



The shelter in place time is a great opportunity to get your summer gear in shape. (Mark Rackay/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

This, too, shall pass

Lately, I have been hearing a lot of references to “cabin fever,” especially by the younger crowd. I am mildly amused by such references, as these kids have no idea what a genuine dose of cabin fever is really all about.

There was a great article in the Montrose Daily Press about activities you can do while home-bound. There were also quite a few things mentioned to keep the kids busy, like movies, television, video games, computers and social media. None of these things existed when I was a kid.

There was a series of blizzards that roared through, over a several week period in January, dumping unbelievable amounts of snow in our mountain town. The year of the winter escapes me, but it had to be in the late 1960s. I was living with my grandparents and we were snow-bound in our little house.

The only indoor activities were cards (pinnacle was their favorite), dice, and a Monopoly game. My grandmother would make some popcorn and the three of us would play games. By the fourth day of the blizzard, the Monopoly game had been burned in the fireplace, the cards were thrown in the trash, the dice were lost after my grandmother threw them at my grandfather, and the smell of popcorn brought on waves of nausea. When the storms finally let up, a month later, we were a pack of white-haired gnomes.

My wife is home for the foreseeable future but she has a schedule of meetings and reports to keep up with on her laptop. In between her “work from home” schedule, she is getting a jump on spring-cleaning chores. To be more specific, she is getting a jump on chores she thinks I should be doing. Clearly, my wife of many years does not want me sitting around the house, relaxing, eating, napping, eating, reading, and eating. So, in the interest of marital bliss, I cooperate, and hide.

Being forced to stay indoors is really tough on an outdoor person, and I am no exception. This time of year is especially difficult without the shelter in place going on, simply because of the weather. One moment it is nice and warm out, and the next, it is raining or snowing. The mountains where I love to recreate are still getting snow and way too cold for my taste. That means I



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

am exiled in the house.

Being told we should stay in our homes as much as possible, and avoid contact with crowds of people, is not something that particularly bothers me, except that now we sort of have to in the interest of a healthy community. I relate it to a fishing trip.

When you are driving along a stretch of river, nothing makes the pools of the stream look more enticing and fishable, than a few “no trespassing” signs. Being told I “can’t” go outside and play makes me feel like someone threw a maloik on me; an indoor curse. I didn’t really want to go outside, but when you tell me I can’t...

In all fairness, this shelter-in-place time could be a blessing for us outdoor folks. We should use the time to get ready for a fun-filled outdoor summer, one that is just around the corner, and I am not talking about exercising.

My preferred method of getting ready for an activity could best be described as last minute. I throw everything together, pile it in the truck, and take the road less travelled, usually forgetting only a few of the essential, and most of the optional items. This method has served me well for over half a century.

Perhaps this season could be different. For the fishing crowd, go through your vest and tackle boxes. Clean up last year’s residue and get things fresh and organized for the long summer of fishing. Throw the fishing clothes in the washer and start clean. Pitch the old, melted and half eaten candy bars in the trash.

The hole in the waders should be fixed now, rather than on the evening before you go. Usually I won’t remember the hole until the icy stream water enters the boot. It is a good time to strip off the old monofilament line, clean the reel and re-oil the drags, before spooling up with fresh line for the season.

My wife likes to ride her bike around the neighborhood for

some outside time. I got a jump on things and got the tires aired up, chain lubed, and a general cleaning, so she is set to go. Bike riding is something we can do during this time, and it is a nice way to get outside on a warm afternoon.

The Colorado spring turkey season opens April 11 and runs through May 31. Instead of waiting until the last minute, get your gear ready now. Clean up your turkey vest, sort out the calls, and get some fresh chalk on the box calls. Give your shotgun a good cleaning, and maybe wash the camouflage clothes from last season. (Note to self: empty pockets first).

How about your camping gear? Remember last season, on the final campout of the year when you broke camp in that pouring down rain? Now is the time to check over all that equipment. Air out the sleeping bags and set up the tent. Sweep out all the dead insects that accumulated over last season.

