



April 2022 "Flyer" Cheyenne - High Plains Audubon Society

Chartered by the National Audubon Society since 1974

Serving southeastern Wyoming Audubon members

Mission Statement: *The Cheyenne-High Plains Audubon Society promotes the conservation and appreciation of birds and wildlife through education, science, advocacy, and habitat stewardship in Southeast Wyoming.*

Vision Statement: *The Cheyenne-High Plains Audubon Society envisions a community where birds, wildlife, and their habitats are valued, protected, and enjoyed by the general public.*

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Mark Gorges, Newsletter, Habitat Hero

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Barb Gorges, Programs, Publicity

Lorie Chesnut, Website

Advocacy, open

Terry Harper, Past president

The **CHPAS Flyer** is published online monthly. Submissions are welcome. The current issue is available online at www.CheyenneAudubon.org.

Contact Us at cheyenneaudubon@gmail.com

Please become a CHPAS member

Send \$12 plus any optional donation and your name, email address and mailing address to Cheyenne-High Plains Audubon Society, P.O. Box 2502, Cheyenne, WY 82003.

All chapter memberships expire Sept. 1. Any membership dues sent in after May 1 will pertain to the remainder of the current membership year and the following year.

Join the National Audubon Society

Send \$20 to Cheyenne - High Plains Audubon Society to join the National Audubon Society and you will receive NAS membership and NAS will return the \$20 to CHPAS.

"Wyoming Bird" chat group

Subscribe, post and/or read about interesting sightings on this Facebook public group site:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/403337446664409/>

Calendar

April 16, 6:00 a.m. – Field Trip: Sharp-tailed Grouse Lek Viewing

We will meet at the Pilot Truck Stop in the front parking lot (off I-80 Exit 367, also known as the WHR exit, 8020 Campstool Road) for departure at 6:00 a.m. sharp. It is about a 40-mile drive to the lek area. We will be driving east on I-80 then north to an area north of Hillsdale.

We hope to see grouse dancing on their lek as well as other spring prairie birds.



We will carpool to the lek site as much as possible to keep the number of vehicles to a minimum. The outing will be about three hours, so we should be back to the truck stop by 9 a.m.

If you are interested in going, contact Grant Frost, 307-343-2024, so that he has a list of those expected and can let you know if the plans change for any reason.

April 19, 7:00 p.m. – Program: “Greater Sage-Grouse - The Largest Conservation Effort in U.S. History: The Ups and Downs,” given by Daly Edmunds, Audubon Rockies policy and outreach director, and Vicki Herren, retired Bureau of Land Management national sage-grouse coordinator.

Cottonwood Room at the Laramie County Library, 2200 Pioneer Ave. It can also be accessed virtually by using this Zoom link:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81967041936?pwd=cjNvVTISeWRGOXFLZUNYcVREaG9mQT09>

The bird’s biology and management will be discussed, including recent science that shows alarming declines and the Bureau of Land Management’s latest management efforts.

Greater Sage-Grouse are found across 11 western states in North America’s largest but often overlooked ecosystem, shrub steppe, with Wyoming containing the largest share of birds. This inconspicuous lekking species was once so prevalent that they fed many pioneers during their grueling westward journeys.



Greater Sage-Grouse photo by Pete Arnold

April 26, 6:30 p.m. – Board Meeting

Contact Wanda Manley, cheyenneaudubon@gmail.com, if you would like to participate in helping to plan chapter activities.

April 29, 8:00 a.m. – Country Club Bird Survey

Contact Chuck Seniawski to take part or to be on his email notice list: 307-638-6519 or chuckski@aol.com. The count will start in the County Clubhouse’s main parking lot.

April 29, 7:00 p.m. – “Bird Photography Using Blinds with Elizabeth Boehm”

Trout Room of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department headquarters at 5400 Bishop Road.

Award-winning Pinedale, Wyoming, wildlife photographer Elizabeth Boehm will be presenting a free talk open to the public. She will discuss different blinds and how to position, set up and use them as well as blind etiquette. She will end with a slide show of her photography. Samples of her work will be available for purchase.



*Redheads eat submerged vegetation and invertebrates.
Photo by Elizabeth Boehm*

Elizabeth Boehm has been photographing birds for more than 20 years and spends most of her time exploring and birding Sublette County, Wyoming. She is always seeking unique images of birds and wildlife in a natural setting. Using blinds, her goal is to be able to approach her subject a bit closer and to capture natural behavior.

She is an award-winning photographer having placed in the Top 10 photos in the North American Nature Photography Association Showcase, first place in the 2019 National Audubon professional bird photo contest, and grand prize in the Wyoming Wildlife Photo Competition along with numerous images published in books and magazines.

