

May 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

Dennis Saville, Vice president

Lorie Chesnut, Secretary

Chuck Seniawski, Treasurer

Pete Arnold, Audubon Rockies Board

Jack Palma, Audubon Rockies Board

Conservation, open

Education, open

Donna Kassel, Historian

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

May 13, 9 a.m. – Greenway Cleanup

Cheyenne Audubon is hosting a Greenway cleanup event, Saturday, May 13th. The public is invited to help. The starting location is the parking lot adjacent to the intersection of Van Buren Avenue and Laramie Street (just north of East Lincolnway and east of its intersection with Pershing Blvd.). Work will proceed to the north along Dry Creek.

Trash bags and light-weight gloves will be provided. Participants should wear sturdy footwear (preferably waterproof) and heavy gloves and bring rakes and hoes, if available, for fishing trash out of the creek.

May 20, 6:30 a.m. – Annual Cheyenne Big Day Bird Count

Starting at Lions Park, we will cover birding hot spots throughout the Cheyenne area. **If you want to join us later than 6:30 a.m., please call Grant, 307-343-2024, to get a location update throughout the morning.** We also encourage people to report all bird sightings during the 24-hour period beginning at midnight on the free app at eBird.org. The middle of May is the high point of the spring migration of birds to their nesting areas from their winter homes.

We will leave from the Lions Park parking lot between the Children's Village at the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens and the picnic shelter to hike around the park for about an hour or two. We will then head to the Wyoming Hereford Ranch. At about lunch time we will head out to the Agricultural Research Station and the Arboretum west of the Air Force Base.

Bring a lunch or pick one up on the way; bring water and dress for variable weather. Everyone, no matter what your birding skills, is invited. Bring binoculars if you have them. The more eyes we have, the more birds we will see. We may finish the planned routes by 3 p.m. However, you may join us for as long as you wish and leave when you need to.



Worm-eating Warbler at the Hereford Ranch - Photo by Lorie Chesnut

Spring migration may have started early this year, seeing that a Worm-eating Warbler, a distinctive eastern species, was seen by many in Cheyenne toward the end

of April. Other early migrants seen about that time included Yellow-rumped Warblers, Orange-crowned Warblers and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers.

We will have a Tally Party at Perkins Restaurant on Del Range Blvd. on Sunday, May 21 at 5 p.m. Come and you can add the species that you saw on Saturday to our list of birds found in Cheyenne on the Big Day Bird Count. If you plan to join us for dinner, please contact Lorie Chesnut at cheyenneaudubon@gmail.com by Saturday evening, May 20th, so that she can make a reservation for the correct number of people at Perkins.

May 26, 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 Club's clubhouse's main parking lot.

Chapter News



Mountain Plover, drawn by Michelle Lager

Chapter President's message

Greetings all,

Springtime in Wyoming, there's nothing quite like it. We received 1.75" of much needed rain earlier in the week. That's a lot for our place in a 24-hour period, we typically see similar amounts during hard, fast-moving thunderstorms in July, and rarely more than inch at a time. Thank you Community Collaborative Rain Hail and Snow Network, known as CoCoRaHS (<https://www.cocorahs.org/>), for making us more weather aware. CoCoRaHS celebrates its 25th year of existence and the Wyoming section celebrates its 20th year of participation this summer. Thank you, Nolan Doesken for turning a brilliant idea into a user-friendly platform, and Tony Bergantino for keeping the Wyoming section moving forward.

What are we going to do with this moisture? Plant of course! Plant natives, plant native forbs and native grasses, plant a few native shrubs. There are resources out there for seed purchase and germination recommendations. There are resources out there for buying native plants. If you need help, let us know, we can help you find what you're looking for. It's not necessary to dig up your garden and start over, but certainly there is always room for some dynamic, beautiful, life supporting native plants. A twist on the famous line from the Field of Dreams; if you plant it, they will come.

As you're cleaning up the aftermath of plant material from last year, remember, not to trim vegetation back until the days are reliably above 50°, and the nights are not far below freezing. Insects need time to emerge from their overwintering habitat and get on with their activities. Likewise, no mowing. Mowing equals overgrazing, it may even be worse, because it takes all the vegetation to one short level. Ground nesting birds need nesting sites, but equally important, they need groceries. If you have mowed it off, there are neither nesting sites nor food available. Have you wondered why there are fewer meadowlarks around? Loss of habitat should be stamped on the inside of your eyelids by now!! We can all do something about this, so venture out and have a great Wyoming spring.

Wanda,
CHPAS President

“What Do Birds Eat” Program review

We are sorry that we were not able to Zoom the program because the library was having problems with their Zoom connection. However, we had a good crowd for a very interesting presentation.

By Barb Gorges

Dave Leatherman is retired from his long-time position as Colorado State Forest entomologist. He has also been a serious birder for a long time. So, it wasn't surprising that while watching birds, he started noticing—and identifying—the insects they were eating, as well as the seeds and fruits.

