



Bird Alliance
Central New Mexico
A Chapter of the National Audubon Society

BIRD ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

July-August 2026

The Great Blue Heron: Witness at the Water's Edge

By Sepala Weliwitigoda, poet and environmental advocate, Chevy Chase, Maryland

*Across the bay, a kayak split the mist.
A heron, cloaked in cobalt reverie,
stood still as time upon a granite stone.
One leg tucked tight, the other poised in thought,
its eye fixed on the glassy, dimpled tide.*

*He waited—not for fish, but for the breath
of something deeper, surfacing at last—
a truth too slow to rise, too sharp to flee.
The river held its secrets just below,
while fog returned to swaddle what we know.*



Great Blue Heron images by Lefty Arnold

The Great Blue Heron often appears motionless in shallow water—focused, poised between patience and movement. To encounter a heron in this state is to feel the pace of solitude: space to breathe, to meditate, and to ponder thoughts and ideas carried quietly within. For a moment, the world slows, as if attention itself has been invited—or granted.

The life of the Great Blue Heron is inseparable from water. It depends on healthy wetlands—quiet shorelines, floodplains, estuaries, and shallow rivers—where fish and amphibians remain abundant and waters retain ecological balance. Because of this reliance, the heron has long been regarded as an indicator of environmental health. Where herons thrive, wetlands are often functioning well. Where they disappear, the loss usually signals deeper disruption long before it becomes obvious elsewhere.

Yet the heron's significance extends beyond biology.

Across many ancient cultures, herons were regarded with reverence long before modern science provided explanations for natural systems. In indigenous traditions across North America, herons were associated with wisdom, patience, and self-reliance; their presence often signaled abundance and the assurance of sustenance. In ancient Egypt, herons were linked to the soul and the passage

between worlds. In Chinese and Japanese art, folklore, and literature, they appeared as emblems of balance, longevity, purity, and the ability to move between elements—water, earth, and air.

These traditions were not grounded in data, but in sustained observation and lived experience with the natural world. Reverence fostered social cohesion and psychological steadiness at a time when nature's uncertainty could not be explained scientifically. The heron's quiet self-reliance served as an example to individuals and families facing sickness, scarcity, and despair—particularly in the production and gathering of food.

Today, science has given us extraordinary insight into how ecosystems function and why species like the Great Blue Heron depend on ecologically sound wetlands. What science cannot compel, however, is care. No legislation or dataset can require people to notice a bird standing at the water's edge, or to feel responsibility for the habitat that sustains it. Laws can protect wetlands, but their effectiveness ultimately depends on human behavior—on attention, restraint, understanding interdependence, and a willingness to coexist thoughtfully with other forms of life.

As wetlands deteriorate through development, pollution, and climate-driven change, herons often respond quietly. Their absence can speak as clearly as their presence. In this way, the Great Blue



Heron becomes both witness and messenger, revealing change not through alarm, but through silence.

Perhaps what is needed now is not a return to ancient belief, but a rational reverence—a way of seeing informed by science and experience, guided by respect. Modern knowledge can explain why wetlands matter; reverence gives us reason to care. Together, they offer a framework for stewardship that serves birds, forests, waters, and people alike.

To watch a Great Blue Heron fish is to observe patience as survival. Nothing holds its attention except the present moment. Nothing is rushed. In that quiet discipline lies a lesson. When we learn to

notice the heron clearly, we may also begin to notice the health of our wetlands—and our own responsibilities—more honestly. Care, like balance, begins with attention. 🌀

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BIRDATHON 2026 raises \$852!

The **2026 Birdathon** is complete and featured four teams and/or individuals who participated.

The teams were:

Desert Thrashers: 87 species; Nolina, Michelle, Jim, Allison

Basin Birders: 58 species; Rex and Susan

Ghost Owls: 45 species; Perrienne, Sarah, Darlene, Connie

Individual: 43 species; Lisa Gould

Total species for all participants: 155



Tricolored Heron

Photo by Tara Tanaka/Audubon Photography Awards



THE BIRD ALLIANCE'S BIRDATHON
IS A FUN WAY TO RAISE FUNDS FOR
VARIOUS PROJECTS. BUT IT ALSO

CAN BE REWARDING FOR PARTICIPANTS:

DESERT THRASHER TEAM MEMBER **ALLISON
SCHACHT** ADDED THE **TRICOLORED HERON**
TO HER LIFE LIST AT **BOSQUE DEL APACHE**
AND HER TEAM SAW A **BOBCAT**!