If you are one of the families that own an RV for camping, you have an endless list of chores to get the rig ready. Everything you took out for the winter needs to be put back, right after a good airing out and cleaning.

My ATV has been sitting quietly in the garage for months now, anxiously waiting for the spring melt. The tires are low, the air filter needs changed, and so does the oil. Now is a good time to get the machine ready for the trails.

We all need to do our part and avoid the spread of this horrible virus but it does not mean we have to be miserable. Looking forward to a trip is the best part for me, and getting my gear ready is not time wasted. Besides, working on my outdoor gear is much better than doing my wife’s nefarious spring-cleaning chores. I think I hear her coming, time to hide.

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What’s an old geezer to do?



Outdoors

By Bill Harris

What does an old geezer like me do to stay sane during these times of toilet paper shortages and social distancing. Go for a bike ride? Well, to be perfectly honest, I go birding. Hopping on my mountain bike is a great way to stay fit, relieve stress and get some fresh air, but going birding wins out when March weather is up to its old tricks.

By mid-March, the birding around western Colorado gets a bit more interesting. Some of the early migrants begin to show up. The ice is off the lower elevation lakes and ponds, so ducks like gadwalls, redheads, green-winged teals arrive in waves from southern climes.

On a tip that some early birds were being spotted in the high desert west of Grand Junction, Alan, Jon, and I headed out early one morning a few weeks back. We drove the dirt roads where Utah and Colorado share a common border, our quarry for the day, sagebrush sparrows and sage thrashers. Both inhabit the scrub brush and sagebrush flats that cover much of the barren deserts of the west.

The sagebrush sparrow is an average-sized sparrow with a gray head, white eye ring, an isolated dark spot on its chest and a prominent white lateral throat stripe. The sage thrasher is a larger bird with brown wings, a longish bill and obvious dark streaks on a light chest. We were successful in our search.

Two recent stops at Fruitgrowers Reservoir in Delta County produced hundreds of migrating Sandhill cranes. There’s something primitive and primordial about seeing and hearing the cranes as they head to their nesting grounds to the north. Deep in our brains the calls of the cranes take us back to the experiences of our early ancestors and a whole lot wilder than the streets of modern city life.

On one of those trips to Fruitgrowers I decided to try to acquaint myself with an

elusive friend — the Virginia rail. The Virginia rail is an inhabitant of thick, impenetrable marshlands choked with bulrushes and cattails. It’s a safe place for critters who have adapted to a muddy, wet environment. Its neighbors include soras, marsh wrens, yellow-headed blackbirds and red-winged blackbirds.

The Virginia rail is more often heard than seen. It has a distinctive “kiddick” call or “grunt” that carries a long distance. Normally, it calls from the deepest recesses of the marsh, but occasionally, especially during mating season, it will reveal itself.

On high ground adjacent to the reservoir’s extensive marshlands I quietly positioned myself, so I had a good vantage point. I then played the “kiddick” call that was in the Audubon app on my cell phone. I played it twice, then waited. Excessively playing bird calls can cause undue stress, so should be used in a limited fashion and cautiously.


After a few moments I noticed some rustling in the cattails ten feet in front of me. A beautifully colored Virginia rail ambled into the open. I froze. The rail slowly walked to within a few feet of me, looked up as if to ascertain what I was, then turned around and nonchalantly disappeared into the cattails. The whole encounter lasted 20 seconds.

I could clearly see the rail’s orange beak, gray face and red eyes, reddish chest and the vertical stripes on its flanks. Close looks at birds are rare; a fleeting glance, aided by a pair of binoculars or a scope is the norm. It is an encounter I will never forget.

The governor’s order to stay home has severely curtailed my birding travels. Backyard and neighborhood birding will have to do for now. Hopefully travel restrictions will be lifted by May when the migration gets into full swing.



Sandhills cranes at Fruitgrowers Reservoir. (Bill Harris/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)



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