April 30, 7:00 a.m. Free Workshop: “Bird Photography Using Blinds Demonstrations with Elizabeth Boehm”

Cheyenne Botanic Gardens’ Paul Smith Children’s Village, 710 S. Lions Park Drive.

Award-winning Pinedale, Wyoming, wildlife photographer Elizabeth Boehm will be presenting a free demonstration open to the public. Boehm will demonstrate various kinds of blinds at the She will discuss any other tools needed for comfort and working with the weather conditions.

“As wildlife photographers, we need to be able to conceal ourselves from our photo subjects to catch natural behavior.

A variety of blinds can be used to bring the photographer a bit closer without flushing or disturbing the intended bird/wildlife,” Boehm said.



Photo courtesy Elizabeth Boehm

April 30, 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. – Spring Bird Identification: “Meet the Birds!” a class for adults and children 12 and older (Bring your own lunch) Cheyenne Botanic Gardens Paul Smith Children’s Village and Lions Park (Some walking included)

Registration required: \$15 via Cheyenne Botanic Gardens. Class limited to 40 participants. Registration is required via <https://bpt.me/5390763> or the Botanic Gardens.

Just before the peak of migration, let Cheyenne Audubon members introduce you to 50 of our local birds. A combination of classroom discussion and short walks into Lions Park, a Wyoming Important Bird Area, with borrowed binoculars or your own, will make spring so much more interesting for you.

May 14 – World Migratory Bird Day

May 21 – Annual Cheyenne Big Day Bird Count

June 10-12 – 2022 Wyoming BioBlitz at Guernsey State Park

Join Audubon Rockies (one of the co-sponsors of the BioBlitz) at Guernsey State Park this year to discover this Wyoming gem, survey wildlife, and have a blast with your family and friends! Registration information coming soon.

The Wyoming BioBlitz is a one-of-a-kind opportunity for families, students, and all nature-lovers to learn about plants and wildlife and help scientists survey them. During this weekend-long event, participants will team up with biologists to search for and document as many plants and animals as possible at Guernsey State Park.

For more information and the full schedule go to:

<https://rockies.audubon.org/naturalist/wyoming-bioblitz>

Chapter News

Chapter President's message



Hello Spring!!

We had a fairly mild winter, but the oscillations of spring weather are a welcome change. We're back on Daylight Savings Time (I wish they would make that a permanent situation) and I love the longer afternoons and evenings now.

The western wheatgrass is greening up, the hollyhocks have a nice basal rosette going and there are birds at the feeders all day now. It's a cacophony when the red winged blackbirds show up in the morning.

There are usually 25-50 males at a time and they fill the cottonwoods and the buffalo berry near the feeders. They eat, some drink, then leave, and another set arrives. This goes on until early afternoon, and then they are all gone.

CHPAS has received the first of two payments from the ChangeX grant, and the seeder and the native forb (wildflower) seed have been ordered. The Laramie County Conservation District will be handling the seeding in the county, but we are looking for a few small locations in Cheyenne for native wildflower plantings. If you have a location in mind, please send us an email and we will look into it. [See Barb's article in the Habitat Hero section below.]

I had an opportunity to participate in the Alberta Native Plant Council annual workshop, via Zoom. Wow!! It was an excellent value at \$20 for the day. They are about a thousand miles north of us, but we are about 3000' feet higher in elevation. The native plant lists look very similar. If you have an interest in native plants, I would put a reminder in your calendar for next March and check out the agenda for their next conference.

Until next month....

Wanda

CHPAS President

Cheyenne - High Plains Audubon Society logo, Mountain Plover, drawn by Michelle LaGory.

March Program Recap - Salamander is guest at March chapter meeting

Coming up: Salamander Saturday, April 9, at UW's Berry Center

By Barb Gorges

The subjects of our speakers usually don't attend our Audubon meetings in the flesh. Instead, we see birds and other wildlife in photos. But Mason Lee, senior project coordinator for the University of Wyoming Biodiversity Institute, brought her ambassador animal, Tim, to our March meeting.

First, Mason introduced us to a few of the 760 species of salamanders worldwide, from the tiny one from Mexico barely longer than the diameter of a coin, to one from China 6 feet long. They are amphibians, beginning life in water and most metamorphose and spend time on land. Their semi-permeable skin helps them breathe but it must stay moist. Salamanders can regenerate lost limbs, tissue, and brain matter, but it works best before metamorphosis.



