Colorado Parks and Wildlife Priority Nongame Bird Species

[Images of various bird species, including a pelican, an eagle, and several others, with the logo of Bird Conservancy of the Rockies at the bottom left.]
Sandhill Crane

Nests in marshes, wet meadows, and other moist areas. Prefers areas with standing water for breeding.
• Breed across the western slope of Colorado
• Found in western Colorado year-round.
• Primarily occupies wetlands on private lands (i.e., Unaweep Divide, Fruitgrowers Reservoir, and near Nucla)
• They are fairly abundant along the Yampa River in Colorado.
Non-breeding habitat:

- Over one thousand Sandhill Cranes over-winter in the Delta area – mostly on private land. Fairly recent phenomenon.
- Many cranes rely on locations along the Colorado and Gunnison Rivers as stop-over sites during spring and fall migration.
Willow Flycatcher

- In Colorado, the endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher occupies the San Juan and Rio Grande drainages.
- Pikes stockade (aka McIntire Springs) along Conejos River in the San Luis Valley is occupied.
- Other subspecies are not considered a priority species
- Recent controversy about designation of subspecies and whether or not “extimus” should be listed.
Willow Flycatcher

- Found in areas with standing or running water and a dense shrub layer. Often occupy extensive willow stands near streams or rivers.
- Occupy western Colorado only during the breeding and migratory seasons (May to September).
Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo

Habitat requirements: Extensive cottonwood galleries with dense shrub layer. Diet of mostly large insects also limits breeding range. Smaller patches of riparian habitat can provide habitat during migration.

“If you are bleeding and cussing when attempting to hike along a river you are in Yellow-billed Cuckoo suitable habitat!” – John Toolen

One of the latest arriving breeding species in western Colorado. Typically arrives in late-May and departs in August.
On July 21st, 2008 a nest was located near Hotchkiss

This fledgling is only a few feet from nest.

Nests very similar to Mourning Dove nests
What have we learned from surveys in Colorado?

- Yellow-billed Cuckoos are very rare breeders in western Colorado
- Cuckoos are being found at elevations higher in Colorado than in other western states.
  - Yampa river in Moffat County (6200’)
  - Nucla in Montrose County (5800’)
  - North Fork valley in Delta County (5300’ – 5800’)
  - San Luis valley in Rio Grande County (7900’)
  - Gunnison (7700’)
- Cuckoos have been reported up to two miles from riparian corridors during the breeding season and during migration (possibly foraging?).
Colorado River Restoration Success

- Restoration on the Lower Colorado River (AZ/CA) is providing habitat.
- Over 1.8 million riparian trees and shrubs were planted over an eight year period at Palo Verde Ecological Reserve.
- Flycatchers and Cuckoos are occupying sites and using them for breeding rapidly (3-4 years for cuckoos) after trees and shrubs are planted!
- Cuckoos have been detected at Grand Junction Wildlife Area (Bureau of Reclamation) at restoration site near confluence of Colorado and Gunnison Rivers.
American Bittern

Habitat Requirements: Expansive wetlands with running water (i.e., Fruitgrowers Reservoir).

Rare in western Colorado and found during migration and summer only. Will occupy smaller wetlands with dense emergent vegetation during migration.
American White Pelican

Breeding habitat requirements:
Islands in large lakes or reservoirs. Can be found at smaller ponds during migration. Range is limited by diet (almost exclusively fish).

Closest breeding site to western Colorado is Walden Reservoir in North Park.

Found at Fruitgrowers Reservoir throughout the summer the past few years but not confirmed breeding at that location.
Bald Eagle

Typically breeds in riparian habitat in western Colorado. Western Colorado offers important habitat during spring and fall migration and winter.

Current breeding range in western Colorado is larger than historical Pre-DDT breeding range?

Western Colorado offers important habitat during spring and fall migration and winter.
Black Swift

Habitat requirements:
High-elevation riparian habitat with waterfalls or wet seeps. Will forage over rivers at low elevations during breeding season and during migration. Hundreds have been seen at Confluence Park in Delta during spring migration.

Lowest elevation breeding site is Rifle Falls State Park – 6500 Feet elevation.

Not all breeding locations have been discovered in western Colorado.
Black Tern

Requires extensive wetlands for breeding. Migrates through western Colorado. Will use large ponds for foraging during migration.

No breeding confirmations in western Colorado but has bred in San Luis Valley and North Park.
Lewis’s Woodpecker

Found in several habitat types including riparian in western Colorado. Requires mature riparian forests with abundant dead or dying trees. Will forage in young forested areas or orchards.

Abundant in the North Fork of the Gunnison River drainage.
Long-billed Curlew

Habitat requirements:
Rare breeder in drier upland habitats in western Colorado. Will utilize wetlands and shores of reservoirs during migration. Often seen in agricultural fields during migration.
Northern Harrier

Found throughout western Colorado during breeding season. Breeds primarily in wetland habitat but will also breed in drier areas with dense vegetation. Avoids forested areas.

A common migrant and over-winters in Colorado in several habitat types.
Veery

Requires areas with extensive riparian forests or wetlands with dense shrub layer.

Found in Colorado during summer and migration.
Western Snowy Plover

Does not breed in western Colorado.

Utilizes wetland habitat in western Colorado during spring and fall migration.
White-faced Ibis

Occupies extensive wetlands in western Colorado during Breeding season. Found frequently at many wetland areas during spring and fall migration.

Summer resident only.
Lazuli Bunting

Listed as a Tier 2 Priority Species in SWAP.

Occupies several habitat types but detected frequently in riparian habitat throughout western Colorado.

Found in Colorado during migration and summer.