

## **Public Lands Center, Monte Vista, Colorado**

# **Spring Bird Count in San Luis Valley finds Unusual Species**

The 18th annual San Luis Valley, Colorado spring bird count held on Saturday, May 10th, 2008 found some rare and unusual bird species. The count was done as part of the International Migratory Bird Day celebration. The count tallied a total of 151 species, which tied the second highest species number in 18 years of spring counts. Total numbers of birds counted set a new record with 18,458 individual birds counted this year. Last years count produced 9,544 birds.

A Yellow-throated Vireo was only the second occurrence for the species in the Valley and had never been recorded during 17 previous spring counts. The Chihuahuan Raven has only recently been documented in the Valley and represented a first in 18 years of spring counts. A female Summer Tanager at the Alamosa Cemetery was a count first and only the 7<sup>th</sup> record for the Valley. A Northern Parula at the cattails Golf Course was only the 7<sup>th</sup> record for the San Luis Valley. A family group of Long-eared Owls, expected in the Valley, was recorded for the first time during a spring count. Other unusual species included Sage Sparrow, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Northern Waterthrush, Osprey, Eastern Kingbird, Canyon Wren, and Clark's Grebe. Phenomenal numbers of Phalaropes (Wilson's and Red-necked) accounted for a full 30% of total individual bird numbers.

Many birds sought cover in dense and protected habitats. Count-organizer John Rawinski, Rio Grande National Forest, said "Extreme winds made for difficult birding conditions. For example, driving winds made spotting scopes impossible to use and binoculars difficult to maintain stability. Birds stayed in dense cover. It is surprising the teams did as well as we did, considering the conditions. The real show-stopping birds were the Yellow-throated Vireo and the Summer Tanager...we just don't see those birds very often." The higher bird individuals and species numbers may be the result of more teams. "We had our highest number of teams this year with 8 and were able to survey birds in places like Mesita and other parts of the southern valley, where we have never been before." said Rawinski. Seventeen persons participated in this year's count, which was slightly more than previous years.

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We have a photo that could be used in the article.

Photo caption: Summer Tanager at the Alamosa Cemetery. (Photo by John Rawinski)

