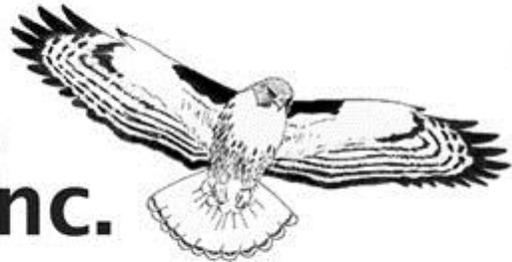


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The Significance of Solitude, by Gail Garber, Executive Director

I pulled up to the main gate of the Valles Caldera National Preserve at precisely 5:30am to begin my 25 mile survey route on the main roads. That crepuscular time of day, sandwiched between the dark and the light, with neither reigning supreme, hosts wildlife accustomed to nocturnal foraging while, at the same time, the first of the songbirds begin their tremulous dawn songs, knowing that it won't be long before the sun will dominate the landscape. No other humans trod upon this magical place this early in day, just me, surveying the grandeur of the vast caldera I was about to enter.

While I heard the Lillian's subspecies of Eastern



Meadowlark call, a lone bird in the immense grassland, it was the large herd of elk that browsed just a hundred yards or so to the east, adults as well as several very young calves cavorting in the luxurious grasses, making soft elk noises among the group, and seemingly unconcerned with the human watching them from 100 yards distant. Expecting them to run, I didn't quite know what to do, but it may have been only seconds before I reached for my camera and began snapping away. In the end, they never did leave; it was my timeline that forced me to drive away.

Elk were virtually everywhere, at each and every point – far more elk than birds. One was in the throes of labor, but I couldn't stay to watch the delivery – darn! As the sky lightened, more birds, especially Eastern Meadowlarks began to sing – all of the Lillian's variety. Songs of the Vesper Sparrows, Brewer's Blackbirds, and Western Tanagers resounded as did the unique drumming of the Williamson's Sapsucker. I learned that there are more American Crows on the Caldera than Common Ravens; baby prairie dogs lounged in the middle of the road and chased each other around inspiring even more photos and, through it all, for the first three hours, no other humans appeared. By then, I was far in the back at San Antonio Creek where I turned eastward toward Obsidian Valley, entering a part of the Caldera closed to the public.

As I neared the end of my journey, the strangest of calls rang out from the partly burned forest. Initially a

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mystery, time revealed the nursery crèche where cow elk surrounded their babies of the year. It was the cacophony of joy heard only by one!

Vesper Sparrow in the Valles Caldera, image by Larry Rimer (taken during a different survey). Elk below by Gail Garber.



Thank You to All Who Donated to our West Nile Virus Vaccination Fund!



supporters, graciously offered donations.

Thanks to you, we well exceeded the dollar amount we needed to pay our vet bill. We promise that every last cent donated that wasn't used for these vaccinations will be put toward further medical attention for our team of amazing Avian Ambassadors.

From the bottom of our hearts, thank you!

If you'd like to know more about how West Nile Virus impacts avian populations, head over to our [blog](#) for all the

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Above: Lisa Morgan administers the initial WNV vaccination to Jamaica, under the supervision of Dr. Michael Melloy. Gail Garber holds the cantankerous 29-year-old Red-tailed Hawk that strikes terror into many of our staff and volunteers. Image by Julia Davis.

Surveying in the Bosque During High River Flows, by Trevor Fetz, Lead Avian Biologist

The arrival of June brought the beginning of the summer field season for the Middle Rio Grande Songbird Study (MRGSS). And, the high flows in the Rio Grande during the first half of the month made many of the surveys more challenging than normal. Several of our transects in the Los Lunas and Bosque Farms areas were inaccessible for the first part of the month (I declined to send Amanda into those sites in chest waders), and several others in the Belen and Veguita areas required me to wear chest waders to complete. In addition, Mike Hill, who surveys our oxbow transects in Albuquerque reported wading in greater than waist deep water to complete his initial surveys. Oxbow 02 always requires chest waders, but Mike said the water was substantially deeper than he has ever previously experienced.

