BIRD ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

September-October 2025

New Climate Change Murals Note Threats To Local Birds

By Laura Banks, Bird Alliance President

A big thank you and job well done to Dana Loy and the Bird Alliance Climate and Conservation Committee (CCC) for successfully putting Albuquerque on the map as a site for the Audubon Mural Project. The CCC took the lead on making the murals a reality with four members shepherding the project: John "Lefty" Arnold, Pete Chandler, Dana Loy, and the late George Perry.

A collection of beautiful murals has been completed at the ABQ BioPark Zoo, serving to alert viewers to the crisis of birds threatened by climate change. The National Audubon Society reports that two thirds of North American birds are at increasing risk of extinction from global temperature rise.

The two artists selected for the project, Jade Cruz and Donny Kelley-Currens, have created stunning tributes to some of the New Mexico birds most threatened by climate change. The murals officially were dedicated on July 30, and you can watch the event on the One Albuquerque Media YouTube channel by clicking here.

To learn more about the mural project—a collaboration between the National Audubon Society, the Bird Alliance and the City of Albuquerque—and vanishing birds, read our January/February 2025 newsletter article. The amazing murals can be seen in the Raptor Roost area at the zoo. Congratulations to all!

These two images show part of the colorful murals by Donny Kelley-Currens (top) and Jade Cruz (left). Continue reading on the next page to learn more about the murals.

Photos by and courtesy of Kelly Aldridge.

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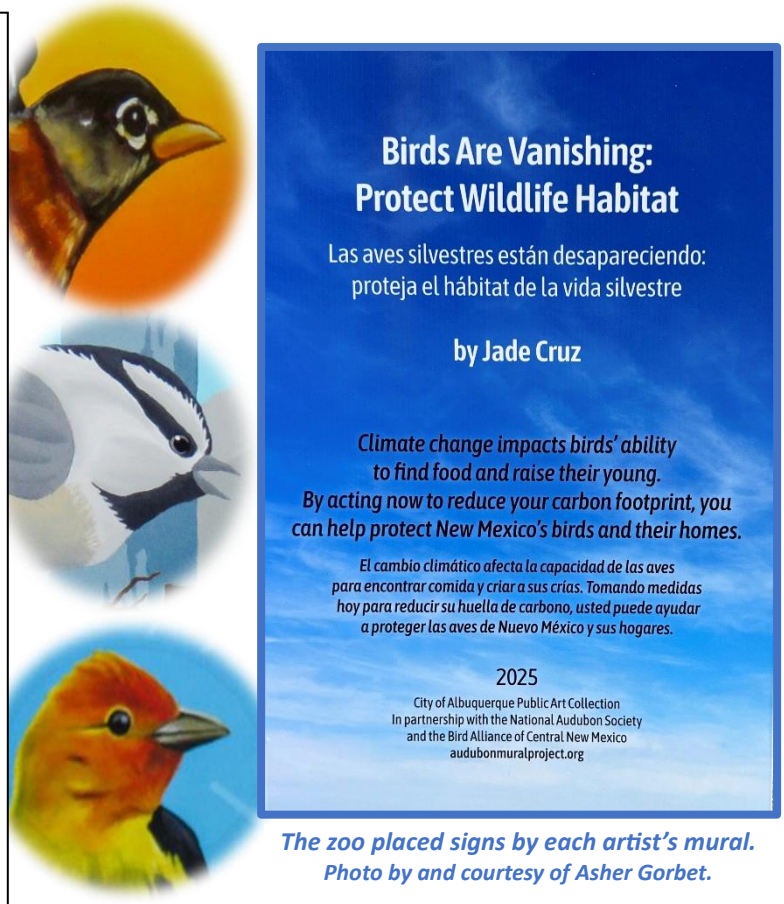
Here are some Bird Alliance and Audubon Southwest members with the mural artists at the unveiling. Left to right: Dana Loy, Bird Alliance; Judy Calman, Audubon Southwest; Asher Gorbet, Bird Alliance; Pete Chandler, Bird Alliance (in the back); Donny Kelley-Currens, artist; Tucker Davidson and Paul Tashjian, both of Audubon Southwest (in the back); Jade Cruz, artist; Jonathon Hayes, Audubon Southwest.

BIRDS DEPICTED IN THE MURALS

A total of 16 species of birds, all of which are threatened by rising temperatures based on the National Audubon Society's "Survival by Degrees" report, are depicted in the murals.

They are:
American Robin
Black-headed Grosbeak
Broad-tailed Hummingbird
Ferruginous Hawk
Grasshopper Sparrow
Horned Lark
Mountain Chickadee
Northern Flicker
Northern Goshawk
Pinyon Jay
Sage Thrasher
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Spotted Towhee
Western Bluebird
Western Tanager
Western Wood-Pewee



The zoo placed signs by each artist's mural. Photo by and courtesy of Asher Gorbet.

