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# THE RAVENS

## Newsletter

Southwestern New Mexico Audubon Society  
is a Chapter of National Audubon Society, Inc.

January — February 2021 Vol. 54, No. 1

**Program Feb 5<sup>th</sup> — 7pm — Zoom**

### *Jon Hayes Presents Local Audubon Issues*



Jon Hayes will explain Audubon Southwest: the merger of Audubon New Mexico and Audubon Arizona, the bird mortality event that New Mexico experienced in September, Audubon's legislative priorities for the upcoming session, and ongoing conservation work in the state. In recognition that Audubon chapter member involvement is crucial for advancing conservation issues in New Mexico, Jon will focus on how members can get involved in state level advocacy and volunteer efforts.

Jon is the Executive Director of Audubon Southwest where he oversees the staff and conservation work in New Mexico and Arizona, focused on conserving our water resources, protecting and restoring the habitats birds need, confronting the climate crisis, and

### Painting Raffle Fundraiser A Success

As of December 12<sup>th</sup> our painting raffle fundraiser brought in about \$1,000 from ticket sales. The event drew to a conclusion with a random selection software tool applied to the list of ticket purchasers. The winner of artist Elli Sorensen's multi media painting, Cliff Swallows Along the San Francisco River, was Amy Erickson, an avian ecologist from Socorro, New Mexico. Amy is thrilled with her acquisition and it will be cherished.

The five winners of a 1 year SWNMAS membership extension are Terry Jurens of Deming, Karen Nakahihara of Silver City, Lynn Fowler of Tucson, AZ, Peter Gorman of Silver City and Mary Barrett of Silver City. **Thank You for Your Support!**

educating the next generation of scientists and conservationists.

Prior to joining Audubon, Hayes served with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the Great Plains Landscape Conservation Cooperative where he was responsible for guiding multi-organizational development and implementation of applied research projects. In this capacity, he coordinated landscape-level cooperative projects in a six-state region among federal agencies, state wildlife agencies, and multiple non-profit organizations focused on improving conservation effectiveness in western grassland and riparian ecosystems. Additionally, he has served with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture, working at a programmatic level to implement regional conservation efforts aimed at restoring declining grassland bird populations.

Jon holds a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Population and Organismic Biology from the University of Colorado and a Master's of Science in Natural Resource Conservation from the University of Montana.

*There will be no program in January.*

*A note from the Vice President*

## **We Exist Because of You!**

Every organization whose year-end messages reach your in-box has a paragraph about the challenges of 2020, the year of Covid-19, a year devoid of embraces among friends and of social isolation. For those of us who dedicate time as SWNM Audubon volunteers, we have missed the room filled with people during those first Friday of the month evening programs. Classroom bird lessons were cut short and the Board of Directors does not meet in person. Yet we have adapted. Despite the ever growing reality of “Zoom burn-out” our Zoom programs have been well attended and the Facebook page currently has 111 followers. In spite of the challenges that we face as an organization and in our individual lives, we are grateful to all of you, our members and supporters whose generosity is both humbling and uplifting. When we meet again in person it will truly be cause for celebration!

*Lisa Fields, Vice President*

## **Zoom In To Birds & Brews Social Gathering**

Please join us on Thursday, February 25th at 5:30pm for a virtual Birds and Brews on Zoom.

This will be a social gathering edition of Birds and Brews, a time to connect with birding friends, share wildlife sightings, conversation, and maybe even some trivia! A Zoom link will be emailed out to members a few days prior to the event.



## **Channel Announcement**

SWNM Audubon and Gila Native Plant Society have teamed up to compile our societies' educational videos on a joint YouTube channel!

Our mission is to have one easy location for members and local educators to view past programs and shorter videos for school kids. There will be a variety of natural resource subjects and lengths of videos, highlighting people, places and species found in our region. This will be a fun and ongoing effort, and if you feel inspired to make a video contribution (birding your backyard, your favorite species, a tour of your favorite birding spot...), please let us know! In this time of virtual learning, we feel the most useful are short 5 minute videos targeted to school kids.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWbwzLgBuQ1e1Q4sjsn8ZXw>

or search

“SWNM Audubon Society and Gila Native Plant Society”

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## **Rufous Hummer Decline**

While commonly observed throughout its range, the Rufous Hummingbird is still recognized as an at-risk species. Unfortunately, the Breeding Bird Survey data suggest that this hummingbird's population has declined by as much as 60% since 1974.

