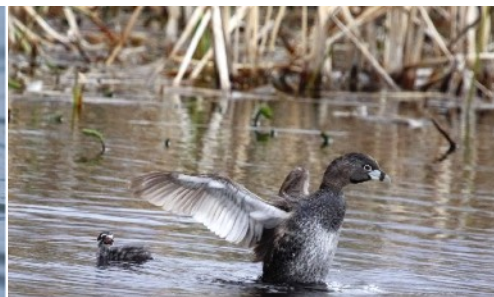
Clark's Grebe, *Aechmophorus clarkia*



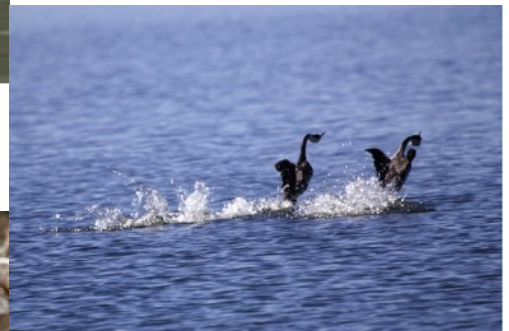
Western Grebe, *Aechmophorus occidentalis*



Eared Grebe, *Podiceps nigricollis*



Pied-billed Grebe, *Podilymbus podiceps* (note cryptic markings on young chick)



Iconic Western Grebe courtship at Home Lake, CO



Big Day 2023 – Lisa Clements

A small group, Lisa and John Rawiniski, Randy Gromley, Jacob Myers, and I, met at 6am, at the Monte Vista Refuge for a whirl wind day of intensive birding. A BIG DAY! In case you don't know what that is, it is birding that is not for the faint of heart. It's about chasing and spotting and counting and going after the next one. It sounds intense, and it is, but at the same time, it is a lot of fun. I mean, what's not to have fun with? Several people in the same vehicle, for hours, intense about their birding and having bird nerd camaraderie. Oh! and apple turnovers.

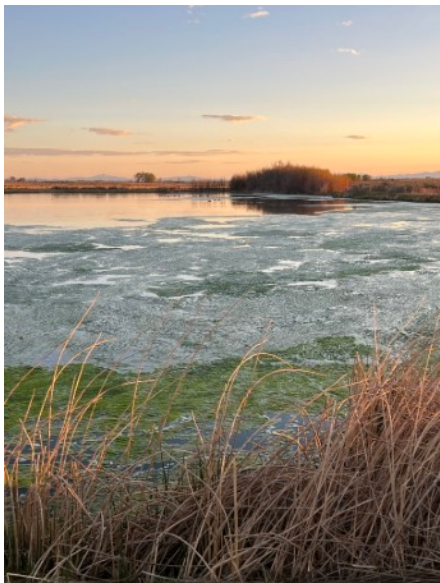
We had beautiful weather conditions, i.e. no wind or rain or many mosquitoes. We hit many of the Valley hotspots, including Smith Reservoir (Piping Plover), MV Refuge (Palm Warbler), and the mountains (Golden Eagle) and the popular Malm Trail (Bald Eagle). We saw 130 species. The record of 153 may never be broken – but it's fun to try.

Below is the list of species we saw:

See Page 8 for some photos of our Big Day

American Avocet	Brewer's Blackbird	Double-crested Cormorant	Lark Sparrow	Northern Pintail	Ruddy Duck	Western Kingbird
American Bittern	Brewer's Sparrow	Eared Grebe	Least Sandpiper	Northern Shoveler	Sage Thrasher	Western Meadowlark
American Coot	Brown-headed Cowbird	Eurasian Collared Dove	Lesser Goldfinch	Orange-crowned Warbler	Savannah Sparrow	Western Tanager
American Crow	Brd-tailed Hummingbird	European Starling	Lesser Scaup	Osprey	Says Phoebe	White faced Ibis
American Goldfinch	Bufflehead	Franklin's Gull	Lewis' Woodpecker	Palm Warbler	Snowy Plover	White-br Nuthatch
American Kestrel	Bullock's Oriole	Gadwall	Loggerhead Shrike	Pied-billed Grebe	Song Sparrow	White-crowned Sparrow
American Robin	Bushtit	Golden Eagle	Long-billed Dowitcher	Pine Siskin	Sora	White-throated Swift
Am White Pelican	California Gull	Great Blue Heron	MacGillivray's Warbler	Pinyon Jay	Spotted Sandpiper	Willet
American Wigeon	Canada Goose	Great Horned Owl	Mallard	Piping Plover	Spotted Towhee	Williamson's Sapsucker
Baird's Sandpiper	Chipping Sparrow	Great-tailed Grackle	Marbled Godwit	Pygmy Nuthatch	Stellers Jay	Wilson's Phalarope
Bald Eagle	Clark's Grebe	Green-tailed Towhee	Marsh Wren	Redhead	Stilt Sandpiper	Wilson's Snipe
Barn Swallow	Clark's Nutcracker	Green-winged Teal	Mountain Bluebird	Red-neck Phalarope	Swainson's Hawk	Wood Duck
Black Tern	Clay-colored Sparrow	Hammond's Flycatcher	Mountain Chickadee	Red-tailed Hawk	Townsend's Solitaire	Yellow Warbler
Black-billed Magpie	Cliff Swallow	Horned Lark	Mountain Plover	Red-wng Blackbird	Tree Swallow	Yellow-headed Blackbird
Black-crowned Night-heron	Common Grackle	House Finch	Mourning Dove	Ring-billed Gull	Turkey Vulture	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Black-chinned Hummingbird	Common Merganser	House Sparrow	Northern Rough Winged Swallow	Ring-necked Duck	Vesper Sparrow	
Blue Grosbeak	Common Raven	House Wren	Northern Flicker	Rock Pigeon	Violet-green Swallow	
Blk-hded Grosbeak	Common Yellowthroat	Killdeer	Northern Harrier	Rock Wren	Warbling Vireo	
Blue-winged Teal	Dark-eyed Junco	Lark Bunting	Northern Mockingbird	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Western Grebe	