Surveying in knee to waist deep water is quite tedious. The biggest issue is the inability to see what you are walking on in the muddy waters of the Rio Grande. Unseen debris can easily trip a person up and that is an especially bad thing if you are wearing waders. In addition, there are places along our survey routes where the river flows carve out deep, unseen holes where previously the ground had been level. The first photo accompanying this article shows such a hole after the water receded--I "discovered" this 2-3 feet deep hole by stepping into it when the water was still high. Fortunately, I stepped on a higher edge of the hole and managed to avoid falling all the way in. But, dropping from knee-deep water to over waist deep without warning was not an enjoyable experience. The second photo is from the same transect stretch and provides some idea of the difficulty in knowing what may lie underwater. The method I subsequently devised to combat the dangers of unseen footing was to proceed very slowly using a long stick to probe before each step. This still didn't guarantee safe footing, but it at least gave me a fighting chance. Of course, the slippery mud is a hazard in itself, even when the substrate is smooth. Another hazard is the river current. At water depths of about 1 foot or less, the current flowing down our trails and through the vegetation is at least noticeable. But, at greater depths, visual perception of the current is often deceiving. Upon stepping into the water, however, the strength of the current becomes obvious. It takes strength and focus to avoid being swept downriver, which takes concentration away from the actual survey. Walking upriver against the current is particularly challenging.



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The high flow levels certainly benefited vegetation in the bosque, and plant growth in the overbank areas has been off the charts. Invertebrate production (unfortunately, including mosquitoes) has also been noticeably high. Ultimately, these developments should benefit the avian community in the bosque. This was the first year since 2010 that there has been any significant spring runoff in the Rio Grande, and it was nice to see the river flowing high.

All images by Trevor Fetz.



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Paper towels
Bleach for bird laundry
8.5 x 14 copy paper
8.5 x 11 copy paper
Digital camera
Clear shower curtain
Laminating materials
Foam board
Binoculars
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Ink cartridges (920) for
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Assorted storage
containers

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and
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An Above Average Trip to the Zoo, by Chellye Porter, Trip Co-Leader

Early one morning a group of Hawks Aloft adventurers met at a truck stop on Interstate 40 and headed out for Window Rock, Arizona. Our destination was the Navajo Nation Zoo where we would be treated to a private tour by Zoo Director and zoologist David Mikesic.

The Navajo Nation Zoo is nestled between beautiful sandstone cliffs and is home to 50 different species of animals native to the Navajo Nation. Most of the animals were found injured or orphaned in the Navajo Nation and will live out their lives being cared for by the zoo's staff.

The zoo has one staff member whose sole responsibility is developing enrichment activities for the animals. Enrichment is a way to encourage and stimulate natural behaviors in animals through sight, smell, taste, touch, and interaction. One such example was a hanging log that had one inch holes drilled in it where the staff placed peanut butter and food bits for the black bears to dig out, which is how they would forage for food in the wild.

During our tour, we were treated to the histories of the animals that call the zoo home. For example, a brother and sister pair of mountain lions came to the zoo after their mother was hit on the road and collected by authorities. She was immediately treated and released in another location. A day later, her cubs were found near the side of the road in the same location but could not be reunited with their mother.

For many of the zoo residents, David was one of the first humans to care for them. Many of them were so small they had to be bottle fed when they arrived at the zoo, and it was obvious that they recognize him and actually came to sit near him as he was telling us their stories. Such was the case of an elderly raccoon that was washing a fish and offered it to David.

My personal highlight was a tour of the eagle aviary that seven Golden Eagles call home. The aviary had multiple heights and locations of perches, as well as running water for enrichment. Several of the birds prefer to stay on the ground while others seek the highest possible vantage point. The largest is a female weighing in at 12 pounds! Her favorite perch is along the south wall where she can look down on the entire zoo property. Every single feather molted by the birds is collected and distributed to members of the Navajo Nation for use in religious ceremonies and costumes. Tail feathers are the most sought after and there is a waiting list for these.

