

April 2023 "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.*

Officers and Committee Chairs 2022-2023

Wanda Manley, President

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Education, open

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Grant Frost, Field Trips, Bird Compiler

Mark Gorges, Newsletter, Habitat Hero

Art Anderson, Important Bird Areas

Social Media, Kirk Miller

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

Join our Facebook Group, Cheyenne-High Plains Audubon Society Group

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 15 – 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.



Sharp-tailed Grouse by Mark Gorges

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 18 – Program: “The Hungry Bird” featuring David A Leatherman

April 18, at 7 p.m., at Laramie County Library in the Cottonwood Room, at 2200 Pioneer Ave.

This presentation will focus on the food habits of our southeastern Wyoming and northern Colorado birds. Surprisingly, few dietary specifics appear in the literature for many species.

As a Colorado State Forest Service entomologist for 32 years and lifelong birder, David Leatherman has long been interested in this topic. He has written a quarterly column titled "The Hungry Bird" in the journal "Colorado Birds" from April 2010 to present and has given many presentations on the subject to bird groups and festivals.



Thick-billed Longspur with white-lined sphinx caterpillar, provided by Leatherman

His photography exhibits of what birds eat have appeared at the University of Colorado Natural History Museum, with one soon to be on display at the Fort Collins' Discovery Museum. The Wyoming Hereford Ranch is a favorite site, and he considers every outing anywhere "going to school."

The Zoom link is:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85905557429?pwd=RDhUeWcvUEIBMHZ2MjlYNnVMSHJXdz09>

The Zoom link will also be posted at the Cheyenne Audubon website, <https://cheyenneaudubon.org/>.

April 25, 6:30 p.m. – Board Meeting

Contact Wanda Manley, cheyenneaudubon@gmail.com, if you would like to participate in helping to plan chapter activities. This meeting will be in the Willow Room at the Laramie County Library.

April 28, 7:00 a.m. – Country Club Bird Survey

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

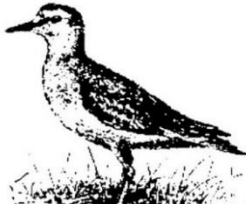
May 13, 9:00 a.m. – Greenway Cleanup

More information in the May newsletter.

May 20 – Cheyenne Big Day Bird Count

More information in the May newsletter.

Chapter News



Mountain Plover, drawn by Michelle LaGory

Chapter President's message

Finally!! A hint of spring is in the air. Winter is being defeated by the longer days.

We're seeing different birds daily now, the red-winged blackbirds have appeared with all of their antics, a few meadowlarks are around now, and even a few robins are hopping about (not a common bird for us on the prairie). I made a quick trip to Table Mountain WHMA to see lots of sandhill cranes on two of the reservoirs and then popped over to Springer/Bump Sullivan WHMA to see snow geese on the northern reservoir. We saw a small flock of wild turkeys making their way across a pasture, and a couple of raptors as well. Breezy and chilly, but worth the drive and the walk. A few sprigs of green grass are starting to poke through the aftermath.

I hope you all have been watching the crane camera at the Rowe Sanctuary in Gibbon, Nebraska: <https://explore.org/livecams/national-audubon-society/crane-camera> If you can't make the trip to see the sandhill cranes, the crane cam is always interesting. It was beautiful last week, when it was snowing giant flakes and the wind was howling, a testament to the strength of this species.

Everyone must be getting the itch to get outside and do some garden and acreage cleanup, I know I am. My hubby bought me a little electric chainsaw to address the pruning on the trees and shrubs we have near the house. It seems like an overwhelming task now, but one row at a time will get it done.

I'm particularly concerned about the amount of smooth brome that has moved in, so I will be spot mowing or weed whacking (you know I am not an advocate of mowing, here's my exception) that with great gusto! The Cheatgrass Summit is April 1, I'm hoping there are some new management strategies for cheatgrass. I hate to spray, but we will be spot spraying our place this year. We were able to get a good handle on the dalmatian toadflax doing this, so cheatgrass will be the targeted species for the next couple of years.

