

Carson O Piñon!

Carson Community Association

Annual, (sometimes semi-annual), Newsletter

Editor: Elizabeth Brownrigg, PO Box 40, Carson, NM 87517

Winter 2016



-photo by Elizabeth Brownrigg

Carson's Snow Birds

- Paul Green

Many birds move long distances each year to take advantage of abundant food during the northern summer. For example, hummingbirds specialize in obtaining nectar from flowers to meet their energy needs. When the flowers disappear in the fall, so do the hummingbirds. This is true for many of our birds. We see some of them for fleeting moments in the spring and fall as they pass through our area on their way further north in search of summer food or en route to the warmer south for better winter feeding. Sandhill Cranes, Red-breasted Grosbeak, and Western Tanager come to mind.

Some birds, including the Ash-throated Flycatcher and Black-headed Grosbeak, visit Carson just for the summer breeding season and then leave us in the fall when their food supplies become scarce. Still other birds come to stay just for the winter either from up in the mountains (Townsend's Solitaire is an example) or from places further north.

Omnivorous birds that are more general in their food habits take advantage of whatever is around at any time of the year and are therefore able to stay with us year round. The Common Raven is a good example. Other year-round residents, such as American Kestrel and Red-tailed Hawk, stay alive by hunting for any available prey items, particularly birds and mammals.

Some birds, like the Spotted Towhee, switch their diet between mainly insects in the summer to mainly seeds in the winter. Seed-eaters are able to survive Carson winters because of the huge numbers of plant seeds that can be found with a little searching. Perhaps the most numerous bird in Carson in winter is the Dark-eyed Junco, a small sparrow sized seed-eater that feeds on or close to the ground and shelters in the pinons. This inconspicuous bird, recognizable from the white flash on either side of its tail as it flies away from you, has much to teach about species and evolution since these different forms may be species in the making.

If you've been watching their activity this winter you'll notice that all the juncos share a suite of features that are distinctive to the Dark-eyed Junco species: white outer-tail feathers, an unmarked gray to black head, white belly and under-tail, and a small pink bill. However, you'll also see that individual juncos can look very different from one another in their coloration. In fact, biologists recognize six distinct populations of Dark-eyed Juncos.

By today's thinking, there are six groups of Dark-eyed Juncos that spend their breeding months in more or less separate parts of North America, reproducing only with their own kind. There is much variation within each of these groups also. In winter these breeding populations move in a generally southerly direction and northern New Mexico is one of the few regions where we can see most of these populations together at our winter feeders. So it's a great exercise in how to identify a bird! And you don't need to travel the continent so see all of the different forms since they come to you.

So where do you start? First, learn the easiest one and then see how others differ from it. The most common at my feeder is the Oregon Junco that you might confuse with the Spotted Towhee. It has a 'hood' from a black head, nape, and throat, reddish sides and back, and a white belly. The female is a little less strongly marked, having a dark sooty hood and a reddish back. This form breeds in the northwest and comes here in winter.

In comparison, the Pink-sided Junco has a paler gray head, neck and breast, pinkish sides, and a black mask between its eyes and bill. This form spends its summer where Colorado, Nevada, and Utah meet.

The Pink-sided form is perhaps most easily confused with the female of the Slate-Colored form, which has a grayish hood and sides. The male Slate-colored form is uniformly dark gray on its head, neck, and back, with a white belly and under-tail. The Slate-colored form breeds across the great boreal forest of Canada and seems to be much more rare in Carson.

There are two other less common forms that you may see in Carson in winter. One is the rare White-Winged form, which is pale gray overall, with white underparts and two characteristic white wing-bars. (If you spot a bird with white wing-bars, get out your field guide and work through the identification because about one in every 200 Slate-colored also has white wing-bars). This population breeds in a very small area of western Wyoming and South Dakota.

The final kind of Junco you may see here is the Gray-Headed form, which is characterized by its well-defined rufous mantle or back, with the rest of the bird being gray above, and pale gray on the breast and flanks merging with a white belly. This form breeds from northern New Mexico and to the north and northwest of here.

