Jo Fine

Camp Colorado

I am so thankful for the generosity of the Central New Mexico Audubon Society that allowed me the opportunity to attend the American Birding Association's Camp Colorado. It's hard to pick a favorite part of the camp when most every event was a highlight. My three favorite features of this camp were the birding (obviously), the education, and the free time.

Over the course of camp we ventured through various elevations of northern Colorado ranging from around 4,500 to 12,000 feet. This allowed us to explore an array of unique ecosystems, including montane and subalpine forests, riparian areas, grasslands, alpine tundra, foothills, and a reservoir. As a group, we saw around 140 species of birds. I personally saw 99 species and added 3 new birds to my world life list. My lifers were Dusky Grouse, White-tailed Ptarmigan, and Orchard Oriole. I also really enjoyed seeing familiar species, and noting differences in their behaviors and habitats as compared to New Mexico.

The montane and subalpine forests treated us to birds such as: Red Crossbill (everywhere), Townsend's and Virginia's Warbler, American Three-toed Woodpecker,

Red-naped Sapsucker, all three species of Nuthatch, and Clark's Nutcracker. One sad and alarming thing I noticed in the montane and subalpine forests was the tremendous damage done by bark beetles. Bark beetles are native species, but their damage to the environment is aggravated by climate change, which enables them to survive the warmer winters.

The alpine tundra didn't have the highest diversity of species, but the quality of the species and ecosystem compensated for the fewer numbers of species. The alpine tundra is a very fragile ecosystem because the limited vegetation requires extended periods of time to grow in the cold environment above the treeline. The tundra landscape mostly consists of massive lichen covered boulders, short grass, wildflowers, and krummholz (a type of tree deformed from high temperatures and winds). The tundra is where we saw the gorgeously-camouflaged White-tailed Ptarmigan, Prairie Falcon, and Golden Eagle, enjoyed very distant views of a Brown-capped Rosy-Finch, and spotted awesome mammal life including the amazing Pika! During the Alpine Tundra day I enjoyed the company of Ted Floyd, who joined us for part of the day. Bark Beetle damage was very visible from the tundra looking down on subalpine and montane forest.

A riparian area describes vegetation around running water, so there can be lowland riparian areas like the familiar Rio Grande Bosque in Albuquerque or high

elevation riparian areas such as montane forests surrounding a small creek. At Camp Colorado, high elevation riparian areas revealed amazing birds such as American Dipper, and a large diversity of the above-listed montane forest birds. In lowland riparian areas, we saw birds such as Black-and-white Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Black-capped Chickadee, Chimney Swift, Blue Jay, roosting Common Nighthawk, Great-horned Owl, Bullock's Oriole, and Gray Catbird. Riparian areas, both lowland and montane, provided the highest diversity of species among the habitats we visited.

The Pawnee National Grasslands was a mixture of cheatgrass, playas, agriculture land, and natural native grassland. Some exciting grassland birds we saw included Mountain Plover, Upland Sandpiper, Baird's and Solitary Sandpiper (in the Playa), McCown's and Chestnut-collared Longspur, Grasshopper, Vesper, Lark, and Brewer's Sparrow, Lark Bunting, Horned Lark, Western Meadowlark, Say's Phoebe, Loggerhead Shrike, and Swainson's Hawk. Like the tundra, the grasslands did not have a vast diversity of species, but the birds' fascinating adaptations made the excursion more than worthwhile.

The Reservoir offered views of deep water birds such as the Western and Clark's Grebe, California Gull, American-white Pelican, and Double-crested Cormorant, along with a more riparian area type bird: Orchard Oriole.

At the Foothills, we witnessed ridge migration in real time. At sunrise we saw large numbers of birds flying over the ridgeside and landing in surrounding shrubs and trees, including Lazuli Bunting, Blue Grosbeak, Canyon Wren, and Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher.