Tim, a Western Tiger Salamander at the meeting by Barb Gorges

Salamanders can have poisonous skin and Tim and his species, Western Tiger Salamanders, have a poison-producing gland on their tails. They are the only salamander species in Wyoming. They are found throughout the state under 10,000 feet but need a nearby waterbody. They are common, but not seen much.

Mason is heading up the Laramie Salamander Migration Initiative to raise awareness and collect data throughout the state. In Laramie, salamanders spend the winter in burrows in the neighborhood near LaBonte Park, sometimes sharing with mice and ground squirrels. On rainy nights in mid-April they migrate across the street to the pond where they lay eggs.

Mason and volunteers have acted as crossing guards in past years. Last year they lost 20 salamanders to traffic accidents and carried 250 across the street. This year they will be collecting data on each one before releasing it.

Mason is also interested in hearing about salamanders in other parts of the state. Salamander Saturday will be held at the Berry Center on the UW campus April 9, 10:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., with free and family-friendly activities. See <http://www.uwyo.edu/uw/news/2022/03/uws-biodiversity-institute-to-host-laramie-salamander-migration-initiative.html> for more about how to take part in the event. To report salamander sightings go to <http://www.wyobiodiversity.org/index.php/community-science/laramie-salamander-migration-initiative/report-salamander-sighting>.

Several chapter members have seen salamanders in Cheyenne. Look for them on rainy spring nights near ponds. Please leave salamanders in the wild. But if you do have to rescue one from the road or a window well, try to wear disposable gloves (the non-powdered kind) so that you don't get your body oils and lotions on them.

Education and Conservation

Chapter Grants

For information on our chapter education and conservation grants, see our chapter website at: www.cheyenneaudubon.org.

Habitat Hero



Microsoft funds Native Prairie Islands program in Laramie County

By Barb Gorges

American humorist Erma Bombeck's observation, and 1976 bestseller, "The Grass is Always Greener Over the Septic Tank," foreshadowed a plan to improve pollinator habitat in Laramie County.

Rex Lockman, wildlife and range specialist for the Laramie County Conservation District, identified the potential of new septic fields for a program he calls "Native Prairie Islands."

Septic systems are required for wastewater from homes and businesses outside the city's sewer and wastewater treatment system. An underground tank collects all the wastewater (sinks, showers, toilets, washers, dishwashers, etc.) in a concrete vault underground. The solids settle to the bottom and have to be periodically removed.

The water, however, flows out into a system of perforated pipes about three feet underground known as the leach field. The size of the field depends on the projected water use of the residents. Rex said a typical residential leach field is 3,000 to 4,000 square feet.

Right now, there is a building boom on small acreage parcels in our county—and many leach fields with bare dirt. Rex wants to see what happens if the leach fields are seeded in native plants, to provide for our small wildlife: bees, butterflies, birds, etc.

At the same time, Rex's colleague, Jeff Geyer, LCCD water specialist, heard about grants available to communities where Microsoft has facilities—they have a "cloud" on the west side of Cheyenne and are building two more facilities on the east and south sides.

These community grants are handled for Microsoft by a company called ChangeX. Although community groups can design their own, ChangeX has a website full of ready-to-use community-based projects to pick from such as community gardens, open orchards, Lego leagues and pop up museums. Jeff must have noticed the one called "Pollinator Partner."

Because of the way LCCD is set up financially, Rex and Jeff next needed to find a non-profit organization to partner with. Cheyenne – High Plains Audubon Society has been working with them on other projects. Chapter president Wanda Manley, who has had a long and close relationship with the district, helped with the seed list. Chapter secretary Lorie Chesnut, who is sometimes up to her ankles in LCCD wetlands projects, assisted with the grant writing.

News that the grant request was successful came in March along with the first funds earmarked for a new seeder. It's a little piece of farm equipment that can be pulled behind an ATV or garden tractor to seed raw areas like new septic fields and new construction.

LCCD will be renting it out like they did the old one, \$75 per day or \$150 per weekend, late Friday afternoon through early Monday morning. The old seeder, after 10 years and many repairs, is being retired.

The second installment of funds will be for the native wildflower and grass seed mixes. Wanda complained to me that liatris (common name gayfeather or blazing star) costs \$300 per pound of seed. I'm trying to imagine collecting that much in the wild—around Cheyenne last year I only saw a few blooming on the prairie. Growing them for harvest can't be much easier, trying to figure out when tiny seeds are ripe and catching them before they disperse themselves.

This spring will be an experiment. There will be enough seed for a few people to seed their disturbed ground. A little irrigation will help seedlings get established and luckily septic fields and house construction sites are within reach of a hose. Rex said some new construction is in old wheat fields and those folks will need a lot more seed.