One kind of Dark-eyed Junco that you probably won't see in Carson is the Red-Backed form, which is similar to the Gray-Headed form, with its rufous mantle, though paler gray and with a distinctive bicolored bill (dark above and pale below). This form breeds across the central latitudes of New Mexico and Arizona. So if you see a bird with a rufous back, always check its bill: is it one color or two?



-photo by Elizabeth Brownrigg

In addition to these many forms of Dark-eyed Junco, another species that you can see in the mountains of SW New Mexico and SE Arizona is the Yellow-eyed Junco which looks similar to the Gray-Headed but has a bright yellow eye and more extensive rufous on its back and wings.

What are the juncos doing here? It's the food of course. This time of year they depend on seeds to survive. Studies have shown that the seeds they eat are mostly

less than half a millimeter in length! If you have cleared sagebrush from around your house and you have more native grasses and herbs growing, you are more likely to have juncos feeding. As an aside, some think that the sagebrush beneath our pinons became established during overgrazing by sheep in decades past and, once established, holds its own because it secretes chemicals from its roots that are poisonous to most other plants. By judiciously removing the sagebrush and setting up erosion controls you can soon have a much more diverse vegetative population and more diverse birds and insects also.

Juncos are not the only birds at your feeders right now of course. Finches with red heads are also around. Once we get into January, Cassin's Finches have replaced our House Finches. The quick way to tell Cassin's from House Finches is by looking at their backs and sides: Cassin's Finches have stripy backs and plain sides while House Finches have plain backs and stripy sides. Purple Finches are rare here: if you see a finch that is more thoroughly red on the head and body, then it's worth taking notes.

Pine Siskins are also abundant. They are with us all year, smaller and slimmer than juncos, strongly streaked and with yellow in their wings and tails.

If you are fairly confident about your sightings, it is useful to report them to eBird.org so that we can build a record of birds seen in the Carson community. If you need a field guide to help you identify the birds you see, the Sibley Guide and the National Geographic Guide to the Birds are perhaps the best ones to get. Online, www.allaboutbirds.com is a great resource, and there are some great apps for your mobile devices that come with sounds. It's never been easier to get help with bird identification. If you have an unusual bird I'd be very interested in coming to see it. Email me at paul@sufficio.org

PS: There is a national bird count going on this weekend. It's called the Great Backyard Bird Count. Take a look at <http://gbbc.birdcount.org/> It's a good opportunity to put Carson's birds on the map. Just count the birds you see and submit your results online.

J Mehaffey



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My Love of Skiing

-Elisabeth Maier

When I was eight years old my dad taught me how to walk on skis. My two younger sisters and I grew up way out in the countryside in eastern Switzerland. The snow was often so deep that we had to walk on skis to the one-room school in the next farming village. We were able to unhook the ski bindings for walking. The teacher would allow us to ski down the hill for two hours outside the schoolhouse.

Within about forty minutes drive from our home there were ski resorts. My dad would tell the teacher that he would take us skiing in the mountains and we would miss school for a day: the teacher always approved. I still have 8 mm movies of us three girls skiing. Usually I am in the back of my sisters. Now, both of my sisters have given up the sport.

When I was fifteen and sixteen, I broke my leg both years in heavy powder. There were no safety bindings and the leg had to give in a fall. We moved to Zurich when I was about seventeen where I attended an all-girls high school. One winter the whole class was sent up to the mountains for three months to study home making. We lived in a big chalet where we attended school in the morning and skied every afternoon! In my twenties I joined a group of friends to ski every weekend. We rented a very primitive cabin in the mountains close to Davos for the whole winter. In the fall we hauled up lots of staples and wine with a jeep. Once there was snow we had to walk up to the cabin. We had so much fun!

After I settled in Los Angeles my skiing opportunities diminished. When we had a wet winter, I discovered small ski resorts within an hour's drive. I would take my son and teach him how to ski. With friends who also had families we organized yearly brief ski vacations in Mammoth. In 1994 I had a slight fall up in Mammoth and shattered my shoulder. It required surgery and took a while to mend. The spring after, I came to Carson for a few days, and I soaked my shoulder at Ojo, which was so healing. I thought I would never ski again. Within a few years my friends stopped skiing. I then joined a ski club where I met Jim. The club offered weekend trips to Mammoth all during the winter. We ventured out with a travel ski club to Italy, Switzerland, Chile, and Canada.