The ongoing causes for decline seem to be unclear: however, recent research indicates that accelerated climate change could result in extensive range loss in the United States. Out of concern for the future of this species, the Western Hummingbird Partnership published a recent report with multiple partners, “Rufous Hummingbird: The State of the Science and Conservation.” It covers the biology and ecology of this classic western hummer, and it highlights the many gaps in information that impede our ability to effectively protect it.

You can find it here: <http://tinyurl.com/E-bulletin>

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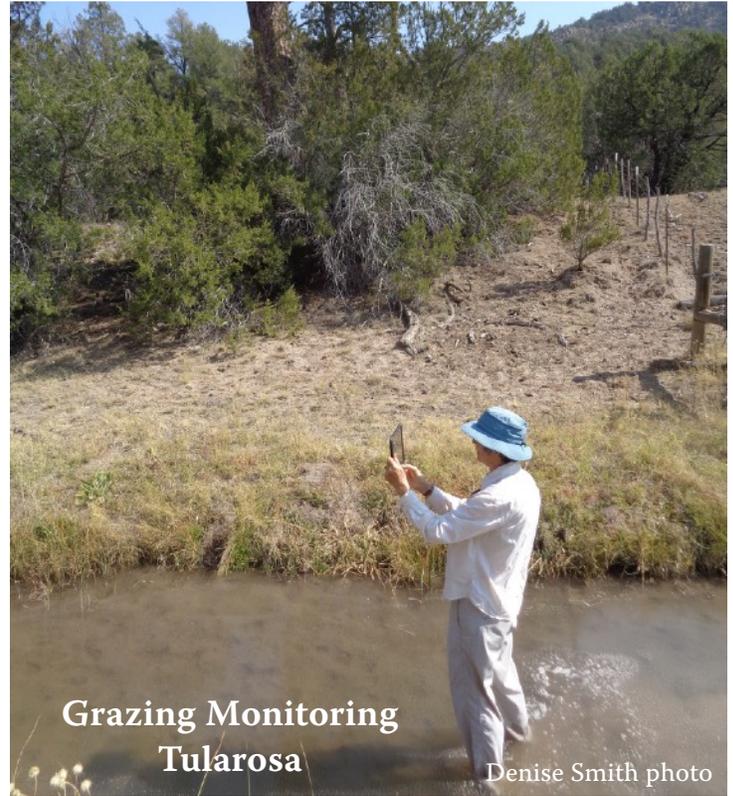
## **Gila Earth Day Plans for 2021**

Plans are underway to hold Gila Earth Day, hopefully in Gough Park. If all goes well, it will take place on Saturday, April 24, and the national theme is “Restore Our Earth.”

# Great Old Broads Monitor Grazing in the Gila National Forest

The Great Old Broads for Wilderness is a national non-profit grassroots organization, led by women, that engages in and inspires activism to preserve and protect wilderness and wild lands. Our local group, the Aldo Silver City Broadband is active in many environmental issues in southwest New Mexico, including monitoring National Forest livestock grazing exclosures, areas that have been fenced to exclude cattle in order to protect fragile stream and riparian habitat. These areas provide valuable habitat for birds, fish, mammals, reptiles and amphibians, many of which are threatened or endangered.

This past year, the Grazing Monitoring Committee has collaborated with the Gila National Forest office to provide monitoring of some of these exclosures, using maps of priority streams and a computer-based monitoring program provided by the Forest Service. The monitoring reports that result from on-site visits are uploaded into the Forest Service database to assist them in their management efforts. Of the four sites visited by committee members this Fall, 2020, cattle were present in two of the areas, the San Francisco River hot springs, and the Gila Bird Area. Livestock owners were contacted by the Forest Service and the cattle were removed. Committee members plan to keep an eye on both of these sites during the winter. Two of the areas had old evidence of cattle but no cattle were observed (Tularosa River near Walk in the Past petroglyphs and East Fork of the Gila River