Jeff is hard at work writing another grant to pay for additional native seed so that it can be offered to more landowners for free.

These native prairie islands have several advantages. Once established, they won't require irrigation—with the septic system sites a little more green and flowery than other seeded areas. Homeowners on 5 and 10-acre lots will otherwise find themselves competing for ground water with their neighbors, especially as our drought continues.

Native wildflowers and grasses can shade out the weeds. While some weeds are interesting, the native plants are better at feeding native birds, bees and butterflies. Native plants, especially grasses, shelter native animals, including insects, and grassland birds which nest on the ground and need the cover.

If anyone in this county knows a thing or two about seeding, it's Rex and Jeff. I'm looking forward to the results of this great idea. And maybe, the island natives will take off across the oceans of prairie and renew their vigor.



Liatris, common name blazing star, will be included in the seed mix for the Native Prairie Islands program from the Laramie County Conservation District. Photo by Barb Gorges.

Habitat Hero virtual programs from Audubon Rockies

They have three programs for April:

April 6 – Birding 101

April 13 – Beyond Butterflies and Bees

April 20 – Building Habitat Mosaics

For more information go to: <https://rockies.audubon.org/events?category=habitat-hero>

If registration limits are reached, the webinars don't show on the list of events. Contact Jamie Weiss, jamie.weiss@audubon.org, and ask her to put you on the list for getting the link to the recording of the webinar.

Bird News

Audubon Rockies' Blog

For stories, news, birding information, activities, and more related to birds and bird conservation in Colorado, Wyoming, and Utah, go to <https://rockies.audubon.org/blog>.

The World According to Sound

On April 24th, The World According to Sound is going to take you on a sonic exploration of all things avian.

The World According to Sound has shared a discount code with us to get 25 percent off the \$25 tickets. Just enter the code "BirdsEncore25," when you purchase tickets at: <https://www.theworldaccordingtosound.org/tickets/birds-5rn2x>.

And for a sneak listen to some of the sounds you will hear in the show, listen to any of [these radio episodes](#) that The World According to Sound made with BirdNote.

February 19 – Report: Birding trip to Game & Fish Pheasant Farm and Table Mountain WMA

by Mark Gorges

It was a sunny but breeze day. After stopping at the Meridan Rest Area on our way north, we were met by nine Wild Turkeys on the side of the road.

Eleven people came on our tour of the pheasant farm near Yoder, WY. Be sure to read Barb's article at the bottom of the newsletter for a detailed description of that very informative tour.

After the pheasants we drove around to the Table Mountain Wildlife Management Area. There we were impressed with seeing over 600 Sandhill Cranes fly up in a flock when an eagle flew over the area where they were feeding. Throughout the day we saw the following bird species:

- Canada Goose
- Wild Turkey
- Ring-necked Pheasant
- Sandhill Crane
- Bald Eagle
- Red-tailed Hawk
- Rough-legged Hawk
- American Kestrel
- Blue Jay
- Black-billed Magpie
- European Starling
- Mountain Bluebird
- Horned Lark
- Western Meadowlark
- Red-winged Blackbird



Crane Photos by Mark Gorges

March 25 – Cheyenne Country Club survey results

By Chuck Seniawski

7:51 AM - 10:09 AM

Protocol: Traveling

2.9 mile(s)

Checklist Comments: 32 degrees. Grant Frost, Bill Gerhart, Mark Gorges, Vicki Herren, Jerry Johnson, Chuck Seniawski, Pete Sokolosky, Roy West.

24 species

Canada Goose 64

Gadwall 39
American Wigeon 9
Mallard 18
Redhead 5
Lesser Scaup 18
Common Merganser 1
Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) 5
Eurasian Collared-Dove 7
Great Blue Heron 2
Red-tailed Hawk 1
Downy Woodpecker 1
Hairy Woodpecker 3
Northern Flicker 5
Black-billed Magpie 10
American Crow 11
Mountain Chickadee 5
Red-breasted Nuthatch 4
European Starling 9
American Robin 3
House Sparrow 8
House Finch 7
Dark-eyed Junco 4
Red-winged Blackbird 18



Red-winged Blackbird, March 25 at the Country Club by Mark Gorges

View this checklist online at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S105554095>

WGFD bird farm pheasants recruit hunters; sage grouse farming appeases developers

By Barb Gorges

It's a matter of degrees when you are in charge of raising thousands of ring-necked pheasants.

Ben Milner, bird farm coordinator for Wyoming Game and Fish Department's Downar Bird Farm near Yoder, is also scrupulous about cleanliness, especially with the storm clouds of avian flu gathering on the eastern horizon.

