



With your back to the past, look to the future ahead. Ever fished Anthracite Creek near Paonia Reservoir? I have, often. I'll go back in 2023. Tight lines in the New Year. May you discover new places and kiss a lot of fish. (Joel Evans/Special to the MDP)

# New year, new places, new fish



## Outdoors

By Joel L. Evans

It's normal. A new year brings reflection of the year past and fresh perspective of the year ahead. Yes, every day is a new day. But it is also true that New Year's day is a significant day on the calendar. It's been asked, that January 1 is the first of 365 days, so what will you do with all of those days?

This is an outdoor column, so my past reflection and future perspective turns that direction.

Let me start with where we live. Colorado. Such a great place for the outdoor minded. Such places exist in many corners of the world. Colorado is not unique in this regard. But it is where I have chosen to reside. I emphasize chosen. I chose to live here first, then find ways to sustain it financially.

So what then does "outdoor-minded" refer to? Certainly one can live in a very large city where engaging in the outdoors is possible with some drive time — contrasted with western Colorado, where we are immersed in the outdoors in every direction.

So we have the place and the opportunity. What outdoor activity do you choose? Now to be fair to

other equally great outdoor places, Colorado doesn't offer it all. Those whose passion is beach surfing obviously choose to live elsewhere. Colorado's varied geography creates a long list of what outdoor activities Coloradans can choose from. With significant altitude variation in a relatively short distance, we have activities suited to red rock country to river valleys to high mountains. Add to that the annual weather seasonality that the varied altitude brings, and one can choose activities suited to both summer and winter and change as the annual seasons change.

Maybe one of these Colorado activities is on your list. Mountain biking, ATV's, four-wheeling, fishing, hunting, boating, road biking, motorcycles, rock climbing, canyonlands hiking, camping, water skiing, snow skiing, snowboarding, ice fishing, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, outdoor photography, kayaking, rafting. Certainly I missed a few. A long list, but that's the point.

For me? Fishing is the activity of choice. There are many variations of fishing — rivers to lakes, big boats to small boats to by foot, summer to winter, warm water species to coldwater species. I've tasted it all, but my passion is rivers and fly fishing for trout.

Reflecting on the past year, I had some great days outdoors with a fishing rod in hand. Some occurred in a big boat or small kayak on a lake, some on a raft in a river, but mostly on foot wading a river. Some large, some

small, some in the middle of a town, some in high country so remote as to question the existence of civilization.

Two memorable but contrasting examples. The Gunnison River flowing thru the Gunnison Gorge is not to be missed. Rafting in the depths of the canyon, often fishing, but sometimes just absorbing the adventure. Or the high country creek off Stoney Pass, where a tributary of the Rio Grande sports colorful cutthroats at every soft bend.

So what do I plan for 2023? Well, I've already started the year with ice fishing. There are some usual frozen lakes that I annually revisit, Blue Mesa Reservoir being a favorite. Almost always catch something there, and more than most other places there is the opportunity for big fish. But to think differently, I hope to make a day trip to some new hardware locations around the western slope. And I've already been to the river this year. It was only for a couple hours, but the Uncompahgre River in town is an easy go.

Pre-spring runoff, March and April, is such a great river fishing season. Fish are waking up, hungry, water is still low and clear but warming, and the summer tourist entourage has not yet arrived. The choices are many. The Yampa at Steamboat Springs, the Eagle at Avon and Edwards, the lower Colorado above Wolcott, the Gunnison and Taylor at Almont, the Animas at Durango, and my favorite, the Roaring Fork from Glenwood Springs to Aspen.

Summer means long days, warm days, active insect hatches, big fish looking for a big meal. Summer opens the high country and grand adventure away from roads and easy access. I think I should make a point to visit new places. I've fished western Colorado many decades and many places, enough to get to know a lot of good places very well. That brings an unconscious repetitive choice to return to familiar places known to be a high likelihood of catching fish. New water is a risk. Maybe the fish population is not so good, maybe the fish are there but that edge born of familiarity is absent, maybe I'll regret going there. Or maybe, yeah!, I'll discover a great new place.

Fall. Wow, fall in Colorado. For fishing yes, but for a lot of reasons besides fishing. Late summer and early fall are ideal weather, moderate day and night temperatures, ideal water conditions for both lake and river, fat fish, overnight stays. Always too short.

I retired last year. Lots of thoughts and activities in that regard besides fishing, but yes, yes, I plan to fish significantly more days in 2023 than years past, no longer confined to the typical weekend outing. Working or retired, casual or all out fisherman, I hope you too make the most of your 365 days. Let me know what fly is working when I meet up with you!