Have a great month and we hope to see you at the birding trip on April 15th to see the sharp tail grouse (an early morning trip) and David Leatherman's presentation on "What Birds Eat" on April 18th at the library.

Wanda,
CHPAS President

Chapter to assist mountain bluebird nest box monitoring

By Barb Gorges

When Rustin Rawlings, our March guest speaker, contacted our chapter a few months ago, it opened up a new chapter activity, mountain bluebird nest box monitoring.

Rustin had already received permission from the city to place 16 nest boxes at the High Plains Arboretum on the west edge of Cheyenne. The arboretum was part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's High Plains Grasslands Research Station until a few years ago and features trees and shrubs that were part of its mission prior to 1974, when it was a horticultural research station. People enroute to the new Cheyenne National Cemetery drive through the station and past the arboretum.

Rustin, who has years of experience building nest boxes for cavity nesters such as bluebirds, tree swallows, wrens and chickadees, found that mountain bluebirds nested in a box he placed at his sister's property on Cheyenne's east side—lower elevation than the west side and the nearest mountains. He told us mountain bluebirds even nest in western Nebraska at elevations as

low as 2,000 feet. The arboretum looked like ideal habitat, open with trees mostly widely spaced. Plus, bluebirds show up there regularly in the spring.

Rustin contacted us about our chapter grants. Our maximum \$500 was the right amount for materials to build eight nest boxes and mount them on metal fenceposts and protect them with stovepipe baffles. The chapter board approved the grant and Rustin had them up in February.

At our meeting March 18, Rustin discussed the ins and outs of nest boxes. There's a good chance tree swallows will usurp bluebirds, even if the boxes aren't near water. That's OK. There's a very good chance that house sparrows will move in. Being an invasive, non-native species not covered by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, it is acceptable to remove and dispose of their nests and eggs.

Nesting success is improved with baffles to keep out racoons and snakes. Boxes are designed without perches to keep starlings and other predatory birds from pecking the nestlings. Keeping cats indoors is important because bluebirds spend some time feeding on insects on the ground.

Monitoring nest boxes is very important—for the well-being of the birds and to contribute scientific information. Rustin collects data for NestWatch.org, one of several community science projects of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Several folks attending his talk have signed up to help him monitor the arboretum nest boxes starting this spring.

If you are interested in providing nest boxes for mountain bluebirds, everything you need to know is at the North American Bluebird Society website, <https://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/> or <https://sialis.org/>, which includes information about all cavity nesters.

If you are interested in finding and monitoring bird nests, what you need to know to keep the birds safe is in the Monitoring Manual at <https://nestwatch.org/>. Basically, observe the nest from a distance to see what's going on so you don't disturb birds laying eggs in the early morning or upset young about to fledge. Don't spend more than a minute at a nest. Don't handle the birds or eggs. Leave the nest by a different route to avoid giving predators a dead-end trail straight to the nest.

The Code of Conduct applies to any bird nest you might come across, even if you aren't monitoring. Avoid:

- Accidental harm to a nest.
- Parental desertion of a nest.
- Attracting predators to a nest.

Education and Conservation

Chapter Grants

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

Habitat Hero



Tallamy warns that native plant programs like Audubon's can create ecological traps.

Dr. Doug Tallamy, Dr. Daniel Klem and Jim Cubie J.D.

(We had Douglas Tallamy as a guest speaker in January 2021 for our Habitat Hero Workshop; he discussed his book "Bringing Nature Home". He and his coauthors, below, emphasize a number of the ideas of the Habitat Hero program that go together with planting native plants in your garden.)

Imagine a wildlife refuge that does not protect its wildlife. How could this be possible? It is not only possible, it is likely, unless we take immediate action to prevent it.

Unfortunately, many advocates of native plants, birds and pollinators - - good-hearted people who want to help reverse biodiversity declines by providing the native plants which wildlife needs in their yards - - inadvertently make just this mistake. When we design ecologically attractive landscapes, they also include real dangers to wildlife, we have actually created ecological traps that draw many animals to their death. And that, of course, is not the goal!