Grant Frost, field trip chair for the Cheyenne – High Plains Audubon Society, arranged for Ben to give us a tour in mid-March, before the eggs start rolling in. Before we could enter the facility, we had to step onto a soapy mat and squelch around a bit to kill any germs. Inside it looked clean enough to perform surgery.

Each year, 18,000 pheasants are produced here, and another 16,000 at Game and Fish's bird farm in Sheridan. Sheridan started in 1938 and Downar in 1963.

Each fall, Ben holds back 135 roosters and 1350 hens for breeding while the rest are released for hunting. The breeders make their home in nine acres of enormous pens secured against predators.

When the spring breeding season kicks in, each hen would normally stop laying after filling a nest with 12 to 15 eggs. But because employees go out every day to collect eggs, and hens have access to nutritious food, each averages 40-50.

The eggs are sorted, cleaned and stored in racks sized for pheasant eggs, smaller than chicken eggs, at 55 degrees which suspends development of the embryos. When there are 6,700 eggs, they move to the giant incubator and 99.7 degrees. The racks tip every 1 to 3 hours to imitate the hen turning the eggs in her nest, keeping the embryos from sticking to the shells.

After 19 days, the eggs are placed in the hatcher, in chick-sized trays where they can hatch. After that, chicks move into brooder houses where heaters set at 100 degrees substitute for brooding hens. They are soon pecking at waterers and feed.

After two weeks the chicks are allowed to walk in and out of small outside pens, and then eventually into the larger pens. These pens are so large that they are farmed. The crop is kochia—an invasive weed in everyone's garden, but it provides good cover and food in addition to the purchased feed.

The old brood stock is released in May at Springer and Table Mountain Wildlife Habitat Management Areas as well as several walk-in areas.

Wyoming has not allowed raising exotic or native game animals privately, except exotic birds. At Downar, Game and Fish settled on ring-necked pheasants, natives of Asian jungles. Private bird farms order eggs and raise pheasants and other exotic gamebird species. Very few escape and reproduce because they are hunted by sportspeople and predatory animals.

Why does Game and Fish continue to produce an artificial population of pheasants, basically for put and take hunting? Ben sees pheasants as a way to introduce hunting to kids and adults, including women who have traditionally made up a small percentage of hunters. Game and Fish sponsors three kids-only hunt days each season on the Springer WHMA and four in November at Glendo State Park to help recruit the next generation.

Historically, it was hunters who raised funds through licenses and tags and lobbied for wildlife so that it wouldn't be extirpated by other interests such as farming, ranching, mining and energy extraction. So, thank those early hunters when you enjoy watching Wyoming wildlife.

Unfortunately, a few developers, alarmed by decreasing populations, think the bird farm method will make up for the loss of sage grouse habitat due to development. I'm discouraged that somehow influential people were able to convince the Wyoming legislature that this could be done by a private company.

Legislation gave Diamond Wings Upland Game Birds five years to give it a try, but this session they had to ask for and received another five, despite a large turnout against.

It turns out raising sage grouse is not like raising chickens—or pheasants.

First, there are no captive flocks to gather eggs from. Diamond Wings is allowed to steal up to 250 eggs per year from hens in the wild. So much for calling this captive "breeding." Sage grouse hens do not lay more eggs when they lose them, like the pheasants do. Plus, sage grouse chicks apparently need more instruction from the hens to succeed, unlike the pheasants.

Studies in Utah and Colorado concluded that captive breeding is not a viable way to increase sage grouse populations. Wildlife biologists say protecting sagebrush habitat is best. And what's good for sage grouse is good for other sagebrush-dependent wildlife.

People from many areas of expertise agreed on a Wyoming sage grouse management plan back in 2015 to keep them from being listed as threatened or endangered, avoiding a host of public land use restrictions.

For an update on sage grouse, please join Cheyenne Audubon April 19, 7 p.m., in the Cottonwood Room, Laramie County Library, 2200 Pioneer Ave. A Zoom link will be available at www.CheyenneAudubon.org close to the date.



Wyoming Game and Fish Department's Ben Milner, bird farm coordinator, explains how the Downar Bird Farm incubator will hold 6,700 ring-necked pheasant eggs until they need to be moved to the hatcher. Photo by Barb Gorges.

In early spring, the nine acres of pens at Wyoming Game and Fish's Downar Bird Farm hold only 1485 breeding ring-necked pheasants. By summer there will be 18,000 birds. Photo by Barb Gorges.



Barb Gorges is the author of "Cheyenne Birds by the Month," www.YuccaRoadPress.com. Her previous columns are at <http://cheyennebirdbanter.wordpress.com>. Contact her at bgorges4@msn.com.

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