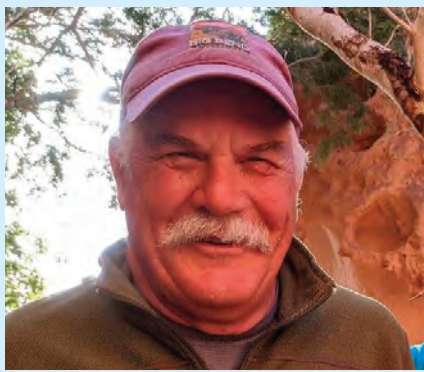


## Vacation in your backyard



### Friends of Youth and Nature

By Gary Shellhorn

Well, maybe not literally but figuratively! Have you ever driven past signs directing travelers to some potentially cool places in Colorado and say “boy, someday we should go there,” but because it is so close to home we don’t?

If you consider our “backyard” to be those places within a 100-mile circle from our doorsteps in Montrose and Delta, we are lucky to be near some interesting places in about two hours.

To fulfill the “someday we should go there” rule, last September my wife and I decided to explore some of those spots we always drove past. Just beyond the Mountain Village turnoff, several places pass my “best backyard” test.

We drove beyond Sunlight and Matterhorn Campgrounds, and headed towards the little used hiking trail to Hope Lake. Well no more, it has been discovered and feels more like the busy hike to Blue Lakes. None-the-less, the wildflowers along this trail are spectacular.

Get your young ones to create their own names for the flowers they see ... like Shrek’s Q-tips, hen and eggs, red rockets, etc. They are not the correct common names but your kids will remember the blooms they see. There are some secluded dispersed camping sites in the area with outstanding evening sunlight views of the surrounding 13’ers.

Around Trout Lake is the old Galloping Goose railroad grade, complete with a very cool “Petticoat Junction” water tower (for those old enough to remember that 60s TV sitcom) next to an impressive wooden trestle bridge over Lake Fork Creek. Both iconic relics of a bygone railroad era. Kids love trains leading to an opportunity for a teachable history moment.

We continued over to Lizard Head pass named for the singular rock spire that looks nothing like a lizard’s head. Apparently, many years ago before a large chunk of that spire fell off, it did remind some folks of a lizard’s head. Along Highway 145, there are several unofficial (or dispersed) camping spots with great mountain views and lots of space between neighbors! Kind of like we wish our backyards to be. Your kids and dogs can run free, be loud with no one to disturb!

Our journey took us on the narrow Dunton road (Forest Service Road # 535) to the West Fork of the Dolores River, Dunton and Burro Bridge. This road is like many mountain roads we have traversed time and again. It is a bumpy, narrower version of Red Mountain Pass. If you have a skittish visitor from the flatlands, this route will freak them out as it is narrow, winding, and rough, with big drop offs and no guard rails to impede your views of the canyon below.

As we headed toward Burro Creek Campground, the road crossed an open landscape of meadows with commanding views of the peaks to the north and Sheep Mountain to the east. At the west end of these meadows, you can park and hike the Kilpacker trail providing the southern access route to El Diente Peak (14,159 feet).

See **BACKYARD** page A11



Animals are not completely color blind, but there are certain colors they cannot see. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/Mark Rackay)

## Are animals color blind?

Camouflage clothing and hunting must be synonymous because I don’t think you can purchase hunting clothes that don’t have some type of pattern of concealment on them.

Some hunters are so fussy about the pattern, that only one particular pattern will suffice, and then everything in the ensemble must match, lest you look improper.

After all the costs, both time and money, to get a fully matching camouflage hunting outfit, from the boots to the backpack, we then put a blaze orange vest and hat over the top of it all, in order to comply with the law.

Bow hunters, of course, are excluded, so they can feel smug in their matching outfit. We do all of this so we can be invisible to the deer, elk, and other game species; or are we?

There are three different types of color blindness. Most common is the red-green color blindness, followed by the blue-yellow color blindness. The rarest is the complete color blindness, where the subject sees the world in black and white, much like the old television programs and movies I watched when I was a kid.

Color blindness is when the eye is unable to distinguish different wavelengths of light (colors). The eye senses light through two types of cells located in the rear of the eye in the retina.

These two cell types are called rods and cones. Rods are for low-light situations, like nighttime, and cones are for bright light situations and for distinguishing different colors.

Deer, for example, are not completely color blind. I have sat still, in a wide-open space while wearing a blaze



### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

orange vest, and had a mule deer walk right past me, within a few feet. He never noticed me, and I assumed he was either color blind or had his mind on something else, causing him to daydream. Lucky for him he was a small buck.

We as humans, have three types of cones in our eye that allows us to see red, green and blue. Deer, on the other hand only have two cones. Having one less cone, deer are unable to distinguish between green and red, but they can see blue very well. If you want to be stealthy around deer, leave the blue jeans at home.

Having only the two cones, the blaze orange vest appears as a neutral gray to the deer. If color were the only visual clue with no movement, the gray might blend in well with the natural backgrounds, which explains why the deer I encountered never saw me.

Pronghorn, deer, elk, sheep, goats and pigs all share the same deficiency in seeing colors. They are unable to see purple, red, pink, or orange. The inability to see orange and pink are why the game departments around the country adopted those colors for safety vests.

Before you start feeling sorry for those poor color blind game animals, know that their eyes, while lacking

a cone, are packed full of rod cells that allow them to see very well in low light, and even near black dark conditions. They sacrifice broad color vision, in exchange for acute sight at night, dusk and dawn.

Humans have a filter in their eye that protects the eye from ultra-violet light and helps us to see objects in fine detail. Deer, elk, and the other big game animals do not have such a filter. They do have the ability to see the wavelength blue, especially during low light conditions, and it enables them to pick out the ultra-violet emissions from a hunter’s clothing. Similarly, a reflective material, like a raincoat, is obvious to their eyes regardless of the color.

Dogs are considered to be color blind because they can’t see certain colors. Dogs can’t tell the difference between red, orange or green as they appear more yellow or blue to them. The only colors a dog can see are yellow, blue and violet. Cats can distinguish between blues and greens but can’t see anything red.

Generally, birds see colors very well. The brighter colored the bird is, the less likely it’s color blind. For example, a parrot’s eyesight is his most acute sense. He will see all the colors that humans see, but with a much greater vividness and a starker differentiation between similar colors. Parrots can see colors in the ultra-violet spectrum that humans cannot, very similar to a human using a black light in a dark room.

Nocturnal birds, such as owls, are the only type of birds that are color blind. They have a reflector in the back of the retina that reflects light. Since owls

generally sleep all day, and only become active at night, I doubt being color blind is much of a handicap.

Most fish species are not color blind, as they have vision fairly comparable to that of humans. The amount of color a fish can see depends on how much light is available. Some colors, under various light conditions, are more easily seen, which makes color a critical factor for some fish.

The rods and cones in a trout’s retina are arranged in such a way that color is perceived first and light after. During the night, the position of the rods and cones change, and light is perceived first, meaning that trout respond to light and not color, and darkness approaches.

This means that during low light conditions, dawn, dusk, and nighttime, or when the waters are muddy, black may be the best color lures to fish with.

Understanding the color perception of animals helps us hunters, fisher persons, and game watchers. It’s a good thing we don’t have to wear blaze blue safety vest when we hunt deer and elk. I have enough trouble finding them.

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