We are asking for a culture change on how we do native plant promotion, and we know that changing culture can be an uphill battle. Nevertheless, the logic of not killing the wildlife we want to protect is overwhelming. We need to up our game on how we promote native plants and protect wildlife.

There are five key actions that should be in place the day a native is planted.

1. No cats in the yard. Residential cats kill over 1 billion birds and who knows how many butterflies annually.
2. Install an attractive bird window collision prevention systems on the home's windows. Death by window collision can undo much of the benefits of planting natives. Bird window collisions kill over a billion birds in the US every year, and billions more worldwide, but they *can* be prevented in several different ways.
3. Manage pests without pesticides. It makes no sense to plant natives and then hire a mosquito fogger to fog your property. Contrary to popular belief, mosquito fogging kills all insects including essential bird food, not just mosquitoes. The same non-target effects can be said of broad-spectrum lawn treatments.
4. Turn off outdoor lights, install motion detectors, or switch to yellow bulbs. Residential outdoor lights are a major cause of insect declines, particularly the moths that create the caterpillars that feed the birds.
5. Be mindful of wildlife when doing routine maintenance. Avoid mowing in the evening when toads are active. Raise mower blades so that you mow over the box turtle instead of through it. Put window guards on basement windows so that frogs and toads don't get trapped and die.

We need to consistently couple this important message with our efforts to recruit new native plantings in residential landscapes. For example, one major wildlife organization recently spent 4,900 words describing the benefits of native plants, providing details about how to plant, choose and buy them. But they only spent one closing paragraph about protecting birds from window strikes. And this article was an exception. Most articles promoting natives say nothing about protecting the wildlife those plants will attract to your yard.

To protect against window collisions see <https://ornithologycenter.com/protectbirds/> To control mosquitoes without killing bees, butterflies, caterpillars, fireflies, dragonflies, and literally thousands of species of insect predators and parasitoids that will maintain food web balance in a well planted yard, visit <https://summitchemical.com/products/mosquito-dunks/>. Avoid lawn insecticides as much as possible. They are rarely necessary at all but are pushed by lawn care companies preventively.

We are asking for a culture change and we know that changing culture can be an uphill battle. Nevertheless, the logic of not killing the wildlife we want to protect is overwhelming. We need to plant and protect simultaneously, or we have actually conserved little.

Their paper can be downloaded at:

<https://www.muhlenberg.edu/media/contentassets/pdf/academics/biology/faculty/klem/Tallamay%20and%20Klem.pdf>

Bird News

News from Audubon Rockies

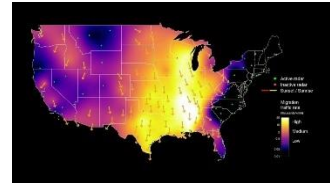
Check out the Audubon Rockies blog page for up-to-date news on conservation issues in our part of the West. Go to: <https://rockies.audubon.org/blog>

Mark your Calendars – 13 May – Global Big Day

On 13 May, join birders from around the world for Global Big Day. You don't have to go birding for 24 hours, even 5 or 10 minutes of watching birds at home makes you part of the team. Last year more than 51,000 people from 201 countries submitted eBird checklists on Global Big Day. Learn about Global Big Day at: [Global Big Day—13 May 2023 - eBird](#)

BirdCast is Back for Spring

BirdCast's migration tools are back for Spring 2023. Get detailed 3-day Migration Forecasts and visit the Migration Dashboard for real-time nightly migration activity anywhere in the contiguous US at: <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/heres-how-to-use-the-new-migration-forecast-tools-from-birdcast/>



Go directly to live migration maps at: [Live bird migration maps - BirdCast](#).

March 18 - Cardinal Field Trip report

Eighteen people were on our trip to the area near Lingle to see Northern Cardinals. Thanks to our hosts, we were able to see 9 species near feeders in a back yard on private property.