BIRD ALLIANCE IN THE NEWS

The murals at the zoo were not the only recent efforts of the Bird Alliance to be featured in the news.

BirdCast migration—Thanks to the determination of member Brian Anderson, last May both KOAT-TV and the Albuquerque Journal reported on the BirdCast website that provides summaries of radar-based measurements of nocturnal bird migration for the contiguous United States, including estimates for the total number of birds migrating as well as their directions, speeds, and altitudes. The coverage—which Brian localized for New Mexico and Albuquerque when he contacted the news media—noted how many birds had been detected in the city and state the past night or so, and the overall effect of the stories was both provoking and interesting.

By the way, BirdCast is operating right now and you can watch migration patterns in near real time or see a summary for a whole night the next morning. Check back to the website often to find out how migration has changed across a night and season and to learn which species of nocturnally migrating birds are likely migrating through the region.

Downtown Albuquerque News (DAN)—An interview with Dana Loy produced a nice story by this comprehensive and energetic news source that covers everything about Downtown Albuquerque. Click here then scroll down to see their story and some colorful images of the murals.

DID YOU KNOW? eBird indicates that the Rio Grande Nature Center State Park Hotspot birding site has the most species reported in Bernalillo County. Near the end of August 2025, a cumulative total of 324 species of birds had been reported there from 17,623 separate checklists. Click here to see the RGNC list of birds reported to eBird and do the same for the other sites listed in this story. That ranks the RGNC as having the fifth greatest number of bird species reported in the state. The top four Hotspot sites with the greatest number of species in New Mexico are: Bosque del Apache NWR (394 species, 11,269 checklists); Bitter Lake NWR (351 species, 3,850 checklists); Rattlesnake Springs of Carlsbad Caverns National Park (334 species, 4,778 checklists); and Percha Dam State Park, (327 species, 3,414 checklists).

SOMETHING NEW: SPARK BIRD STORIES

By Laura Banks

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the transitive verb *spark* as "*to set off in a burst of activity*." There is no better way to describe the first impact that birds can have on a someone who is open to embracing what is beautiful and important in the world.

From the Snowy Egret, whose existence was threatened because of the beauty of its feathers sparking the original mission of the Massachusetts Audubon in 1896 to modern day stories of those who have discovered birds and birding as a way to heal, learn and engage with nature, birds can be powerful sparks.

First encounters and origin stories from bird enthusiasts are always wonderful to hear and read about, and we share some of them here. Please consider sharing your stories for future editions.

My Spark Bird by Perrianne Houghton, Bird Alliance Board Member

What was my spark bird? That was a hard question at first, since there were several birds when I was growing up on Cape Cod: The Blue Jay; Black-capped Chickadee; American Crow, that were like kindling, waiting in the background. Then when visiting my dad in Tucson during summers as a teenager, Gambel's Quail, Curve-billed Thrasher, Cactus Wren, Gila Woodpecker, were added to the fuels.

Canyon Wren

I loved Arizona and the West, so after high school I moved to Tucson. After about three years exploring the southern Arizona mountains, canyons, deserts whenever possible, and getting ready to transfer from Pima College to University of Arizona, the bird fuels, Phainopepla, several hummingbird species, Hermit Thrush, Harris's Hawk, were building up high.

Then it happened. I was on a four-day backpack trip to the bottom of the Grand Canyon during the Christmas holiday. On the way down the Hermit trail, I heard a bird singing, spotted it, and knew it was a Canyon Wren. I had seen and heard them a few other places before, but not like this.

The exquisite, descending notes echoed from canyon wall to wall and they hit me. There, in the canyon, my favorite place, the Canyon Wren sparked all the fuels. And they've been burning ever since, as I've lived and worked around the western states, made birds a big part of my career and traveled near and far to see, listen to, learn about, appreciate and love them.

An internet search will produce numerous links to spark birds, and we found this interesting one called "The Spark Bird Project."

Check it out here.

Board member Asher Gorbet will share their spark bird in the November-December 2025 newsletter. And yes, we want to hear your spark bird stories. Please email yours to phoughton@bacnm.org.

Annual Membership Meeting Wrap-up

By Laura Banks

The Bird Alliance of Central New Mexico had its Annual Membership Meeting on July 20, 2025. We would like to thank the Rio Grande Nature Center State Park and the Friends of the Rio Grande Nature Center for their help in coordinating our meeting, which was in the Education Building.

The meeting's members helped chart the course for the Bird Alliance for the upcoming year. We recognized the generous contributions of time, talent, experience and resources of our many volunteers who serve as board members, bird walk organizers, bird walk leaders, outreach table volunteers, expert presenters, conservation volunteers, census and science volunteers, newsletter contributors, membership coordinator, webmaster and many other roles.

We acknowledged the passing of two of our dedicated volunteers, Kathy Carson, who had recently continued her love of birding in Seattle, and George Perry, whose beautiful photographs were offered and sold at our meeting to support the Bird Alliance mission.