One of the reasons I chose to settle in Carson was the vicinity of the Taos Ski Valley. I participated in a documentary on older skiers that was being filmed in the Ski Valley. This was an opportunity to meet other skiers my age. I still ski with some of them. I worked in the kitchen at the Phoenix for 1½ seasons- it was fun and hard work. Had to get out so early and the West Rim Road was not paved. We have several skiers here in Carson: Elizabeth Brownrigg, Scott Stevens, Terry Wolff and Peter Allen, to name a few. Jim has spent the last winters here, and we have fun going up to ski together. I am 76 years old now and still love to ski, hoping I can do it for a bit more!



-photo by Elizabeth Brownrigg

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Please donate to the CCA and the CVFD.

Both organizations need your ongoing support!

We need to raise \$4600 to contend with South Carson Way, the driveway to the Carson Community Center, (Quonset).

Now is a great time to make a tax-deductible contribution:

CCA, PO Box 101, Carson, NM 87517

Do you know where your dog is right now, and is it barking?

As owners or custodians of companion animals we have responsibilities to our pets and to our neighbors. These responsibilities are highlighted in the new Taos County Animal Control Ordinance that was passed in August 2015. Apart from looking after the health of our pets, we are also responsible for preventing them trespassing onto the property of neighbors. Our dogs should be restrained on our property either by a fence or by using a leash. If your dog is potentially dangerous to others, you must also obtain a Potentially Dangerous Dog Permit according to the requirements of the New Mexico Dangerous Dog Act.

We are also responsible for not allowing our dogs to persistently or continuously bark so as to annoy our neighbors. If you fail to control or silence your dogs following requests from neighbors, they can call the Sherriff to enforce elements of the Animal Control Ordinance. If we don't want law enforcement officers mooching around our property it would be wise to know more about the Animal Control Ordinance. You can read it online at taoscounty.org. Each infringement of the ordinance carries a \$300 fine.

The intent of the Ordinance is to protect animals from neglect and abuse, protect residents from annoyance and injury, promote the health, safety and welfare of the residents and animals and assist in providing control and recovery of animals. The Ordinance covers all animals including cats and dogs that are defined as companion animals.

Among the provisions of the ordinance is that dogs and cats should be vaccinated against rabies at 3 months of age and be neutered at 6 months, and shall be permanently identified by a microchip.

If your neighbors' dogs are causing nuisance to you it is best to try first to resolve this with your neighbor. If you are unable to resolve animal problems, you can as a last resort contact the Taos County Sheriff's Department at (575) 737-6480. They are empowered to impound any animal that is in violation of the requirements of the Ordinance, or of State Law.

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THIS IS IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY, AND STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

1. _____ Name

2. _____ Phone

3. _____ Blood type

4. _____ Doctor's phone

5. _____ Medications, oxygen, etc.

6. _____ Emergency contact if you live alone

7. _____ Physical address driving directions

Tips for Preventing/Defending Against Fire

In the event of an emergency, (yours or someone else's), ALWAYS CALL 911 FIRST.

Clear trees, dead branches, weeds, tall grasses, (anything flammable) from around your buildings. The recommended clearance is a 50' minimum.

Keep all flammables, such as gasoline, paint thinners, etc., at least 50' away from buildings.

Store fireplace ashes in a tightly lidded metal container. This suffocates hot embers and keeps them from blowing out. Be sure embers are completely cool, (24 hour minimum suffocation), before dumping.

When constructing or renovating, use non-flammable materials such as metal for roofs and stucco for exterior finishes wherever possible. Avoid using flammable construction materials.

Ensure that your property is easily accessible in the event of an emergency. Keep a clear pathway for emergency vehicles. For example, if you go to help someone who is in urgent need, be sure not to block access with your own vehicle.



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(a charitable organization under the CCA)

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**IF YOU ARE NOT ON THE EMERGENCY PHONE TREE PLEASE CONTACT
ELIZABETH: 758-2758 or egb@elizabethbrownrigg.com**

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Remembering...