*Joel L. Evans is an avid fisherman, outdoor writer and photographer, who has explored Western Colorado for decades.*

# The 'most recognizable bird' in the world



## Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

My grandfather had a set way of doing everything and his breakfast preparation routine was no exception. He would first make a slice of toast and set it on a plate. Next, he would return to the stove and fry an egg, to be placed on the slice of toast.

One summer camping trip, I was sitting in a camp chair by the fire while my grandfather was going through his breakfast ritual. He laid the piece of toast on a plate and set it on the seat of the vacant camp stool next to mine. As he was frying up his egg, a Steller's jay (a member of the same family of birds as the blue jay) flew in and grabbed his piece of toast, and in a comical fashion, headed away with it.

When my grandfather returned with his egg, and noticed his toast was missing, he unleashed an oath at me, accusing the "usual suspect" of stealing his breakfast. I professed my innocence profusely, but my past reputation in such matters delivered me a swift conviction. I usually ate everything that was not locked away or nailed down. During a normal day, I consumed enough food to supply a platoon of marines for a month on a recon mission.

Blue jays, known scientifically as *Cyanocitta cristata* are a member of the Corvidae family. Jays are the loudest and flashiest member of the Corvidae family, which includes the regular Colorado birds like ravens, crows and magpies. There are 10 members living in North America. The most common jay in Colorado is the Steller's jay, native to western North America.

The Steller's jay is sometimes called the long-crested jay, mountain jay, or pine jay. Steller's jays make their home in the forested areas and is sometimes mistakenly called a "blue jay." While they make look somewhat similar, they are very

different birds. Steller's jays replace the blue jay in most areas, however, there has been some hybridization in Colorado.

Steller's Jay have been the closest thing to a blue jay in Colorado until recently. Folks from back east know that the blue jay is very popular there. In fact, the blue jay is listed as the "most recognizable bird" in the world. Over the past 10 or 15 years, the blue jay has been making his way into our fair state. This subtle entrance of the blue jay, along with the hybridization with the Steller's, is making the sightings of blue jays a more common occurrence here.

Blue jays have a rare characteristic in birds, called sexual monomorphism. This means that the males and females look the same. I guess the other jays can tell them apart, but we generally can't. Males are a slight amount larger in body size, but unless you witness their courting behavior, you may never know for sure.

During their mating time, blue jays are found in groups, typically of three to 10 birds. In these groups, a single female blue jay determines the behavior of the surrounding males. For example, when a female begins to fly, the males follow, or when the female lands, the group of males will also land. Very similar to the behavior of boys at the school bus stop. Once the female Blue jay chooses her mate from the crowd, they typically become monogamous mates for life.

A long life a blue jay can have, living around seven years in the wild. There was a blue jay studied by researchers that lived over 17 years in the wild, and one that made it past 26 years in captivity.

Scientists have long considered the Corvidae family of birds, which includes ravens, crows and blue jays, to be the amongst the smartest animals on earth. For example, jays are smart enough to understand patience. They are known to sit back and wait while humans are having a picnic, then swoop in and finish the scraps when the people are finished. Sometimes they don't wait and steal toast from the plate when you are not looking.

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# Out with the old, in with the new



## Gardening from A to Z

By Linda Corwine McIntosh

By Linda Corwine McIntosh | Gardening A to Z

I know, out with the old and in with the new has kind of become the mantra after New Year's these days. But I really hope you don't feel that way about a houseplant that may be struggling a bit. Most of the time it's just a matter of finding out what the plant is trying to tell you and doing what you can to accommodate it.

Why not start this year off with trying to learn to speak houseplant. For example, do you know your plant can actually tell you if it wants more or less light? Plants that aren't receiving enough light will have small, thin leaves and a leggy, spindly appearance. The plant may become yellow and drop the lower leaves. 'Low light syndrome' can even eventually lead to the premature death of the plant.

It's really easy to over water a plant that has low light syndrome. Plants that are growing in low light conditions will not only require less water, but will also need less fertilizer than those growing in bright conditions. The normal reaction when we see plants in this condition is to pour water and fertilizer on them to stimulate growth, but resist this temptation until you're certain this is what's needed. Root rot, fungal

problems, insects, and disease will all become more prevalent when a houseplant is overwatered.

Drain holes in the bottom of the pot will help you avoid overwatering a plant. The holes also help with air movement in the root zone. Some of the plastic pots that are available look like expensive stoneware pots and I think they're great! The problem is some of them don't have drain holes in the bottom. In that case, I get my drill and make a few small holes and put a clear plastic drip tray under it. It may not look quite as good but my plants appreciate it.