Every day in the field we learned about the ecosystems we explored, but during non-birding hours at the YMCA of the Rockies we were treated to some fascinating discussions. Our counselors Greg Levandoski, David LaPuma, Corrie Borgman, Joel Such, and coordinator Jennie Duberstein, shared their knowledge and experiences in careers involving nature and wildlife. Corrie taught us about high elevation ecosystems such as the tundra, including their susceptibility to climate change, and provided information about flora and fauna. Corrie turned out to be a fellow Burqueño, and we enjoyed discussing the Land of Enchantment. Greg presented on grasslands, an ecosystem in which he has done lots of field work. Similar to Corrie, he talked about the overall ecosystem and the effects of climate change. Greg lives in Colorado, but has family in Albuquerque and visits a lot, so he and I did a fair amount of conversing about the city as well. Corrie, Greg, and I plan to reunite for some Albuquerque area birding whenever we get a chance.

David gave an informative presentation on the invaluable work he does with Cellular Tracking Technologies. The world of GPS and cellular tracking of birds and

wildlife is changing drastically, and David is at the forefront of these breakthroughs. With the climate crisis rapidly worsening, there are very few native bird species that aren't threatened with extinction; even if they are not currently listed as threatened or endangered. David's work, alongside banding and other field work, will be essential to tracking how birds and their habits change in the near future.

Joel gave us two presentations, one was a sort of introduction to Colorado birds and ecosystems and the other was on Brown-capped Rosy-finches and their breeding range. Joel's presentation on Rosy-finches was especially interesting to me because I have spent lots of time doing work with all three species of Rosy-finches in their wintering range with Rio Grande Bird Research at the Sandia Crest. Joel did something that was previously considered impossible: he caught and banded Rosies in their breeding range. He collected blood samples and banded birds from various high-elevation breeding grounds, often doing perilous hikes and banding on steep ridges in freezing cold temperatures. The point of Joel's work was to both gather more information on Rosy-finches in general (considering they are a very new genus of birds) and to specifically study whether Brown-capped Rosy-finches have different genetics at different breeding grounds. Joel used color bands representing each regional breeding ground. Because Rosies don't eat a lot of seeds during the summer, it makes trapping them with a seed and potter trap much more difficult; that is why it was thought to be

