



BIRD ALLIANCE BULLETIN

December 2024

Message from the Board

It's been a busy year in New Mexico! Earlier this year we decided to change the name of the chapter from Central New Mexico Audubon Society to the Bird Alliance of Central New Mexico. While the name has changed we remain a chapter of the National Audubon Society.

The people who power the Board have had many changes as well. We said farewell to a President, Glenda Morling, and hello to our new President Laura Banks. We welcomed our new Secretary, Lefty Arnold. Our good friend, Robert Munro, stepped off the board as well, but remains an active volunteer for the Melrose project. Denise Jones has stepped off the board as well and remains active as a volunteer on the outreach committee. And finally, we bid goodbye to a new friend to New Mexico birding, George Perry, who passed away unexpectedly in September.

We have had a change in the newsletter presentation as well. We changed from The Burrowing Owl quarterly news, to monthly news and eventually creating the Bird Alliance Bulletin. Our long-time newsletter volunteer, Melissa Howard, has stepped away and our short-term volunteer who filled that role, Jordan Graham, also stepped away in October to welcome his first child, Congrats; Jordan!

Here's how we'll navigate impacts of the new administration A statement by Dr. Elizabeth Gray, CEO, National Audubon Society

We recognize that the outcome of this election brings a new set of challenges and it's more important than ever that we stay united in our commitment to protect birds and the natural habitats they depend on.

A new administration under President Trump may bring renewed attempts to roll back the environmental protections we have fought so hard to secure. We understand that this news may feel daunting, but it also strengthens our resolve to fight for what we know is right: the preservation of our natural world for birds—and for all of us.

We have faced challenging times before, and each time, with your support, we have risen to the occasion. We will not let potential setbacks derail the progress we've made. Instead, we will double down on our efforts, working tirelessly to protect birds, their habitats, and the environmental laws that safeguard them.

Here's How We'll Continue the Fight:

- **Vigilance Against Rollbacks:** We will closely monitor and respond to any attempts to weaken critical environmental regulations. Our policy experts are prepared to advocate fiercely in Washington, D.C., and across the nation to ensure that hard-won protections for birds and their habitats remain intact.
- **Strengthening Local and State Initiatives:** While federal policy may shift, our commitment to local and state conservation efforts remains steadfast. We will work with communities to build resilience, ensuring that conservation continues regardless of changes at the federal level.
- **Rallying for Resilience:** We know that many of you share our concerns about the future, and we see this as an opportunity to come together like never before. In the coming months, you'll hear about ways you can take immediate action to support our work. Your voice, your involvement, and your donations will be more critical than ever.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment to the birds we love and the places they need to survive.

We understand the urgency of this moment, and we're prepared to act. Thank you for your unwavering commitment to the birds we love and the places they need to survive.

Plastics and Land Birds

by Dana Loy

Have you noticed it's harder and harder to find produce that's not prepackaged in plastic? It's a problem! You can't check its freshness and you can't buy the amount you need. Worse, through taking home so much plastic, you become an unwitting partner to the plastics industry and global warming.

Plastic is overwhelming the Earth. We've seen what it does to the ocean, waterfowl, and sea animals. We've seen drifting masses of plastic trash. We've seen the turtle with a straw in its nose.

We don't hear as much about plastics and land birds, but it's killing them, too. For example:

- Plastic can develop food-like smells that attract birds and other wildlife. When eaten, it can cut soft tissues and damage internal organs. It can accumulate in birds' stomachs, causing them to stop eating and starve.
- Birds can become entangled in plastic such as deflated balloons, decomposing grocery bags, or the netting from "Cuties." It can cut into birds' skin. It can make them unable to hunt, escape predators, or provide for their young.
- Birds ingest microplastics through the water they drink and contaminated prey.
- Parent birds can transfer bits of plastic to their chicks while feeding them.

There are more plastics in the world than ever before, and half were produced in just the last two decades. They emit pollution at every stage of their life cycle: during extraction, production, manufacturing, use, recycling, and disposal. They're made from fossil fuel and contribute to climate change, the biggest threat to bird survival.

While we should always, of course, dispose of plastics responsibly, we should reject the belief, largely promoted by the chemical industry, that most plastics can be successfully recycled. It's just not true. It is significantly cheaper to create new plastic products than to recycle existing ones, and most types of plastics can't be recycled at all. In the United States, only about 5% to 6% of plastics are recycled each year. The rest are released into the environment through landfills, incinerators, and litter, and they never biodegrade except into tiny microplastics, which birds (and all of us) are absorbing every day.

While we wait and work for policies to reduce plastic production, we can change our buying habits, ask stores to stop accepting so much plastic, and reuse the plastics we already have.

It's very hard to use less plastic! There are hundreds of useful suggestions for that; here are just a few.