If you have a free day and are looking for something to do, consider taking a 170 mile drive out to Window Rock, Arizona for a visit at the [Navajo Nation Zoo](#). You can pack a picnic lunch to eat under the cool cottonwood trees or treat yourself to a delicious bowl of mutton stew!

Above, two of the non-releasable Golden Eagles that reside at the Navajo Nation Zoo. Below, trip participants (L-R): Front Row: Chuck Brandt, Allison Schacht, Barbara Morrison, Marsha O'Keefe. Back Row: David Mikesic, Lida Crooks, Nancy Hall, Bryan Hall, Chellye Porter. Images by Gail Garber



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Juggling June by Amanda Schluter, Biologist and Educator

Another month has gone by and, with the end of June, my schedule should be less hectic. In July, most of our raptor nest monitoring should conclude. I had to make a trip out to El Segundo mine near the end of the June to monitor the few remaining nests. In the middle of the month, Larry Rimer, Everett Ogilvie, and I also went to the Upper Rio Grande Gorge to continue monitoring the active nests and territories. During this visit, we were able to observe a few Golden Eaglets just before they fledged their nest. Because of my crazy schedule, Larry made another trip without me at the end of the month to check the Prairie Falcon, Ferruginous, and Red-Tail Hawk nests that had not fledged.

After my trip to Taos, I immediately made my way to the Jemez Mountains where Gail Garber and I had the pleasure of completing a second round of surveys in the Valles Caldera and the Jemez National Forest. We had to delay some of the surveys due to the Cajete Fire in the Jemez National Forest. Luckily, the firefighters were able to get control of the fire quickly and we were only excluded from our site access for about a week. It goes to show that, no matter how carefully you plan your schedule, there will always be unforeseen circumstances that throw a wrench into your plans.

Along with everything that I had going on this month I was able to get back to Iowa to visit my paternal grandparents and other extended family. I am very blessed to be close with my family even though they live 1,100 miles away! My family lives in a small town along the Cedar River with a little man-made lake nearby. My cousin has a beautiful house right on the lake where a pair of Bald Eagles nest in her backyard every year! I was very excited to be able to see that the Bald Eagle pair had two eaglets that were branched and sitting next to their giant nest. The pair had multiple large nests they have built throughout the area that they move from nest to nest every year. My family enjoys watching the eagles that live in the area year-round.

This is always my favorite time of the year. I love seeing the baby raptors fledge and leave the nest. I get a little sad when I know that I will no longer get to see them anymore but I know that they have survived a big first step in their lives. To see the Golden and Bald Eagle nests successfully produce offspring and know that the adults will likely be back to reproduce next year makes the crazy schedule worth it.

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Upper Rio Grande Gorge Raptor Survey

Below, Golden Eaglets practice for flights to come any day. Image by Larry Rimer.



Time for Summer, by Julia Davis, Education and Outreach Coordinator

Summer is in full swing. As I write this, we are in the midst of a brutal heat snap. I have lived in Albuquerque for three years, and have never experienced this kind of heat. One day, when I was driving, the temperature peaked at over 100 degrees near the airport. I could smell the asphalt and gar bubbling in the sun. I was in the field with Amanda in the weeks leading up to the heat wave. However, just as soon as the heat settled in, I found myself busied in the office with my normal summer work load.

In June, I went to Los Lunas, Bosque Farms, and up to the Jemez with Amanda for songbird surveys. This gave me the opportunity to exercise my bird identification skills. After each trip, I made lists of the different birds so I could retain as much information as possible. We spotted one of my favorite birds, tanagers, in the bosque and Jemez. It is nice seeing the Western and Summer Tanagers found in New Mexico and learning more about them.

Besides looking for birds, it has been mews cleaning, report writing, and general wrap-ups from the school year--all from the air conditioned office! Well, all except mews cleaning, but we manage to finish up that task before the heat of the day sets in. In the the summer, we spend a little extra time with each of the birds, giving them a nice refreshing shower with the hose. It is nice to see them fluff the moisture through their feathers. I imagine it must feel so good to them.