Eurasian Collared-Dove
Northern Flicker
Blue Jay
Black-capped Chickadee
Mountain Chickadee
White-breasted Nuthatch
Townsend's Solitaire
American Robin
House Finch
American Tree Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco
White-crowned Sparrow
Northern Cardinal



Northern Cardinal by Grant Frost

Other birds seen on the trip, mainly in the Springer and Bump-Sullivan Wildlife Management Areas::

Snow Goose
Cackling Goose
Canada Goose
Trumpeter Swan
Northern Shoveler
Gadwall
American Wigeon
Mallard
Northern Pintail
Lesser Scaup
Common Goldeneye
Northern Harrier
Red-tailed Hawk
Bald Eagle (many of them)

March 25 – Bluebird Nest Box Orientation

It was a cold, windy day, but nine of us went out to the High Plains Arboretum for an orientation tour of the new bluebird nest boxes with Rustin Rawlings.

Rustin gave us an extensive briefing on monitoring protocols for the nest boxes. This included observations of box selection by birds, nest building in the box, egg laying and hatching, and fledging success or failure. We also discussed use of the boxes by birds other than Mountain Bluebirds. He gave us the basics for using an app on our phones to record our data.

He then took us on the tour of the box locations. We examined each of the eight boxes. By the time we got back to our cars the winds were not as strong and the sun was warmer.



March 31 - Cheyenne Country Club Survey results

7:55 AM - 9:56 AM

Protocol: Traveling

2.8 mile(s)

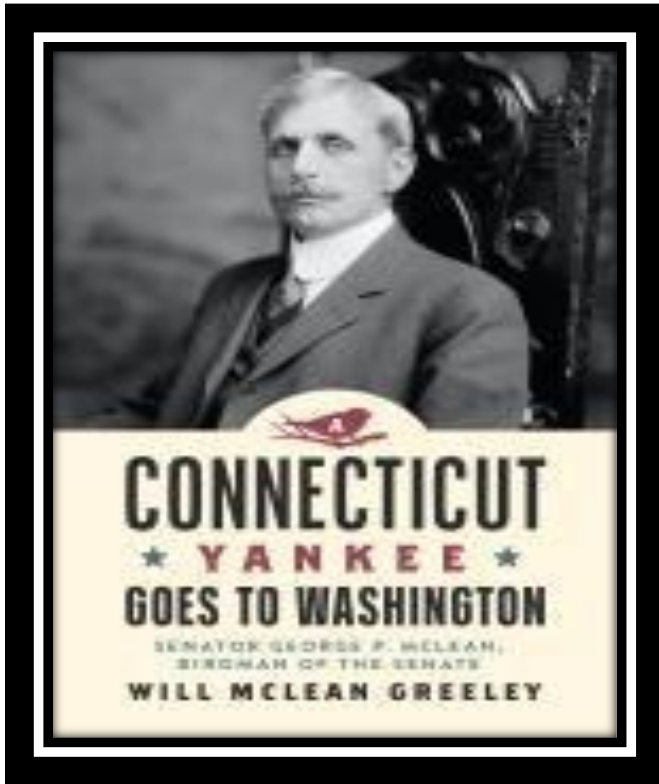
Checklist Comments: 34 degrees. Light breeze morphed into quite stiff breeze. Art Anderson, Bill Gerhart, Barb and Mark Gorges, Vicki Herren, Ray Milczewski, Kirk Miller and Chuck Seniawski. 25 species (+1 other taxa)

Canada Goose 18
Wood Duck 1
Cinnamon Teal 1
Northern Shoveler 22
Gadwall 14
American Wigeon 15
Mallard 250
Northern Pintail 2
Green-winged Teal 33
dabbling duck sp. 35 Flew off in distance before we could ID
Redhead 105
Ring-necked Duck 7
Lesser Scaup 4
Eurasian Collared-Dove 1
Lesser Yellowlegs 3
Ring-billed Gull 70 Flying together overhead.
California Gull 5
Great Blue Heron 2
Red-tailed Hawk 2
Northern Flicker 3
Prairie Falcon 1
Black-billed Magpie 10
American Crow 18
European Starling 5
American Robin 1
Red-winged Blackbird 8



Northern Pintail by Mark Gorges

View this checklist online at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S132306831>



Book Cover

McLean biography traces politics of passage of Migratory Bird Treaty Act

By Barb Gorges

It's spring migration season. Mid-March, the mountain bluebirds were back and could be seen at the High Plains Arboretum, where we hope they will find the new nest boxes put up by Rustin Rawlings.

