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YOU'RE WATCHING DURANGO TV NEWS. I'M WENDY GRAHAM SETTLE.

THE FIRST TIME YOU SEE A WESTERN Tanager WITH ITS FLASH OF ORANGE AND YELLOW FEATHERS, YOU KNOW YOU'VE SEEN SOMETHING SPECIAL.

THAT'S THE THRILL THAT DRIVES MANY PEOPLE TO GO BIRDING AND IT'S WHY SEVERAL HUNDRED BIRDING FANS WILL GATHER IN CORTEZ NEXT MONTH FOR THE 15TH ANNUAL UTE MOUNTAIN MESA VERDE BIRDING FESTIVAL SCHEDULED FOR MAY 8 THROUGH THE 12TH.

THE FESTIVAL INCLUDES TOURS THROUGHOUT MONTEZUMA COUNTY TO LOOK FOR BOTH COMMON AND ELUSIVE SPECIES OF BIRDS, FROM WATER AND SHORE BIRDS TO COLORFUL SONGBIRDS AND RAPTORS.

“THE UNIQUE THING HERE IS THAT WE HAVE SO MANY DIFFERENT HABITATS, YOU KNOW, BECAUSE YOU INCREASE AN ELEVATION. SO YOU START OUT WITH THE LOW SAGE SCRUB LAND, AND THEN YOU GO UP HIGHER TO THE PINYON-JUNIPER, AND THE OAK AND PONDEROSA PINE, AND THEN THE SPRUCE AND TUNDRA. SO JUST THERE'S A LOT OF DIFFERENT HABITATS VERY CLOSE BY.” – Diane Cherbak, Birding Festival Coordinator.

BIRDERS HAVE CATALOGUED UP TO A HUNDRED AND SEVENTY SPECIES DURING THE FESTIVAL.

IN 2016, BIRDERS CAUGHT A GLIMPSE OF A RARE CALIFORNIA CONDOR, THE LARGEST WILD BIRD IN NORTH AMERICA. THE SPECIES WAS ALL BUT EXTINCT IN THE WILD BY 1987 DUE TO HABITAT DESTRUCTION, LEAD POISONING AND POACHING. BUT IT HAS SINCE BEEN REINTRODUCED IN CALIFORNIA AND ARIZONA, AND NOW, ABOUT 500 BIRDS EXIST BOTH IN CAPTIVITY AND IN THE WILD.

TOUR GUIDES ARE LOCAL VOLUNTEERS WHO ENSURE THAT EVERYONE IN EACH GROUP HAS AN OPPORTUNITY TO SEE THE BIRDS THEY'RE SIGHTING.

“YOU DON'T NEED TO BE AN EXPERT. THE THIS IS NOT WHAT I WOULD CONSIDER A HIGH-POWERED, YOU KNOW THERE'S SOME FESTIVALS THAT YOU GO TO THAT IT'S ALL ABOUT SEEING THE MAXIMUM NUMBER OF BIRDS AND YOU GO GO GO AND OURS IS MUCH MORE RELAXED. WE ALL WANT TO SEE THE MAXIMUM NUMBER OF SPECIES BUT IT'S NOT QUITE AS DRIVEN.” – Diane Cherbak, Birding Festival Coordinator.

IN ADDITION TO THE TOURS, THE FESTIVAL OFFERS PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOPS AND SPECIALTY LECTURES. KEYNOTE SPEAKER THIS YEAR IS NOAH STRYKER, AUTHOR OF BIRDING WITHOUT BORDERS: AN EPIC WORLD BIG YEAR.

IN 2015, STRYKER BECAME THE FIRST HUMAN TO SEE MORE THAN HALF THE PLANET'S POPULATION OF BIRD SPECIES IN A SINGLE, YEAR-LONG, AROUND-THE-WORLD BIRDING TRIP.

THE LECTURE AND CONFERENCE DINNER WILL BE ON SATURDAY NIGHT AND IT'S OPEN TO THE PUBLIC. RESERVATIONS ARE REQUIRED.

ALL PROCEEDS FROM THE BIRDING FESTIVAL BENEFIT THE CORTEZ CULTURAL CENTER. TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE BIRDING FESTIVAL, VISIT CORTEZCULTURALCENTER.ORG.

THANKS FOR WATCHING THIS EDITION OF DURANGO TV NEWS. IF YOU LIKED THIS STORY OR WOULD LIKE TO WATCH MORE DURANGO TV NEWS, VISIT US ON OUR WEB SITE AT DURANGOTV.COM OR VISIT OUR FACEBOOK PAGE AT DURANGO TV.

I'M WENDY GRAHAM SETTLE FOR DURANGO TV NEWS.