Big Day Adventurers Adventure



Morning Has Broken



Willet



Immature Great Horned Owls



Black Terns © John Rawinski



Yellow-headed Blackbird & White-faced Ibis



Palm Warbler © John Rawinski



Piping Plover © John Rawinski



Western Tanager



mesa

Rio Grande at sunset





Welcome New Members and Thank You Renewing Members

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

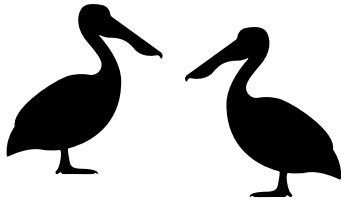
New Members

- Patrick Grove, Colorado Springs, CO
- Dee Schranz, Denver, CO
- Jerry & Ronna Jo Cochran, Monte Vista, CO
- Brandt Garber, Telluride, CO
- Robert Krattli, Golden, CO
- Kyle Gustafson, Alamosa, CO
- George & Linda Rush, Monte Vista, CO
- Jeff Sherman, Longmont, CO
- Gigi Dennis-Lounsbury, Monte Vista, CO
- Shelly Catterson, Rancho de Taos, NM
- Mark Guebert-Steward, Evergreen, CO
- Kevin Sloan, Crestone, CO
- Ruth Brown, Aspen, CO
- Teresa Dorsey, Crestone, CO
- Carol Sednek, Cheyenne, WY

Renewing Members

- Jerry & Vonda Jones, Crestone, CO
- Jim Seavey, Salida, CO
- Maxine Mandell, Erie, CO
- James & Mary Jane Rhett, Monte Vista, CO
- Gary Conover, Colorado Springs, CO
- Stephanie Ouren, Buena Vista, CO
- Bob Streeter, Fort Collins, CO
- Jamie Damico, Florissant, CO
- Paula Muir, Boulder, CO
- Richard Kenshalo, Salida, CO
- Cortiney Bradley, Buena Vista, CO
- Jenny Nehring, Monte Vista, CO
- Melanie Helton, Colorado Springs, CO
- Tim Armstrong, Monte Vista, CO
- Peggy Godfrey, Moffat, CO
- Virginia Simmons, Del Norte, CO
- Hugh Kingery, Franktown, CO
- Lea Wilkins, Edwards, MO
- Lelia Coveney, Salida, CO
- Martha Kennedy, Monte Vista, CO
- Martin & Diana Jones, Alamosa, CO
- Mary Susan Eldredge, Alamosa, CO
- Deborah Tennant, Vail, CO

- Ina Anderson, Saguache, CO
- Elizabeth Garner, Colorado Springs, CO
- Robert J Ross, Basalt, CO
- Vivian Pena, Capulin CO
- Crystal Wilson, Englewood, CO
- Barbara Klaus, Evergreen, CO
- Karen George, Boulder, CO
- Elizabeth Winston, Loveland, CO
- Steve & Mary Russell, Alamosa, CO
- Tanja Britton, Colorado Springs, CO
- Ruth Arnold, Black Hawk, CO
- Cheryl Kirksey, Littleton, CO
- Rio de la Vista, Del Norte, CO
- Diane Hutton, Aurora, CO
- Susan Putnam, Aurora, CO
- Brian & Diane Underwood, Pueblo, CO
- Suzanne DeVore, Mosca, CO
- Marianna Young, Monte Vista, CO
- Nancy Merrill, Hayden, CO
- Sara Oldham, Lakewood, CO
- Mike Foster, Farmington, NM



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 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: <input type="checkbox"/> Senior (62+) or Student \$25 <input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$30 <input type="checkbox"/> Family \$40 <input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor \$75 <input type="checkbox"/> Best Friend \$125+ <input type="checkbox"/> Life \$1000+





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



Loggerhead Shrike
© Evert Brown



Larius ludovicianus



Loggerhead Shrike
© Deborah Bifulco



Larius borealis

Loggerhead vs. Northern Shrike

When it comes to songbirds, shrikes are a bloodthirsty bunch. They've earned the name 'butcher birds' for the way they impale their prey on thorns or barbed wire. Preferring to hunt in open areas, they'll perch on the very top branches of trees or on powerlines to watch for prey. Their targets can include anything from cardinals and lizards to grasshoppers and mice.

Here in North America we have two species of butcherbirds: the medium-sized Northern Shrike and the somewhat smaller Loggerhead Shrike. If you live in the northern United States, you can see the Loggerhead Shrike in summer and the Northern Shrike in winter (they breed up in the taiga and tundra). In the extreme southern states, you only get the Loggerhead year round. But what do you do in the middle of the country where their winter ranges overlap? The secret to identifying adult shrikes is all in the face.

Species that shrikes might be confused with include Northern Mockingbirds, Clark's Nutcrackers, and Townsend's Solitaires. Yet their hooked beaks, beefy heads, and distinct behavior set them apart from other birds. (Any blood is also a good clue.) If you see a passerine hovering and hunting in a clearing, there's no doubt: You're about to see a butcherbird get down to business.

See the article online for more information: <https://www.audubon.org/news/learn-tell-northern-shrike-loggerhead-shrike>