Cheyenne Audubon's field trip March 18 to Lingle to see northern cardinals was a success. I never expected to see one in Wyoming. They even produced a breeding record for the state last summer.

We also checked out the reservoirs at the Springer Wildlife Habitat Management Unit, finding two trumpeter swans and sandhill cranes amid the usual ducks and geese. The following week, a storm of snow geese showed up.

Studies show there are fewer birds in North America than 50 years ago. But the losses would be much worse if not for the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Because "our" birds cross international boundaries, it is important that there is international law. And we have the persistence of one man to thank for it, George P. McLean, 1857-1932, former governor of and U.S. senator from Connecticut.

McLean's great-great nephew, Will McLean Greeley, has written his biography, "A Connecticut Yankee Goes to Washington, Senator George P. McLean, Birdman of the Senate." An archivist by trade, Greeley inherited the story of a man who is a fascinating subject, with a well-documented life, too.

I admit, I jumped right to Chapter 8, "Saving the Birds," only skimming the previous chapters describing McLean's rise from home-spun-wearing farm boy to governor. He was a champion of nature, especially birds.

In the late 1800s wild birds were being harvested for feathers for women's hats (the impetus for the founding of the National Audubon Society). Chickens were less available than wild birds,

including songbirds, for putting on dinner tables. States had hunting regulations, but not well enforced.

McLean's first efforts, as a Republican elected to the Senate in 1911, were for federal protection of migratory gamebirds. But as he acquired supporters, including hunters, gun and ammo manufacturers, the U.S. Agriculture Department and conservation groups like the National Audubon Society, he extended protection to songbirds and insectivorous birds.

In the era before chemical pesticides, protecting insect-eating birds protected crops. So it made sense to add the Weeks-McLean bird protection bill to the massive ag appropriations bill. President Taft was so tired on the last day of his administration that he signed it without reading it.

The Weeks-McLean bill also defined bird hunting seasons, allowed federal laws to supersede state wildlife laws when more stringent, placed a five-year-ban on killing vulnerable species including whooping cranes, wood ducks and swans, and funded seven federal field agents and 172 local game wardens paid by the U.S. Agriculture Department.

Protecting birds should be an easy sell, but Missouri Senator James Reed felt the need to oppose McLean at every stage, even though biographer Greeley discovered the two men and their families socialized outside work.

McLean next had to work with a Democratic president, Woodrow Wilson, and the distractions of World War I, the 1918 pandemic, plus opponents wanting the Supreme Court to judge whether the federal government could usurp the states' control of wildlife. Greeley points out that this was the Progressive Era and McLean was one in the best sense, progressivism including federal regulations we take for granted today, like labor laws.

Since international treaties are more impervious to Supreme Court decisions, McLean went after one next. In the final push, he had to let the president's man take credit for the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Updated over the years but briefly tampered with during the 2016-2020 presidential term, it's recovered its full effectiveness.

Although George McLean became one of the wealthy elite, he was not miserly with his estate. He left substantial sums to all his nieces and nephews, great-nieces and nephews, employees and conservation groups like the Connecticut Audubon Society. His estate established the McLean Fund and the 4,400-acre McLean Game Refuge.

Historical, political biographies are not my usual literary fare, but I was intrigued by the bird connection. And I was rewarded with a riveting story in which, under the leadership of one man, America and the other treaty signers were convinced to do the right thing for birds.

Author Greeley found that McLean's rationale for protecting birds was that he found them to be beautiful. So, get outside this spring and look for those beautiful birds. Or at least look out your window.

Say a little thankyou to George P. McLean that the robins weren't all baked into pies and that they are still patrolling your lawn.

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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