Small, watery looking blisters on the leaves, or rusty spots on the underside of the leaves, especially on plants with thick leaves, are caused by over watering and cold conditions. This situation is known as Edema (Oedema) and can easily be cured by moving the plant to a warmer location and reducing the amount of water that it receives. Another symptom of over watering is yellow foliage, wilting, and dark brown roots.

I bet you've noticed your plant needs less water in the cooler, darker days of winter than when it was vigorously growing during the bright long days of summer. When I see a plant that is wilted, my first reaction is to give it a drink, but after touching the soil, or probing down an inch or so with my finger, I often discover that the plant is too wet.

Most plants prefer the soil to become a little dry to the touch before you water again. A general rule of thumb is, most houseplants are better at handling a lack of water than an abundance of it. Water your plants thoroughly, but do not allow

them to stand in water. Your watering schedule should depend on what kind of plant you have and things like the pot and media it is in, how much sun it is getting, humidity, and temperature.

With that said, your plant may be trying to tell you it's under watered if the leaves are an off color, it's wilted and the growth is stunted. It may also exhibit yellow veins or browning around the tips and edges of the leaves.

Plants can actually experience too much light. Plants that receive too much light may wilt or have an overall yellowish appearance. In time, large brown spots known as leaf scorch or leaf burn, may even develop on the leaves.

Your plant might be trying to tell you it's outgrown its living space and needs to re-potted. If you can pick up the pot and it feels unusually light it might be time to re-pot. Carefully removing the plant from the pot and looking at the roots should be very telling. If they're noticeably compacted, it's time to re-pot. The exception is orchids. They like their roots to hang over the edge of the pot.

Your plant could be trying to tell you it's too hot or too cold. Most houseplants are from the tropics and prefer temperatures around 60 degrees at night to 75 degrees in the day. Maybe your plant just needs to be moved away from a cold window or moved to a sunnier, warmer room.

I'm sure your plant isn't happy if it's exposed to hot or cold drafts. Citrus trees for example, don't do well in drafty locations. Placing a temperature-sensitive plant near a door or vent can cause yellowing and leaf drop.



Winter can be tough on houseplants. Oftentimes they may tell you why. (Linda Corwine McIntosh/Special to the MDP)

A dusty, dirty, plant will also not be happy. Cleaning it with a damp sponge, feather duster, or a tepid shower may be just the thing your plant is screaming for. This is also a good time to check for insects and perhaps cut off a few unsightly leaves.

Remember, when you make changes to your plant, they'll be slow to react. Give them a few weeks to see how they're responding.

I know this is pretty basic but it's a good place to begin to understand what your plant may be telling you. Insects and disease

are a whole 'nother topic for discussion. Just don't be too anxious to toss that struggling plant. It may simply be trying to get your attention

Linda Corwine McIntosh is a certified pesticide applicator (Interior) advanced master gardener and ISA-certified arborist.

## BIRD

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One of the main predators of the blue jay is the red shouldered hawk, but just about all hawks and owls will attack a blue jay given the chance. Blue jays are so smart that they can imitate the sound a hawk makes once they are spotted. This act often times prevents a blue jay from becoming a blue-plate special on the lunch menu.

Because of their somewhat larger size, blue jays tend to dominate the activity around a backyard bird feeder, to the point that some folks consider them a bully. I have seen a group of jays go after a squirrel, sending him to parts unknown, when he tried to get on a bird feeder with a few jays already there.

When you see a blue jay fly, your first thought is how slow he appears, never in a hurry to get anywhere. They seem to glide effortlessly, only flapping their wings occasionally. Their normal top speed is somewhere around 25 mph, making them easy prey for a hawk or falcon, who can reach 180 mph in a dive bomb attack. This probably explains why they have a vocal hawk alarm system.

We are not really sure why the blue jay has been moving into Colorado. One theory is that they were reluctant to cross the great treeless prairies,

giving to their relatively slow flight, making them an easier target for the flying predators. As humans have expanded across the plains, planting trees everywhere, the blue jays have started making the crossing.

The blue jay is not a state bird anywhere, which seems strange to me considering their popularity back east. The cardinal on the other hand, can claim state bird status for seven states. I guess there is always the baseball team to honor them, the Toronto Blue Jays.

I am happy to see them in Colorado, even though my grandfather probably would not be. If he did not buy my story about the blue jay swiping the toast, he is never going to believe a racoon ate the rest of the chocolate chip cookies. I better come up with something else.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press, Delta County Independent, and several other newspapers, as well as a feature writer for several saltwater fishing magazines. He is an avid hunter and world class saltwater angler, who travels around the world in search of adventure and serves as a Director and Public Information Officer for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org



A Steller's jay, more commonly referred to as a blue jay. (Submitted photo)