

Migration – everybody’s on the move



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Jean Shepherd once said, “We are a nomadic people. It was Americans who created the mobile home, not Yugoslavians or Belgians, Americans. Travel to an American is what eating strudel is to a German. We are simply reaffirming our national heritage.”

I can go along with that statement. Traveling and experiencing outdoor life in other parts of the world is what I am all about. This wanderlust comes rather surprising because my grandparents who raised me, never really went anywhere. They lived in one or two houses their entire life. My grandfather said he saw enough of the world during WWII and didn’t particularly want to go back.

Since the earliest times, humanity has been on the move. Some people move in search of work or economic opportunity, to join family, or get away from cold winter weather. Other people move to escape political conflict, persecution or large-scale human rights violations.

During my time in

South Florida, I saw the annual migration of “snowbirds” travelling south to escape the cold and snow from such exotic Yankee locations as New York, Ohio, and Canada. We affectionately referred to them as the “condo commandos,” but that is a story for another column.

Animals, on the other hand, are the true champions of being on the move. We all know that birds fly south in the winter, but we take that for granted, never really giving it much thought. Geese for example, will travel 2,000 to 3,000 miles during the winter if they can’t find open water, returning to their birthplace in the spring. Canada geese can travel 1,500 miles in a day if the weather permits. Just over 1.5 million Canada geese migrate into the 10 Central Flyway states each year.

There are around 350 bird species in Colorado, and every spring, more than a hundred million birds migrate to and through the Rocky Mountains. Sandhill cranes are a classic example, as 500,000 of them converge on Nebraska’s Platte River Basin before continuing their journey. Some 20,000 stop off at Great Sand Dunes National Park each year.

The longest land migration route in the lower 48 states covers 200 miles and belongs to the pronghorn. The migration route is in western Wyoming and called the Path of the Pronghorn. This route takes the



When it comes to large scale migration, African animals are champions. This large-scale migration took place in Tanganyika. (Reginald Victor Runyoro/Wikimedia Commons)

pronghorn from their winter grounds in the Green River Basin to the summer ranges in Grand Teton National Park, the National Elk Refuge, and along the Gros Ventre River.

An archaeological site along the migration route at Trappers Point holds evidence that humans hunted pronghorn along the path as long as 6,000 years ago. Trappers Point started in 1968 as a location to overlook a newly established National Landmark, the Upper Green River Rendezvous Grounds, where 6 mountain man rendezvous were held between 1833 and 1840.

During construction, an ancient pronghorn kill site was discovered. Investigation determined that pronghorn have used the area for thousands of years and humans were hunting at the site as many a 6000 years ago. Pronghorn migrate through the Trappers Point bottleneck to this day.

Miles on the ground

are much more impressive than the miles birds put on daily when they travel, but 200 miles are amateur numbers compared to Caribou. The Arctic caribou is one of the most nomadic species, travelling about 3,000 miles a year. In North America, they travel from the coast during the summer to the interior for the winter.

If you are into bone fishing, besides the Florida Keys, Christmas Island, an Australian external territory must be on your radar. The island offers some of the best bone fishing in the world. You would probably not want to be there in November though. Beginning with the first rainfall of the wet season, Red Crabs, a species of land crab, all over the island leave their homes at the same time and migrate toward the ocean to mate and spawn. Sounds peaceful enough, except there are more than 100 million of them.

The migration distance

champions would have to belong to the whale. The humpback whales travel nearly 16,000 miles every year, as they make the trek from their polar feeding waters in the summer to tropical waters to breed and give birth during the winter.

The African continent is home to some pretty impressive migrations. The much celebrated “Great Migration” between Tanzania and Kenya, involves about two million wildebeest, zebra and gazelle. Recently, that migration has been bested, and a new record for migration of land mammals has been set.

The new champion is the migration in South Sudan, where an extensive survey has revealed an enormous migration of six million antelope, the largest land mammal migration on Earth. The animals across the region have endured despite decades of civil war and instability in South Sudan.