Areas birded:

Bosque del Apache
Escondida Lake
Box Canyon Road
Pueblitos Road
Water Canyon Road
Autumn Lake
Pueblo Montaña Bosque Trail
Ghost Ranch
Forest Road 100
Ghost Ranch Box Canyon
Rio Chama ☯

A big thank you to every Birdathoner who participated!

BIRD ALLIANCE SCHOLARSHIPS ARE AVAILABLE!

If you know of a young person between the age of 6 and 20 who has their heart set on a camp, program or course to learn about birds, wildlife or conservation, please guide them to the [Ryan D. Beaulieu Youth Memorial Scholarship](#) information on our website. They'll be glad you did! ☯

ENDEMIC BIRDS IN NEW MEXICO

By John "Lefty" Arnold

Reading the May/June 2026 issue of *Bird Watcher's Digest*, I came across a message from the editor who, among other things, discussed endemic birds, including those found in the United States.

ENDEMIC: A species native to a particular locality or region. (From the Merriam-Webster dictionary.)

That got me wondering: Which, if any, United States endemic birds can be found in New Mexico? (Four: Keep reading.) And does New Mexico have its own endemic species? (NOPE: But Hawaii and Alaska and California and Florida do, so keep reading.)

Some online research provided answers about endemics, including the fact that, excluding Hawaii (which has 29 or so endemics still living there while many others have become extinct) but including Alaska, this nation has 16 of them on the continent:

1. Carolina Chickadee
2. Red-cockaded Woodpecker
3. Fish Crow
4. Seaside Sparrow
5. Boat-tailed Grackle
6. Saltmarsh Sparrow
7. Yellow-billed Magpie (*only in California*)
8. Bachman's Sparrow
9. Greater Prairie-Chicken
10. Island Scrub-Jay (*only in California*)
11. Lesser Prairie-Chicken
12. Florida Scrub-Jay (*only in Florida*)
13. Black Rosy-Finch
14. Gunnison Sage-Grouse
15. Brown-capped Rosy-Finch
16. McKay's Bunting (*only in Alaska*)



After perusing [eBird and its record of birds that have been reported in New Mexico](#), here's the list of endemics seen in the Land of Enchantment, all of which can be found in other states as well:

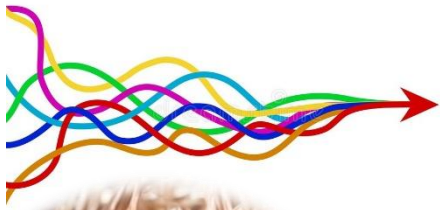
1. Lesser Prairie-Chicken*
2. Black Rosy-Finch*
3. Gunnison Sage-Grouse
4. Brown-capped Rosy-Finch*

So, I asked myself:

1. How many of these birds have I seen in New Mexico? (*Three.)
2. And I ask you: *How many of these four species have you seen in New Mexico?*
3. *Did I miss any continental U.S. endemics that have been reported in New Mexico? If so, please email me at johnleftyarnold@bacnm.org.* ☺

Endemic Rosy-Finches!
The Black Rosy-Finch (top)
was photographed by
Rodney Reinhardt.

The Brown-capped Rosy-Finch
was photographed by
Tim Wallace.



Birder and photographer
Tim Wallace captured this
Lupine Blue butterfly
(*Icaricia lupini*) while on a recent
Thursday Birders field trip
to the Manzano Pond
and Quarai Ruins
National Monument.

HOW ABOUT YOU?
**Do you have some bird images
you would like to share?**

We'd love to feature
your photographs.

Please send images to
Perriane Houghton
at this email address:
phoughton@bacnm.org.

Include your name, the name
of the bird, its location,
and the date. 🌀

UPCOMING PARTNER EVENTS

CLICK ON EACH LINK FOR MORE INFORMATION.

