

Parent, mentor, aunt, or uncle, everyone is a teacher. This year I have had the good fortune to bird one-on-one with my 24-year old nephew, Dan, and a cowboy's five-year old son, Cole.

My nephew was born into a birder family. One of his first spoken words was "*chickerpucker*", his word for chickadee, and later "*evie-geevies*", for Evening Grosbeaks, two words I still use today. However, it didn't take long for Dan to dislike birding, and eventually most birders, people Dan thought were too-obsessed with birds. Birding seemed trivial to Dan, a waste of good sleep and playtime.

Having climbed all but a couple of Colorado's 14,000-foot peaks, Dan saw cool birds. On a couple of climbs together we saw Pine Grosbeak and as summits were neared, Brown-capped Rosy-Finch and White-tailed Ptarmigan. But the birds and their names were forgettable, and their high-elevation habitats were only important as places to put a foot, or to place a hand. Recently, Dan told me he didn't remember any of the birds we had seen, not even the ptarmigan he had found while I struggled to keep up.

Cole's daddy is a cowboy who helps heifers deliver their calves when needed. He brands, castrates, and dehornes young cows, and rides the range every day, except Sundays. This week I asked Cole's dad if he had seen any Mountain Plovers on the cattle ranch where I bird. Cole, who was helping his dad with the round-up, while riding his horse, Diamond, pointed towards a

pond, saying "there are lots of shorebirds there." I went to look. I was watching a group of spinning phalaropes, vortexing arthropods into a swirling water column, when the small boy with the large cowboy hat walked over. I showed Cole shorebirds and ducks in my spotting scope and told him the name of each one.

This year Dan shocked me when he asked me if I would take him birding. He asked "Why do people enjoy looking at gulls?"

but also—"How do you guys I.D. harriers without using binoculars?" This year, Dan's goal is to see 300 Colorado species, not to conquer the last summits. Yesterday, Dan and I found his lifer Scissor-tailed Flycatcher and he replied "Now THAT's a sexy bird!"

After viewing Marbled Godwits, but unable to pronounce their name, Cole walked quickly towards his house while I moved to the next lake. Dowitchers and Willets were everywhere. Behind me, carrying a fanny pack, two bird books, and binoculars came Cole, mostly hidden underneath his big hat. Birds, normally unapproachable, were magically tame when this boy stood by my side. I found an ABA Checklist in my car and put an "X" next

to all of the birds he had seen, and I wrote "Cole's Checklist" on the top. We walked half-way to his house, stopping beneath the big cottonwood. With my scope aimed at a large cavity partially filled with two fluffy Great Horned Owl nestlings, I asked Cole "Do you want to see two baby owls?" He looked at the birds, and then at me, and said "I think there are three." And there were. Later, when I drove back by the lake, Cole was showing his mom, his brothers, and sister the baby owls.



Young Cole Moon studies baby Great Horned Owls © Bill Maynard

Editor:

Bill Maynard

Design/Production:

Ed Rother

Publications Director:

Bryan Patrick

Address editorial correspondence to:

Winging It
4945 N. 30th Street, Ste. 200
Colorado Springs, 80919

Freight address:

4945 N. 30th Street, Ste. 200
Colorado Springs, 80919
winging@aba.org
(719) 578-9703

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Winging It (ISSN #1042-511X) (USPS 003-289) is published bimonthly by the American Birding Association, Inc., 4945 N. 30th Street, Ste. 200, Colorado Springs, CO 80919. Periodicals postage paid at Lebanon Junction, KY, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Winging It, 4945 N. 30th Street, Ste. 200, Colorado Springs, CO 80919. (Individual membership: \$45 per year; includes \$12 for Winging It and \$33 for Birding magazine.) Return postage guaranteed: Send undeliverable copies and POD Forms 3579 to 4945 N. 30th Street, Suite 200, Colorado Springs, CO 80919-3151. For Canadian returns mail to WDS, Station A, P. O. Box 54, Windsor ON N9A 6J5. GST Registration No. R135943454. Canadian Publications Agreement No. 40033104.

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