Lastly, there are some great weekend events coming up in July for you to check out! These include the Lavender Festival on Saturday, July 15, and the Valles Caldera Birthday Bash on Saturday, July 22. If you are interested in attending as a volunteer, we still need help for the Lavender Festival! It is an all day event, from 9am-4pm.

Team

Amanda Schluter
Jeannine Kinzer
Bob Kipp
Everett Ogilvie
Larry Rimer
Tom Ryan

Bosque Nesting Raptors Study Team

Wendy Brown
Ed Clark
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Please contact julia@hawksaloft.org or call the office if you are available to help out for a portion of the day.



How Birds Keep Their Cool, by Maggie Grimason, Senior Editor/Educator



As I write this, the high today is slated to reach 102 degrees, and the temperatures have hovered in the 90-100 range for the last several days. As such, I've spent a lot of time in the last week thinking about how to stay cool—seeking out swimming pools, shade, and swamp coolers with a keen vigor. With the intensity of the sun of late, I started to wonder just how birds keep from overheating, and even thrive during these summer months.

As it turns out, most birds are very well adapted to hot environments, and have a number of biological and behavioral adaptations that help them to stay cool even as the mercury climbs. As it so happens, birds have a much higher baseline body temperature than, say, a human being. Across

species, the average body temperature of birds is about 105 degrees, which means they are necessarily already well-equipped to regulate their body temperature.

Birds don't have sweat glands like we do, but they have a high metabolic rate, which also translates to a rapid rate of respiration, allowing for heat within the body to dissipate, even without panting. On top of that, those few swatches of bare skin on the avian body are useful when it comes to cooling down—they help to allow heat to escape the body. If the body was entirely feathered, that would make body temperature regulation more difficult. There some birds that can even swell these exposed patches of skin to more efficiently (and more quickly) cool down when necessary.

Generally speaking, the hotter the climate a bird resides in, the greater the size of its beak. Toucans, for example, have very large bills. This is because bills have blood flow to them that can be increased to assist in heat dissipation. In the tropical parts of Central and South America where toucans are found, this is an absolute necessity. The ability to regulate heat through methods such as blood flow to the beak, as well as breathing, and skin exposure are all significant biological adaptation that keep birds cool all summer long.

There are a few behavioral means by which birds achieve this effect, too. Birds may reduce their activity level during heat spells, puff out their feathers, hang out in the shade (just like me!), or take a quick bath to make themselves more comfortable. Some birds—like storks and vultures— also practice urohidrosis, that is, defecating on their bare legs to cool down by way of evaporative cooling.

Steve Youtsey

Upcoming Events - Please Help

Saturday, July 15
Lavender Festival
9am-4pm
Outreach booth

Wednesday, July 19
Loma Colorado Library
2-3:30pm
Single visit education program

Saturday, July 22
Valles Caldera Birthday Bash
10am-3pm
Outreach booth

June Rescues

Barn Owl - Head trauma - pending
American Kestrel - Caught by dog
American Kestrel - Human interference - transferred to Dr. Ramsay for continued care
American Kestrel - Human interference - pending
American Kestrel - Human interference - pending
Great Horned Owllet - Luxation of left ulna and left shoulder
girdle - pending
Cooper's Hawk -

If, from the comfort of your air conditioned house, you find yourself wondering how the birds are faring outside your door—now you know that nearly every species is very well equipped to stay cool and happy even during a high desert heat wave.

Images: Turkey Vulture, above, by David Powell. Keel-billed Toucan by Greg Basco; he says, "I used a relatively slow shutter speed to take this picture of a keel-billed toucan during a rainstorm in northern Costa Rica."

Human interference - transferred to Dr. Ramsay for continued care
Cooper's Hawk - Right leg injury
Cooper's Hawk - Human interference - transferred to Dr. Ramsay for continued care
Cooper's Hawk - Severe fracture of right wing
Cooper's Hawk - Human interference - transferred to Mikal Deese for continued care
Western Screech Owl - Right eye injury - pending



KEEP REEN PHOTOGRAPHY

Toucan photo by Greg Basco

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