- Shop with your own reusable bags
- Carry a reusable water bottle
- Carry your own reusable cutlery
- Say no to plastic straws
- Buy items like rice and beans in bulk (bring your own reusable bags)
- Buy produce that isn't packaged in plastic and ask stores to stop accepting
- Use your own takeaway coffee cup
- Carry reusable containers for lunch, snacks, and leftovers
- Remove balloons and plastic decorations from your party list



'Alternative plastics'

Sources

<https://abcbirds.org/blog21/plastic-kills-birds/>

<https://www.technologyreview.com/2023/10/12/1081129/plastic-recycling-climate-change-microplastics/>

<https://www.beyondplastics.org/>

<https://www.genevaenvironmentnetwork.org/resources/updates/plastics-and-climate/> Here's how we'll navigate impacts of the new administration

MEMBER'S PHOTO GALLERY



Song Sparrow, RGNC, Lefty Arnold



Hermit Thrush, Dixon Rd, Corrales. Lefty Arnold



Hooded Merganser, RGNC, Lefty Arnold

We would love to showcase your photos

Email your photos to Lee Hopwood at leehopwood@bacnm.org

Please include your name, location of the photo and name of the bird in your email.

The new design and delivery of the Bird Bulletin beginning in January 2025 will produce 6 issues a year as follows:

January/February March/April May/June July/August September/October November/December

The due date for photos and/or articles will be the 15th of the month prior to publication, i.e. Jan/Feb material is due on December 15th.

Featured Bird - Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*)

By Asher Gorbet

In late fall and early winter, the Bosque and woodlands of central New Mexico are ablaze with flashes of red and white as our annual numbers of Northern Flickers – the red-shafted variety – meet their annual peak. Flickers are year-round residents in most woodland types throughout New Mexico, but we take on additional birds during the winter, when individuals in the northern portion of the range enter our area to overwinter in our relatively mild central New Mexico climate. The “shaft” color refers to the bright flashes of color along the center of the flight feathers – the long feathers of the wings (primaries and secondaries) and the tail feathers. This color can be seen in perched birds, but the true beauty comes in watching them in flight. The dramatic shaft color on the underside of the wings flash alternately with boldly barred upperparts and a large, bright white rump patch. Flickers are not shy about perching prominently on dead branches in the tallest of trees or undulating through the open sky above the canopy to move from perch to perch.

Many of us are surprised when we first learn that Northern Flickers are woodpeckers. These birds are regularly encountered on or near the ground, where they forage on ants, a favorite delicacy of flickers, and other insects. Flickers are rather omnivorous, however and are also often found foraging on berries and other fruit. They are much less likely to be found feeding in a classic “woodpecker-style” than their counterparts with “woodpecker” in their name (think Downy, Hairy, Ladder-backed, etc.) which is probably why many of us do not immediately recognize them as woodpeckers. Like all woodpeckers though, they excavate nesting cavities in trees and have long, strong tongues that they can use to extract insects from their burrows in wood or earth. They also have stiff outer tail feathers which help prop them when perched vertically.

Northern Flicker is one of the largest woodpecker species in the US and has two well-marked subspecies – Red-shafted and Yellow-shafted. In the Rocky Mountains and western states, Red-shafted is our default flicker, whereas Yellow-shafted ranges across the eastern US. New Mexico’s superb location on the eastern and southern edges of the Rocky Mountains, means that while Red-shafted is far and away the expected subspecies, we can and do find Yellow-shafted Flickers in central



Jason Kitting

New Mexico. Additionally, and more commonly, we encounter “intergrade” flickers – hybrid individuals who show characteristics of both subspecies.

So, when possible, check your flickers carefully! Look for a reduced patch of red feathers at the nape ; mixed black and red in the moustache of a male; birds with buffy brown in the face (especially the cheek); and salmon orange shaft color as indicators you may be looking at an intergrade bird.

Bear in mind that the color of the shafts alone is not necessarily reliable on its own as diet influences the amount of red in the shaft. Both Red-shafted and Yellow-shafted flickers may show orange shafts that are similar in color

to intergrade birds, but intergrade birds will never show pure red or pure yellow shafts. As always, documenting these birds on your eBird checklist along with photos and good written field notes describing the combination of criteria used to differentiate an intergrade or Yellow-shafted Flicker from our usual Red-shafted birds, are great way to help us better understand them, their occurrence, and frequency in our area.

clockwise from upper left: Yellow-shafted Flicker open wing; Male Yellow-shafted Flicker; Female Yellow-shafted Flicker; Male Red-shafted Flicker; Female Red-shafted Flicker; Red-shafted Flicker open wing.

