



News Release

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Spring Bird Count in San Luis Valley finds Unusual Species

MONTE VISTA – The 19th annual San Luis Valley, Colorado spring bird count held on Saturday, May 9th, found some rare and unusual bird species. The count was done as part of the International Migratory Bird Day celebration, a cooperative effort between State and Federal agencies.

This year's count tallied a total of 148 species, which was the fourth highest count in the 19 years of spring counts. Total numbers of birds counted, however, was lower than average with 7,182 individual birds being counted. Last year's count produced 151 species and 18,458 individual birds. Lower total numbers may be due to spring storms that delayed some bird arrivals.

A Pectoral Sandpiper was found, which is rare in the San Luis Valley. It was a count first, a first spring record, and one of four records for the San Luis Valley. The Pectoral Sandpiper migrates through our area towards breeding grounds in the arctic.

Count-organizer John Rawinski, volunteering for the Rio Grande National Forest, said, " The Pectoral Sandpiper is not a big bird by stature (about 9 inches), but is a 'big bird' to find in this Valley".

A male Summer Tanager at the Alamosa River was only the 10th record for the Valley. A Black-and-white Warbler found in Saguache is only the 11th record for this species in the valley. Other unusual species included a male Lazuli Bunting, Northern Waterthrush, Red-necked Phalarope, Burrowing Owl, Canyon Wren, Lewis's Woodpecker, a dark phase of Ruddy Duck, and Gray Jay.

"One of Saturday's gems was the male Lazuli Bunting, a beautiful blue bird with a reddish brown breast that fed at a feeder in Blanca....we just don't see those birds very often." said Rawinski.

Another astonishing trend was the lack of birds in the local heronries.

“Where in many years we had hundreds of nesting White-faced Ibis, Snowy Egrets, and Cattle Egrets, we had less than 10 birds present this year,” said Rawinski. “This sudden downward trend is a concern and could be due to a number of factors, such as late arrivals, water, and environmental conditions” said Rawinski.

Fifteen people participated in this year’s count, which was about average for the event.

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