You can find a lot of bird food information in Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Birds of the World, a database available by subscription. But you can also find Dave's column, "The Hungry Bird," in the Colorado Field Ornithologists' quarterly newsletters, <https://cobirds.org/colorado-birds-journal>. Only the most recent two years are not available to nonmembers.

Little information is available to the public about what Rocky Mountain birds eat, Dave said. He invites you to send him photos of birds with their mouths full and he is willing to help you identify the food, daleatherman@msn.com.

Dave declared, "Everything birds do is about sex or food" (and water and shelter). They are always looking for food. The number of calories per day required for swans is 570, for mallards, 290, for ruby-crowned kinglets, 9.4.

The birds that migrate south for the winter are the insect-only eaters that have to stick to warm climates where insects stay active. Our year-round, resident birds switch to seeds during the cold seasons. (Well, we should have asked Dave about the Swainson's hawk switching from small mammals here in the summer to grasshoppers in Argentina in the winter.)

Birds' bills will tell you a lot about what they eat, from the flycatcher's thin little bill, the sparrow's seed-crunching bill to the crossbill's unique design for extracting seeds from cones.

Dave said black oil sunflower seed is the best birdfeeder food to offer in our area. Planting berry and fruit trees and shrubs will bring in a wider variety of birds. Look for plants like crabapple, cotoneaster, juniper (get both male and female plants), mountain ash, honeysuckle, hawthorn, currants, rose, buckthorn to attract solitaires, waxwings, tanagers, robins, flickers and mockingbirds.

Exotic plants are not the best choice, Dave said, because they don't offer as much nutrition as our native plants do. This could mean birds have to spend more time feeding, meaning longer exposure to the risk of predators.

There are all kinds of bird food out in the wild. Dave discussed many: pondweed, nectar, mites, green ash seeds, white-lined sphinx moths, dragonflies, galls, midges, bark beetles, caterpillars, millers/cutworms, aphids, flying ants, termites, other birds, small mammals—and which birds eat them.

We look forward to the day Dave's "The Hungry Bird" columns get collected into book format.

Education and Conservation

Free Digital Library from Environment for the Americas Chapter Grants

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

Habitat Hero



Habitat Hero Garden at the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens

On Friday, April 28, eleven volunteers gathered at the Habitat Hero garden to clean it up after a long winter.

As we do every year, we had left the vegetative growth from last summer stand throughout the winter to provide winter interest in front of the CBG Conservatory and to collect snow. Now it was time to cut back that old growth.

We spent about two hours cutting back the tall stems, trimming the bunch grasses, and removing leaves that had blown in during the fall and winter. All the stems that we removed were cut into small pieces and scattered to act as mulch. That style of light mulching allows the seeds from last year's flowers to sprout, and it makes the spring-blooming bulbs more visible. Below are before and after photos of the garden by Mark Gorges. The tentative

date for planting the garden's extension is June 2. Please contact Barb Gorges, bgorges4@msn.com, if you are interested in volunteering.



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>

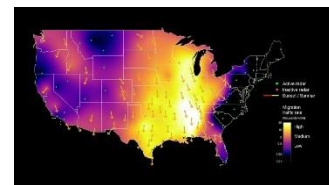
Mark your Calendars – 13 May – Global Big Day

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](#).

April 15 – Sharp-tailed Grouse Trip report

We had 10 early risers convoy out to the short grass prairies northeast of Cheyenne to look for Sharp-tailed Grouse on their leks where the male grouse display.

We saw a few individual grouse in scattered places, but we did find one lek where there were 14 birds dancing. They put on a good show as we watched them for a while from a distance.

Sharp-tailed Grouse 21
pigeon/dove sp. 6
hawk sp. 1

American Kestrel 1
Horned Lark 6
European Starling 2
Western Meadowlark 6
Red-winged Blackbird 10

View this checklist online at
<https://ebird.org/checklist/S133852159>



Sharp-tailed Grouse dancing – Photo by Mark Gorges

April 28 - Cheyenne Country Club Survey results

7:00 to 9:00 AM

Protocol: Traveling

3.0 mile(s)

Checklist Comments: 31 degrees. Breezy. Partly cloudy. Cold front had passed through the previous night, leaving very light snow. Janet Compton, Grant Frost, Bill Gerhart, Mark Gorges, Vicki Herren, Kirk Miller, Kim Parfitt, Chuck Seniawski and Pete Sokolosky.
37 species

Canada Goose 20
Northern Shoveler 2
Gadwall 6
Mallard 8
Green-winged Teal 2
Redhead 2
Ring-necked Duck 26
Common Merganser 6
Eared Grebe 2
Eurasian Collared-Dove 2
Mourning Dove 1
American Coot 4
California Gull 14
Double-crested Cormorant 6
American White Pelican 3
Great Blue Heron 1
Black-crowned Night-Heron 2
Turkey Vulture 1
Red-tailed Hawk 4
Downy Woodpecker 2