Wing MOLT

AKA: changes in wing feathers used to age species

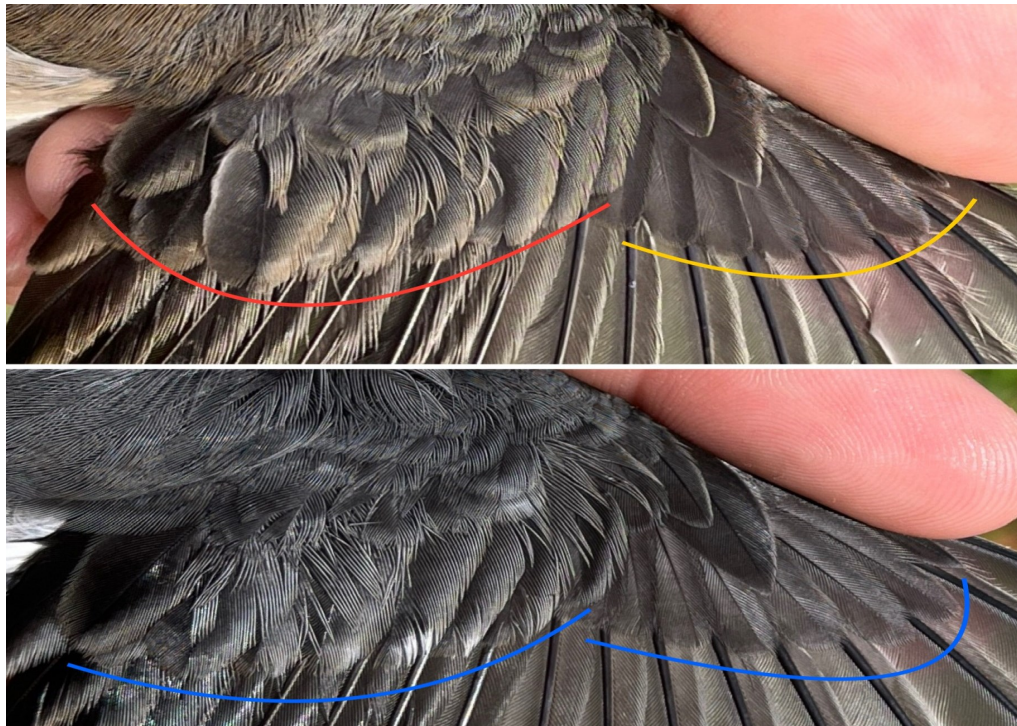
By Jason Kitting

Here's a look at aging one of North America's most familiar winter sparrows.

Dark-eyed Juncos (*Junco hyemalis*) are a relatively easy birds to age in fall. The top picture is a young Hatch Year female bird who is in her formative plumage. This bird shows two generations of feathers in her wing which is typical of young birds during their first fall. The yellow line shows the primary coverts which are juvenile feathers and were grown in while this bird was still in the nest. An important aging characteristic for the young birds are the fairly brownish primary coverts with relatively thin and rounded (or pointed) tips. The red line shows the greater coverts which are formative feathers and were grown in a couple weeks after this bird fledged from the nest. These formative feathers replaced older juvenile feathers.

The bottom picture is an adult After Hatch Year male bird who is in his basic plumage. This bird only shows one generation of feathers which is typical in adult birds in fall. This is why both the greater coverts and the primary coverts have blue lines because they are all basic feathers and were grown in at the end of summer when this bird was done breeding. Unlike the young bird above, this bird's primary coverts are a dark gray in color with very broad and almost flat tips. This color and shape are characteristic of adult birds. Amazingly it is possible to see the difference in primary covert color in the field. The easiest way to see this feature is to compare the color of the primary coverts with the greater coverts. If there is a major difference between brown and dark gray, it's a young bird. If there isn't much of a difference and both feather tracts have dark gray feathers, its an adult bird.

All banding is being conducted under a federally authorized Bird Banding Permit issued by the U.S. Geological Sur-



Jason Kitting

THURSDAY BIRDERS SCHEDULE

December 5, 2024

**Holiday Get-together and Bird walk/
Rio Grande Nature Center State Park**
8:30 am - 12:00 pm
Walk Leader: Claude Valliere

December 12, 2024

**Bosque del Apache NWR/
Festival of the Cranes**
7:50 am - 3:00 pm
Leader: Bob Wilcox

January 2, 2025

Tingley Beach Trails and Ponds
8:50 am - 11:30 am
Leader: Mary Raje

January 9, 2025

Willow Creek Bosque Open Space
8:50 am - 11:30 am
Leader: Perrienne Houghton

January 16

Sevilleta NWR
8:50 am - 2:00 pm
Leaders: Asher Corbet and Lee Hopwood

January 23

Embudito Canyon
8:50 am -Darlene Benedict and Connie Jo Baca
11:00 am
Leaders:

January 30

Petroglyphs - South Point Day Use Area Trail
8:50 am - 11:30 am
Leader: Sara Jayne Cole

THURSDAY BIRDERS HOLIDAY EVENT

December 5, 2024

**Rio Grande Nature Center
Education Building**

Please bring cookies or something to share and we will provide coffee, tea and hot chocolate. The bird walk will be meeting at the blind in the NE corner of the parking lot at 8:30 a.m. Afterward, or if you choose not to attend the bird walk, join us at the Education Building. We will be ready by 10:00 a.m.

Albuquerque Christmas (CBC) Count December 15, 2024

[NM CBC Calendar - Google Sheets.](#)

Valle de Oro Christmas Count December 14, 2024

laurel@friendsofvalledeoro.org

Check for instructions, last minute changes, and updates at:

<https://www.bacnm.org/thursday-birders/>

Birding for New Birders
Los Poblanos Open Space
Saturday, December 28, 2024 8:00 am

Address: 6018 Los Poblanos Field Trail (Montano Blvd west of 4th street-turn on Tierra Viva Pl.)

<https://tinyurl.com/hbzn88z4>

Free parking Meet in the parking lot

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 www.bacnm.org.