

JUNE 2021

# NOTES OF A NATURALIST

A monthly newsletter bringing you the species, landscape, history, and happenings of the Taft-Nicholson Center

## Wildlife Sightings

June is usually a great time for wildlife viewing, and this month did not disappoint. A large herd of elk has been seen consistently in the valley between Sparrow Pond and Upper Lake. Like other ungulates of the valley, June is their calving season. They will soon begin seeking out cooler temperatures in the shade of the forests and at slightly higher elevations. Moose have also been a common sighting this month, often found browsing on willows throughout the valley. One was even spotted at the Lower Lake dam.

During the first part of June, almost every evening, a flock of Franklin's gulls congregated over Lakeview. A pair of sandhill cranes could also be seen soaring overhead around sunset several days in a row, as they took off from near the firetower. Bird songs fill the air, along with some other more surprising sounds. Low-frequency drumming, which almost resembles the sound of an engine, could be heard echoing through the forests in early June. This bizarre sound is part of a male ruffed grouse's mating display. While sitting



Ruffed Grouse drumming  
Photo Credit: Neal Herbert/NPS

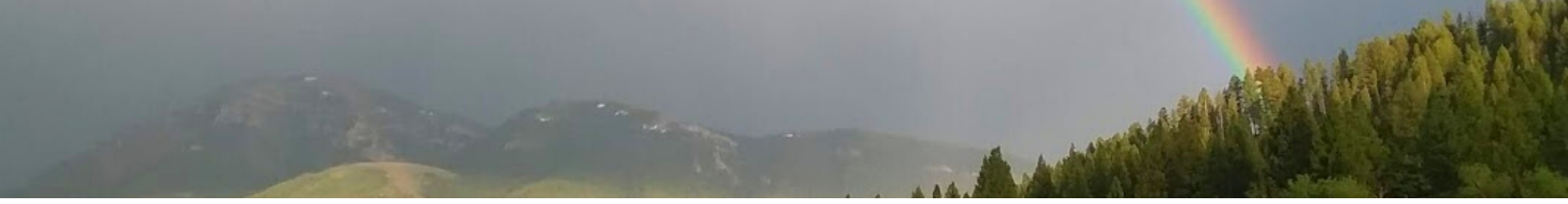
on a log or stump, the grouse rapidly beats his wings. Though this is referred to as "drumming", grouse don't actually drum against anything but the air. The rapid movement of their wings create mini air vacuums, which is what causes the deep vibrations that can be heard up to a quarter of a mile away. A male ruffed grouse, in the middle of his drumming display, was spotted just off South Valley Road near the Odell Creek trailhead early this month.

## Campus Greenhouses

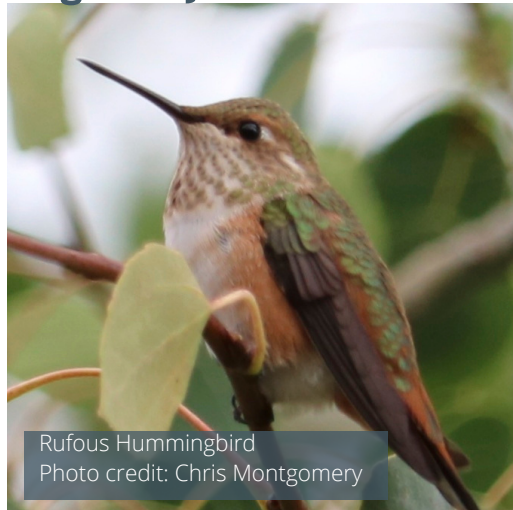
We are excited about our most recent additions to the Taft-Nicholson Center: two greenhouses! Centennial Valley's climate and short grow can make it difficult to grow produce. We usually have very few frost-free days here, making for a very short growing season. Greenhouse growing is the ideal way to have fresh vegetables. We are excited to be able to supplement our meals with fresh veggies grown right here on campus!

This summer will be our trial run to see what will grow. Our greenhouses are currently housing a variety of plants: summer squash, cucumbers, green beans, peppers, tomatoes, radishes, beets, various leafy greens, and herbs. We are looking forward to our first harvest.

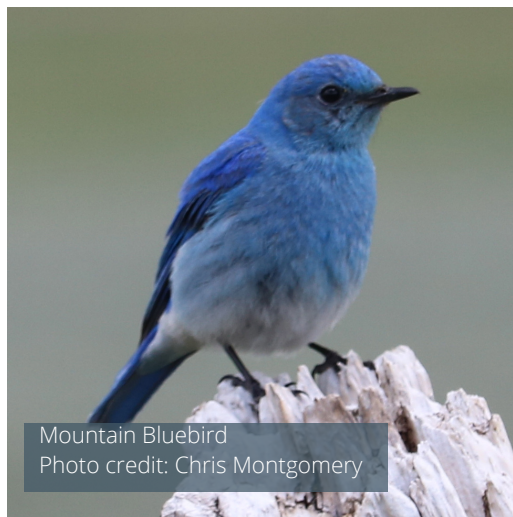




## Migratory Birds



Rufous Hummingbird  
Photo credit: Chris Montgomery



Mountain Bluebird  
Photo credit: Chris Montgomery

Spring can be a rough time for migratory birds, particularly in places like Centennial Valley, where weather can be harsh and unpredictable. A snowstorm in late May led to a noticeable decline in migratory bird activity. Many birds arrive early in the spring in order to get their pick of prime nesting locations and resources, but they then might have to endure winter weather in May or even June. It's a trade-off for migratory birds: arrive later and risk losing access to resources, or arrive early and risk getting caught in freezing weather. While such events are not necessarily new or unusual in places like Centennial Valley, migratory bird species may face even more challenges in a changing climate.

Recent studies have shown a gradual shift in spring migrations in response to warming climates. Hundreds of bird species in North America are now heading north earlier than they were a few decades ago. Unfortunately, these shifts in bird migrations won't necessarily be synchronous with shifts in plant and insect activity. For many birds, the timing of their migrations has evolved in a delicate balance with the availability of the resources they rely on. The arrival of hummingbirds at their breeding grounds, for example, is generally in sync with flowers blooming. What will happen if these flowers bloom earlier? Even slight de-synchronization between birds and their food resources could have large impacts. The trend towards warmer and drier weather will also likely impact many bird species, particularly spring heatwaves during nesting season. Weather extremes and dramatic changes in temperatures can influence whether eggs and fledglings survive.

## Wildflower Spotlight

This flower, which is a member of the buttercup family, appears in the late spring. It has several common names, including sugarbowl, leatherflower, vase flower, and lion's beard. The latter name is in reference to the feathery tufts that eventually replace these flowers. Individual seeds are attached to each "feather", which help disperse them through the wind.



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