Grazing Monitoring  
Tularosa

Denise Smith photo

upstream of Grapevine Campground) Our missions of environmentally focused non-profits can often overlap, and Southwestern New Mexico Audubon recognizes the value of acknowledging and partnering with others to increase positive synergistic effects on behalf of our natural environment. You can look at the Great Old Broad's website for local contacts and information at [www.greatoldbroads.org](http://www.greatoldbroads.org)

By Denise Smith

## SOUTHWESTERN NEW MEXICO AUDUBON SOCIETY Directors 2019 – 2021

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## THOR

Since the day in 2013 when an adult male Golden Eagle collided with a car on Rt 180 near Deming, this bird showed us humans the resilience and amazing migration route that eagles are capable of. After recovering at Gila Wildlife Rescue, he was fitted with a satellite transmitter and we could follow his migration to Alaska and see him return to Rt. 180 year after year.

Our November virtual program featured Thor's story by biologists from Eagle Environmental, Inc. who placed the transmitter on him.

After eight years of "coming home" to our area, we are saddened to learn of Thor's death.

The cause of death is currently being investigated.



## ANNUAL RAPTOR COUNT— JANUARY 16, 17, 18

(Martin Luther King weekend)

Interested participants should get in touch with Linda at [raptors.linda@yahoo.com](mailto:raptors.linda@yahoo.com) by January 3rd.

## It Was An Epic Year For the 2019 CBC

*Geoff LeBaron, Director, Christmas Bird Count, breaks down everything we learned from the 120th Christmas Bird Count*

When Frank Chapman published the results from the humble beginnings on December 25, 1900—27 people tallied birds and their combined effort in 25 locations across the continent—it was probably unfathomable to him that the brand new “Christmas Bird Census” would last well over a century, and grow to cover the entire Western Hemisphere and beyond. And as we completed the 12th decade of Audubon’s Christmas Bird Count during last season’s 120th CBC, we did

The 120th Christmas Bird Count was as grand as its title suggests. The centivintennial count drew a record-breaking **81,601 observers** including 40 new count circles. But while humans were out in full force, it is both surprising and worrisome that the total number of birds tallied last season dropped to **42,704,077 birds**—that’s around six million birds lower than the previous year.

One cannot help but wonder what’s going on and what may be causing it. We plan to do a future analysis of long-term CBC results, looking at species groups, numbers of birds, and the total effort each season, to look into where the largest declines seem to be happening.

**2020— 121st Christmas Bird Count:** With the COVID-19 pandemic that has become all-consuming since March of 2020, it will be an “interesting” Christmas Bird Count season for the 121st Count, one like none other in history.

Curious how all of this data fits together? [Check out the CBC Trends Viewer!](#)

*American Birds/National Audubon Society*

**Editor’s Note:** Watch for the our local 2020 results in the upcoming March – April RAVENS.



## WHITE-THROATED SPARROW SINGS NEW SONG

White-throated Sparrows in British Columbia are singing a new tune, and the song has been sweeping across Canada. What began as a minor change to a common song has now morphed into a continent-wide phenomenon.

“As far as we know, it’s unprecedented,” says biologist Ken Otter from the University of Northern British Columbia, Canada. “We don’t know of any other study that has ever seen this sort of spread through cultural evolution of a song type.”

First noticed in the late 1990s, Otter started hearing white-throats singing an unusual song. Instead of sticking to the species’ usual three-note finish, local sparrow populations were ending their tune on two notes.

Now, between 2000 and 2019, this minor change has travelled over 1,800 miles, from British Columbia to central Ontario, virtually wiping out a historic song-ending that’s been around since the 1950s at least.

No one knows what’s so addictive about this new ending, or why it can’t last alongside the three-note variant, but scientists are trying to figure it out.

Exactly why male white-throats end up adopting this novel ending is still unclear. Otter says the ending might simply be compelling because it’s unusual and unique. Like many other bird songs, however, it could be related to female preferences.

“In white-throated sparrows, we might find a situation in which the females actually like songs that aren’t typical in their environment. If that’s the case, there’s a big advantage to any male who can sing a new song type.”

For more, including a sound-video of the songs, check them out here:

<https://www.sciencealert.com/this-sparrow-song-went-viral-across-canada-and-it-s-unlike-anything-we-ve-heard-before>  
<http://tinyurl.com/E-bulletin>