-Gerald Boxberger

After the recent snows, I was thinking back to the 1940s and early 1950s, when we used to get heavy snows, usually in late November or early December. We would have a foot or two of snow on the ground until the spring thaws in late February. Travel was limited but you could put chains on our 1929 Model A Ford and you could go most places. Four-wheel-drive vehicles consisted of maybe someone coming by in an old army vehicle. Back in those days the temperatures would be down to 20° or 30° below zero and sometimes -40° for days at a time.

After 1946 when my folks started hauling the mail to Taos Junction from Carson, it was really a challenge to get it delivered. Sometimes Dad would haul it on horseback and hoped that there was not too much that day.

Our fun trips were on some Sundays, when we would hook up the sleigh Dad made out of an old vehicle frame, to a horse, and we would bundle up and go visit Joe Graves and his family, three miles north. Dad would sometimes pull Mom and me on a small sled with the saddle horse. These were simple fun things we did.

When you don't know any different or better, you just go along and survive, and we were happy. We always had enough food stored up and would try to make the trip to Taos every two or three weeks. Fond memories of snow days in Carson.

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***** Please note that if you would like to email the CCA community, send the email to me: egb@elizabethbrownrigg.com. I've received a few complaints from people getting emails from folks they don't know. Thanks for your cooperation.**

From the Old One

-Jim Defibaugh

I've watched people come and go for a little over forty years. The changes are big. Once the road leading into Carson was a single two-lane path. Growth came at an alarming pace. We had a tea factory, a whole forest full of pot patches. Many visits from law enforcement and their whirly birds. Seems this was used as a training area. One positive factor is how everyone came together to help one another. We have had some thieves but I think they were from elsewhere. We have had so little trouble it isn't worth a mention.

I'll have birthday #95 on the 25th of April, and I hope I can hang on for a few more years. This has been quite a trip. I started in West Virginia. First adventure was Civilian Conservation Corps at 13 years old. A 1200-mile trip is a long one. We were in a town called Timber. Fire was our main job, but planting was part of it. After a long stay in Oregon, I transferred to Virginia and the Blue Ridge Parkway. We were still working on it when the war came. I've also had the privilege of working on the Saturn V, which was a moon rocket. I must have liked war because I went through all three of them into retirement. Hope I've not bored you all. I'm a proud man in an honest way.

SPRING BLING FLING!

will be on Saturday, May 14, 11-3, @ CVFD.

Come join the fun, bring your good quality stuff to sell, (this includes food, clothing, etc., and anything else that's legal), and spend a relaxing afternoon visiting with Carsonites. Donate 20% of sales \$ to CCA. Bring a chair and a table if you can. CCA will provide some, too.

The Creative Process

-by Issa De Nicola

There are many pathways to go about creating an artwork. Though I gain most inspiration for my art from the natural world, when working on a painting or photograph, the essence of my approach is to be open to spontaneous creative energy present in the moment. I rely on intuition more than intellect to help navigate new subjects in the working out and find that is one of the most exciting and illuminating aspects of artistry. It requires transcending doubt and breaking through to a space of trust and harmony with the creative process.

Issa De Nicola is an award-winning Taos artist who recently moved to Carson.



“Spanda”, pastel by Issa De Nicola

Dry-land Farming

-Scott Stephens

Some of the Carson people who lived here during the time it was a farming community talked about dry-land crops- crops grown with no irrigation, only rain and snow. I had also read about the Hopi and their farming in the desert. This all sounded good to me. So I planted some blue corn from the pueblo. It came up real good then slowly died. I talked to someone who had experience with these things, and they laughed. I didn't realize you needed to remove the sagebrush first! So all the water sage, grass, rabbit brush, and weeds had to go. Then I turned the soil with a shovel, and wound up with a very nice patch of corn and beans. The next year Joe Schwilling came over with his tractor. He drove the tractor and I rode the 2-row lister, determining how deep to plow by the sound of the tractor. One end of the field was sandy, one end more clay. Using a planting stick, the field got planted one seed at a time: blue corn, an assortment of beans, (but mostly Carson pintos), sunflowers, millet, potatoes, field peas, and more. Also had some wild roses, native plums, and irises all growing in the field with no irrigation other than precipitation. Did that right up until the dry years hit.



-photo by Elizabeth Brownrigg