[New Mexico's Native Bees: Exploring Ecosystem Services,
Ecology, and Identification](#)

Albuquerque Chapter of the
New Mexico Native Plant Society
July 13-17, 2026
Museum of Southwestern Biology, Albuquerque

[American Birding Association
Community Weekend](#)

Albuquerque
August 22-23, 2026

[Wildlife Zone Family Adventure](#)

September 26, 2026
9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.
Bosque del Apache Visitor Center 🌀



*The Bird Alliance of Central New Mexico is a not-for-profit
chapter of the National Audubon Society. Its 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. 🌀*

*For more information, please visit these websites:
[Bird Alliance](#) and [National Audubon Society](#).*

SUMMER TANAGER'S DELAYED PLUMAGE

By Jason Kitting

This gorgeous “strawberry lemonade” tanager was definitely one of the prettier birds encountered in early June! This beautiful plumage also is relatively unique among many bird species.

This Second Year male Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*) is an excellent example of delayed



plumage maturation. As the name implies, delayed plumage maturation is when an individual (usually male) delays its adult plumage and retains some of its juvenile-like plumage (usually colored like a female) into their first breeding season.

Summer Tanagers, Blue Grosbeaks, American Redstarts, Bald Eagles (males and females), and Tree Swallows (only females) are all examples of species that show delayed plumage maturation.

The yellow and brownish feathers are a mix of juvenile and formative feathers from last year (2025) when this bird hatched, while the red feathers are alternate feathers from earlier this year (2026). When he is done with his first breeding season at the end of this summer, he will then go through his prebasic molt (remember to add the pre when talking about the molt, and remove the pre when talking about the feathers) that will put him in his full red adult plumage for which this species is known.

Despite not being in his full red attire, this young male was paired with a Second-Year female. The

females of this species do not show delayed plumage maturation and attain their full adult coloration in their first breeding season, even though they show the same extent of molt as the males.

All banding is conducted with a federally authorized Bird Banding Permit issued by the U.S. Geological Survey's Bird Banding Laboratory. 🐦



WANT TO GO BIRDING?

Visit [Thursday Birders](#) to find field trips, instructions, last minute changes and updates.

Visit [Monthly Bird Events](#) to learn about monthly trips to local open spaces. 🐦

Celebrating Albuquerque's Newest Open Space

San Antonio Oxbow Bluffs

By Perrienne Houghton



Bird Alliance member and Oxbow Open Space advocate Susan Chaudoir with Mayor Tim Keller at the ribbon cutting. Photo by Sara Jayne Cole.

On Friday, June 12, Albuquerque's Open Space Division had a ribbon-cutting event on the west side of the Rio Grande. The grand opening of San Antonio Oxbow Bluffs Open Space celebrated completion of Phase 1 construction, including a pavilion and outdoor classroom, an ADA-accessible loop trail, native plants and picnic areas.

Phase 2 will add: native trees and shrubs at the Education Center and parking lots; another shade structure; picnic tables; more native plants; public restrooms with water; shade structure at the *hornos*; a pedestrian bridge across the Corrales drain; and erosion control measures throughout the site.

Oxbow Bluffs is a 23-acre protected area of desert shrub upland and is adjacent to about 36 acres of marsh wetland along the Rio Grande. The open space provides habitat for wildlife, public access, and natural resource conservation.

This property originally was owned by Susan and Rufus Poole and was bought by a developer after Susan Poole passed away in 2012. But the community actively fought for

protection of the land and adjacent wetlands. The Poole adobe house burned in 2020 and by March 2021, the city and many organizations were able to purchase the property.

About 70 people attended the ribbon-cutting and celebrated with Albuquerque Mayor Tim Keller, previous and first open space superintendent Rex Funk, present superintendent Colleen Langan-McRoberts, several other open space employees, neighborhood residents, Bird Alliance members, and community members who were all involved in some way to preserve this important property. 🌻



Always ready to promote the Bird Alliance and its efforts, Sara Jayne Cole (right) and Perrienne Houghton shared information with the audience. Photo by Bill Pentler, retired Open Space employee.