In 2007, a Wildlife Conservation Society survey suggested South Sudan’s migration involved about 1.3 million animals. During April and May of 2023, pilots flew over an area of over 120,000 sq km, covering the entire known range of the migration in the Boma-Badingilo Jonglei landscape.

As part of the study, 126 animals were collared to measure the distances they travelled. The number showed about 1,250 miles covered. While this migration is something many of us would like to see,

it would be best to wait until things become more stable. South Sudan isn’t considered safe for tourists at this time.

If 100 million crabs walking around does not shake you up, consider a trip to Zambia to witness the annual bat migration. Some 10 million straw-colored fruit bats fly the friendly skies from west Africa to Kasanka National Park.

My wife and I are still nomadic in our golden years, but in a more refined way. We no longer spend much time sleeping in tents, and even the mobile home days have left us. My wife says she likes something more than an air mattress between her and the ground, something like two or three floors of a luxury hotel seems just about right. I better not tell her about the accommodations on our next Africa trip. Let her be surprised.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press, Delta County Independent, and several other newspapers, as well as a feature writer for The Nautical Mile, and several other 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. Personal email is elkhunter77@icloud.com For information about the posse, call 970-765-7033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

River District celebrates 5-year milestone for Community Funding Partnership

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

The Colorado River District is celebrating the five-year milestone of its Community Funding Partnership (CFP), a voter-approved funding program created to help West Slope communities advance multi-benefit water projects and build long-term solutions in the face of hotter, drier conditions. Since launching in 2021, CFP has awarded \$32 million to 147 grants across western Colorado and leveraged \$98 million in additional outside funding.

The grants include 19 awards for projects in Montrose County, totaling \$874,025 to-date

CFP was made possible after West Slope voters overwhelmingly approved ballot question 7A in 2020, which provided dedicated funding to invest in locally driven solutions that support agriculture, infrastructure, healthy rivers, watershed health and water quality, and conservation and efficiency.

“Over the past five years, we have built a dynamic and responsive funding program that delivers for West Slope water users,” said Amy Moyer, Colorado River District Chief of Strategy. “With dedicated staff and targeted opportunities like the Accelerator Grant and financial sustainability pilot

programs, we continue to respond where the need is greatest. Looking forward, we remain committed to leaning into durable, long-term opportunities that help water users adapt to hotter and drier conditions.”

CFP provides multiple funding opportunities that meet local needs and advance priority projects. General grants provide funding for multi-benefit water projects across the West Slope, while emergency grants offer rapid assistance for urgent and unforeseen needs. The Accelerator Grant Program, launched in 2022, helps local partners compete for state and federal dollars by supporting early-stage planning, engineering, feasibility studies, and grant writing needs, and has leveraged an average of \$64 in additional outside funding for every \$1 invested.

In 2023, CFP made a legacy investment in long-term West Slope water security by committing \$20 million to the Shoshone Water Rights Preservation Project, a once-in-a-generation effort to protect essential Colorado River flows that support West Slope communities, agriculture, river health and aquatic ecosystems, water quality for drinking water supplies, and local economies. Additionally,

the program introduced the Irrigation Company Financial Stability Pilot Grant program in 2025 to help agricultural water users plan pay for long-term infrastructure needs.

“Looking back on the impact the Community Funding Partnership has made in the past five years has provided an incredible window to how we aim to deliver the program into the future,” said Melissa Wills, CFP program manager. “We will continue to remain an accessible funding source for all water users, provide flexible and adaptable grant programming, serve as a convener of stakeholders to share knowledge, and be responsive and nimble to get funds on the ground efficiently.”

The Colorado River District’s Community Funding Partnership was approved by western Colorado voters as part of ballot initiative 7A in November 2020. Launched in 2021, the program funds multi-purpose water projects on the western slope across five categories: productive agriculture, infrastructure, healthy rivers, watershed health and water quality, and conservation and efficiency. Learn more and apply for funding at coloradoriverdistrict.org/community-funding-partnership.

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