Green-winged Teal - Photo by Mark Gorges

Northern Flicker 6
Merlin 1
Black-billed Magpie 4
American Crow 13
Mountain Chickadee 3
Red-breasted Nuthatch 6
White-breasted Nuthatch 2
European Starling 7
Townsend's Solitaire 1
American Robin 3
House Finch 3
Chipping Sparrow 1
Dark-eyed Junco 1
Song Sparrow 1
Western Meadowlark 1
Red-winged Blackbird 7
Common Grackle 4

View this checklist online at
<https://ebird.org/checklist/S135322678>



Common Mergansers by Mark Gorges

Longspurs animate local shortgrass prairie

By Barb Gorges

Eastern Laramie County has no mountains, but it is not flat. We were looking for birds north of Hillsdale (a town name indicating the varied topography), walking across the shortgrass prairie on a very fine morning (meaning no wind) in late April. We were surrounded by small birds popping up, circling us and then upon landing, becoming invisible.

A nearby windbreak was full of robins and red-winged blackbirds, but up the hill, where the grass was well-grazed, barely an inch tall, it was full of grassland birds like western meadowlarks and horned larks. And lots of longspurs.

Your field guide, if not brand-new, will show them as McCown's longspurs. While John P. McCown was stationed with the U.S. Army in Texas along the Rio Grande, he collected several bird specimens. Presumably it was winter, when these longspurs are wintering there and in southern New Mexico and due south in Mexico.

McCown sent the specimens back east and the ornithologists determined his longspur was a new-to-them species. In 1851, they named it in honor of McCown.

However, by 2020, a closer examination of McCown's career showed that he'd served on the frontier with less than perfect integrity and then joined the Confederate army. Altogether, he became someone the North American Classification Committee of the American Ornithological Society did not want to honor, and the bird's name was changed to thick-billed longspur. The committee is considering removing people's names from all bird names which in North America would affect 150 species. You will need a new field guide when that happens.

But out on the prairie, the birds have no nametags, only their markings. The thick-billed longspur has a heavy, seed-cracking bill. It is closely related to sparrows and eats seeds all winter. However, in spring it eats insects and invertebrates and will feed them to its young.

As we walked, the longspurs kept popping up and circling us. Perhaps we were kicking up



Thick-billed Longspur - Photo by Kirk Miller

insects as we walked, just like cows or buffalo. It's also time for the males to do their aerial territorial mating display. They are marked with distinctive black bibs this time of year and with their tails fanned out, white with dark center stripe and black lower edge, they are, after seeing so many, easy to separate from the more numerous horned larks which have much blacker tails.

Over the last 50 years, the thick-billed longspur population is down 94%, mostly due to changes in their habitat. They are on Wyoming Game and Fish Department's "Species of Greatest Conservation Need" list which includes 80 bird species:

<https://wgfd.wyo.gov/Habitat/Habitat-Plans>.

Wyoming has about 27% of the world's thick-billed longspurs. Their breeding range is primarily eastern Wyoming, much of Montana and small extensions into Colorado, Nebraska, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Game and Fish attributes population declines to prairie fragmentation by agriculture (plowing), urbanization (subdivisions)

and fire suppression. Stressors include energy development (including wind energy), invasive species (like cheatgrass), off-road recreation, altered fire and grazing regimes (longspurs prefer heavily grazed areas), drought and climate change.

Maybe the academics can study how many houses per square mile can be built on the prairie before longspurs decamp. But not all homeowners take care of their property in the same way.

First, to protect ground-nesting birds like longspurs, meadowlarks and horned larks, people are keeping their dogs off the prairie or at least on a leash April through July.

Second, people who value grassland species of all kinds refrain from mowing too often, especially April through July to protect the nesting birds, but also to reduce extreme fire risk.

It seems counterintuitive. If the shortgrass prairie grasses are repeatedly cut back (some people erroneously believe they need to mow more than once every couple years), the grasses begin to struggle. The less-shaded soil gets too hot, and heat-loving species move in, such as the more combustible, non-native cheatgrass.

Prairie grasses are so cool. They have deep roots so they can make a comeback from drought and grazing. Wanda Manley, who lives out on the prairie and has a master's degree in range management, told me that even after a (normal) grass fire, the growing point of each grass plant stays green and recovery is rapid. But where the prairie has been abused, fires are so hot, the soil burns and recovery will take much longer.

If you are someone who owns a patch of prairie and a riding mower and who enjoys a reason to get out there on a nice day, why not leave the mower parked and grab your binoculars? Walk out, maybe to the top of one of the hills, and listen for the music of the longspurs, these small birds that have been visiting our prairie every spring for thousands of years.

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.

.Cheyenne – High Plains Audubon Society P. O. Box 2502, Cheyenne, WY 82003

