

UTE MOUNTAIN MESA VERDE BIRDING FESTIVAL



www.utemountainmesaverdebirdingfestival.com

Cortez Cultural Center, 25 N. Market St., Cortez, CO 81321, (970) 565-1151

Neither wind, rain, sleet nor snow became the motto of avid birdwatchers who participated in the Cortez Cultural Center's 11th annual Ute Mountain-Mesa Verde Birding Festival. Despite Colorado's frivolous spring weather, tour participants gathered early each morning at the Cortez Cultural Center. After picking up sack lunches containing gourmet sandwiches of choice, they boarded vans donated by several area entities. A dozen volunteer drivers chauffeured the birding festival participants throughout five counties to a variety of habitat destinations - Navajo Lake, Lost Canyon, Mesa Verde, McPhee Reservoir, Ute Mountain Tribal Park, McElmo Canyon, Bradfield Bridge, La Plata River, Upper Dolores River and Dolores River Canyon, Dove Creek, and Coalbed Creek in eastern Utah. An overnight carpool expedition explored scenic and cultural birding landscapes around Moab, Utah. In all, 21 local and regional avian experts provided their services as tour guides to enhance birding opportunities during the five-day event. Several tours, including *Beginning Birding* and a family bluebird outing, were full.

The 2015 birding festival's 23 tours garnered a total of 166 species, a half-dozen more than the 2014 tally. Four **Summer tanagers** and the thrill of **Lucy's warblers** feeding their young in the nest, a rare experience with a rare Colorado species, highlighted the Yellow Jacket/Canyon of the Ancients tour. The Local Lakes tour chalked up two warbler species not observed during previous birding festivals - **American Redstart** and **Townsend's Warbler**. The first confirmed report of a **Harris's Sparrow** in Dolores County came from the Bradfield Bridge tour, which also captured the honor of sighting 80 species. The Weber Canyon tour observed a **Fox Sparrow**, not sighted since the 2005 festival. Dolores River Canyon's tour spotted another species new to the UMMV Birding Festival, **Golden-crowned Kinglet**, and also tallied an elusive **Brown Creeper**, listed only in the 2010 tally. Three different night tours scouted for owls around Cortez and Mancos and netted **Great-horned, Flammulated, Northern Saw-Whet** and **Western Screech owls**. While the Old Spanish Trail - West tour did not see Sharp-tailed or Gunnison's Sage-grouse, the birders logged **Sage Thrasher** which had not been listed since 2008. However, the Old Spanish Trail - East tour again successfully spotted **Acorn Woodpecker**, another rare Colorado species. **Common Poorwill**, generally uncommon during the birding festival, showed up on Wednesday's opening day lists, while **Common nighthawks**, never included on previous birding festival tallies, made an appearance for Friday's Mancos Owling tour. Shorebird sightings were minimal again this year, but **Willet** and **Whimbrel**, generally uncommon, added to the 2015 tally.

The 2015 UMMV Birding Festival attracted 125 birdwatchers from throughout Colorado, New Mexico, and neighboring states. A young man from Alaska, who was visiting the area, walked into the Cultural Center upon hearing about the birding festival and signed onto four tours. Fifty people attended John Rawinski's opening night presentation, *The Mysteries of Colorado Owls*. Thursday afternoon's presentations by Dr. Tony Apa (Department of Natural Resources) and Dr. Joseph Ortega (Fort Lewis College) provided festival participants with interesting data about habitats and survival ratios among Four Corners species. Saturday evening's banquet and Nathan Pieplow's keynote presentation, *The Amazing Sounds of Birds*, attracted 101 people.

As the volunteer birding festival committee winds down after this year's festival, ideas already are stewing for the 12th Annual Ute Mountain-Mesa Verde Birding Festival. With the recent sighting of a California condor on

Summit Ridge between Mancos and Dolores, discussion has focused on a California condor as the 2016 poster bird and re-establishing an overnight condor tour to Vermillion Cliffs in Arizona.

The Ute Mountain-Mesa Verde Birding Festival originated in 2005 as a major regional event sponsored by the Cortez Cultural Center, a non-profit entity with the mission of promoting and reinforcing *the Creative Spirit, Cultural Heritage and Natural Wonders of the Four Corners*. The UMMV Birding Festival is the only community-based watchable wildlife event within the Four Corners region. According to Colorado Tourism statistics, bird watching ranks near the top among Colorado's most popular outdoor recreational attractions. The UMMV Birding Festival has brought birding enthusiasts from throughout Colorado, the United States and Canada, Australia, and Hawaii to the Cortez area.

General support for the UMMV Birding Festival's various activities comes from regional agencies, businesses, and individuals. The festival's reputation as one of the best depends upon a cadre of local volunteers who dedicate time and services toward planning and implementing educational activities, informational lectures, and birding tours. Other volunteers, many associated with regional, state, and federal agencies, provide wildlife expertise as guides, serve as van drivers, or offer presentations about birds and wildlife-oriented topics pertinent to Southwest Colorado. The UMMV Birding Festival gratefully acknowledges the commitment of these volunteers.

No matter what the weather, the UMMV Birding Festival strives to maintain its reputation for providing tours that span a broad array of habitats with opportunities to observe species not common in other Colorado locales. All UMMV Birding Festival activities are open to the general public. The festival focuses on the interests of seasoned birders as well as anyone curious about bird identification, avian habits and habitats, or the casual sport of Backyard Birding. Through its long history, the UMMV Birding Festival has promoted educational opportunities and has bolstered awareness of the recreational and ecological benefits of birds. Of the seven annual birding events scheduled within western Colorado, only the UMMV Birding Festival incorporates a broad expanse of habitats - Alpine and Ponderosa forests, Great Sage Plain, lakes and riparian corridors, open fields and orchards, canyonlands, and desert scrub. The species tallies from this annual May event represent over one-third of the total avian species documented within the State of Colorado.

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