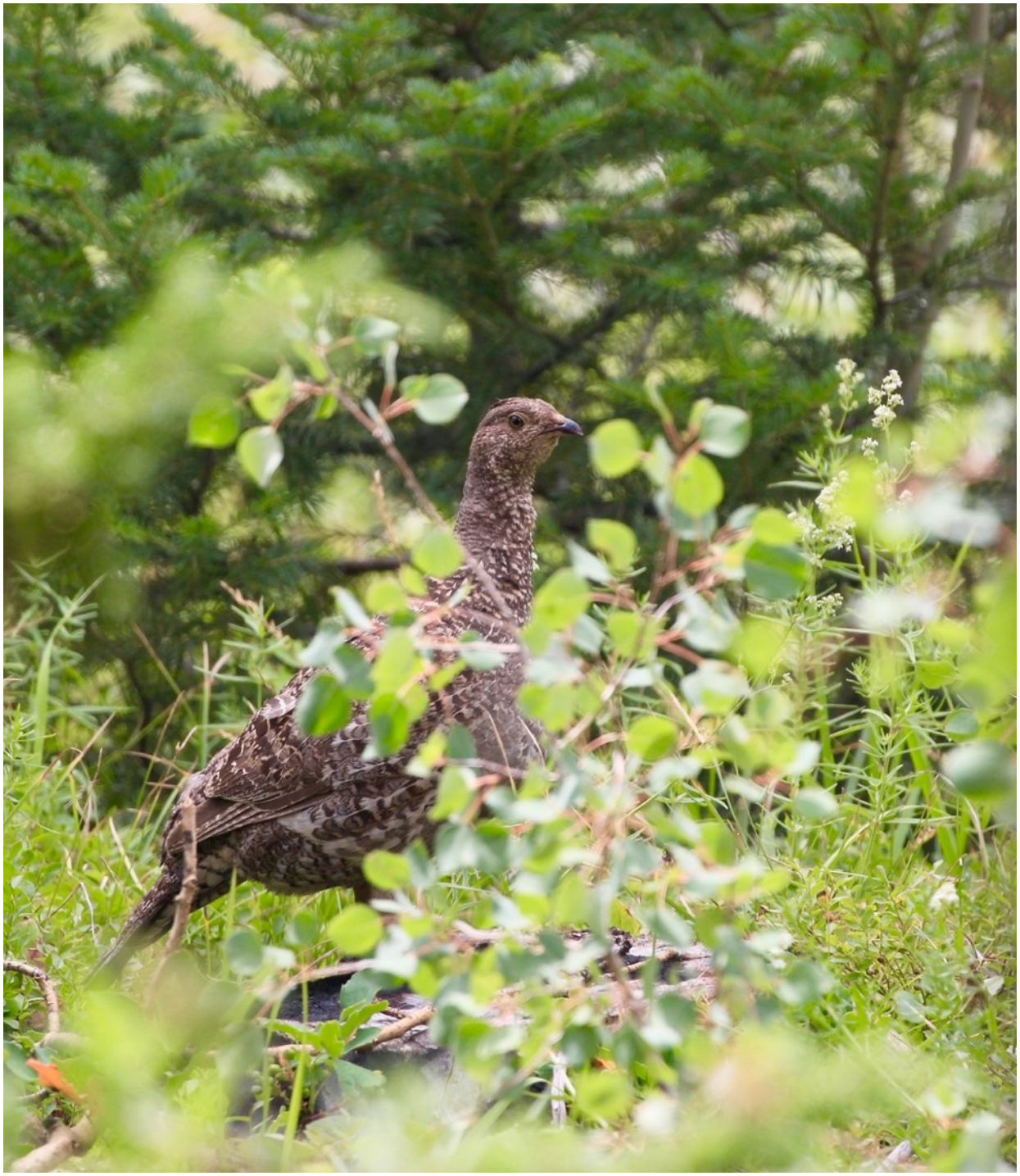
impossible. During the winter the Rosies flock to seed which means trapping them is considerably easier at this time of year. I invited Joel to come band with us at Sandia Crest to enjoy a nice warm room, much easier conditions, all three species (not just Brown-capped), and of course a cellular connection.

Aside from specific presentations we had a round table questionnaire where we asked the counselors about their careers. I asked a question about how to pick a career around birds, when our changing climate is in such a dire situation. I specifically asked at what point does specialized work on a specific grassland, or even on a specific species, become useless, and at what point do we need to focus on the bigger picture. David LaPuma gave me a response I really liked: "act locally think globally." If everyone follows that mantra, doing what they can locally while always focusing on the bigger picture, I think there's lots of hope for the Earth. To me, "locally" means both literally in your region or area, but also means doing things specific to you. One example of acting locally while thinking globally might be to eat less beef or beef that you know has been locally-ranched, or ranched in an environmentally conscious way. There are currently fires raging in the world's lungs (the Amazon) as a result of deforestation aimed at making room for cattle farming. The round table inspired me to continue my pursuit of a career involving birds, ecology, and environmental science.

We also enjoyed some free time around our home base, the YMCA of the Rockies. During free time I played tennis, mini golf, and basketball with the friends I made. Additionally we visited Scott Rashid's banding station, where he bands birds primarily to educate people and groups around the Y. It was interesting to see the differences between my local banding station (RGBR) and Scott's much smaller operation. The Y also had great food that I enjoyed with my new friends.

Thank you so much to CNMAS and the Ryan Beaulieu Memorial Education Fund for an amazing and once-in-a-lifetime experience and highlight of my year!

Pika (Photo by Jo Fine)



Female Dusky Grouse (Photo by Jo Fine)