Members of the Bird Alliance Board of Directors provided updates on our finances, programs, and activities. The Bird Alliance is in good standing as an independent chapter of the National Audubon Society, is financially stable and growing, and has more than 2,500 members. We continue to offer scholarships to help youth attend nature-based camps, conduct outreach and educational activities, monitor and contribute to important conservation efforts, lead bird walks for new and experienced birders, and serve as the custodian of the Melrose Woods Important Bird Area in Roosevelt County.

As required every two years according to our organizational bylaws, an election—using paper ballots—was conducted for the Board of Directors. The result was retention of the slate of directors for additional two-year terms: Laura Banks; Perrianne Houghton; Lee Hopwood; Asher Gorbet; Jason Kitting; Pete Chandler; and John "Lefty" Arnold.

If you have any questions about the Bird Alliance of Central New Mexico or would like to contribute to our mission as a volunteer, please explore our Bird Alliance website and/or use this link to contact us.

Thank you to all who attended the meeting. It was a wonderful opportunity to gather together and celebrate our love of birds and each other!

MEMBERS' PHOTO GALLERY

COOL YARD BIRDS

These birds showed up in Lefty Arnold's yard near Old Town Albuquerque in late July (Western Kingbirds) and early August (Cooper's Hawk). The kingbirds were enjoying some Mexican Elderberries (pictured is an adult bringing an insect to a youngster in the tree) and the hawk perched on a bird bath and took a serious look around the yard.

Photos by Lefty Arnold

Share your bird images!

We'd love to feature your photographs.

Please send images to Perrianne Houghton at phoughton@bacnm.org.

Please include the name of the bird and its location, plus the date, if possible.

The Bird Alliance of Central New Mexico is a not-for-profit chapter of the National Audubon Society. Our mission is to protect and conserve birds and wildlife habitats in our region, support responsible stewardship of land, promote environmental education, and welcome all communities to join us in the love and appreciation of birds.

Please visit our website at Bird Alliance.

SPREADING THE BIRD ALLIANCE WORD

A bevy of Bird Alliance volunteers are hard at work sharing information about our central New Mexico chapter of the National Audubon Society, appearing at various events around Albuquerque and nearby communities.

From events at the Rio Grande Nature Center State Park, Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge, city libraries, Open Space locations, the Downtown Growers Market and others, the collective effort provides a casual opportunity to inform folks attending these diverse events to learn more about issues of concern.

Bird Alliance Board member Pete Chandler at a recent Bird Alliance appearance at the Downtown Growers Market.

Some of those issues include protecting birds from window strikes, lights out efforts to reduce the dangers presented to birds by brightly lit buildings, keeping cats indoors, and climate change impacts, to name a few.

MONTHLY BIRD ALLIANCE & THURSDAY BIRDERS WALKS & PROGRAMS

- **September 13, Embudo Trailhead, 7:30-9:30 a.m.**, Indian School Road NE, Albuquerque
  Meet in the parking lot. Click here for a map to the location.
- **October 4, Piedra Lisa Canyon Trailhead, 9:00-11:00 a.m.**, Camino de la Sierra NE, Albuquerque
  Meet in the parking lot. Click here for a map to the location.
- **Thursday Birders—**Click here to see upcoming field trips listed on our website.
- The **Program schedule** can be found on our website. Monthly Programs are scheduled at 7 p.m. usually on the third Thursday of the month except May-August and December. Descriptions of future monthly programs are posted on the website when available.

Aging to Perfection

By Laura Banks

Congratulations to Bird Alliance board members Asher Gorbet and Jason Kitting for their enlightening and enjoyable article in *North American Birds* that helps us understand how we can visualize and document bird plumages that change with the age of the bird. The age of a bird is an important data point to be included in conservation reporting since it speaks to the general health of the individual bird and the success of the species.

In January 2025, Rio Grande Bird Research reported that the most common species this year is the Black Rosy-Finch, followed by the Brown-capped Rosy-Finch, and then the Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch.

Asher and Jason, who are both scientists and bird banders with Rio Grande Bird Research, provide a history of how birders and researchers have for years tried to describe the various plumage patterns that can be used to age birds. They advocate for wider adoption of the standardized Wolfe-Ryder-Pyle (WRP) Plumage Cycle System that is more precise and uniform than the traditional systems that rely solely on descriptors such as "hatch-year" or "after-second-year." These broad terms use intervals that are not always consistent across biozones and species, and are best supplemented by the coding used in the WRP system.

If you are a member of the American Birding Association, check your inbox or mailbox for the latest edition (Volume 76, Number 1, 2025) to read the article and view the wonderful demonstration photos of birds in hand.

Information about the WRP system can be found here. You also can view Jason's January 16, 2025 presentation on Rosy Finch conservation and banding on our monthly program archives page.