



Monte Vista’s 41st Sandhill Crane Festival



Paloma Zahringer
—Staff Writer—

Sandhill cranes and other migratory birds follow a specific annual route. They typically breed in the northern parts of North America, such as Alaska and Canada, then migrate south for the winter. Along this path they make stops to rest and rehabilitate at various wetlands, grasslands, and agricultural fields. One of these very popular stopping points is here in the San Luis Valley. These areas provide the cranes with the necessary resources to fuel their long journey. In Monte Vista, locals and tourists celebrate this with the Crane festival for the 41st year in a row. This festival is a combination of unmatched up close experiences of wildlife viewing, local shops, and the friendly, welcoming atmosphere of the San Luis Valley. A visit to the Crane festival is an amazing natural spectacle and consists of viewing tours either on your own or led by Erv Nichols and San-

dra Noll. This well traveled duo shares their skills with photography, wildlife interpretation, and provides easily understood lectures on landscape and wildlife. This year, the festival offered guided tours in Spanish ensuring accommodation to a broader audience. During this time the Monte Vista chamber of commerce hosts a Craft and Nature Fair. Hannah Casias states that this fair was packed with artists and community members enjoying the scenic beauty of the crane festival. The Crane Festival is a major contributor to the San Luis Valley’s economy bringing in an estimated 3.5 million dollars. The Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory values conserving the bird’s natural environment and habitat. Their goal is to use this festival to bring awareness to improving native bird populations, especially seeing as the Sandhill Crane has been around for approximately 2 million years. Evelyn Vigil shares a story of her experience at the festival nearly 12 years ago. It was a beau-

tiful phenomenon, hundreds and hundreds of cranes flew overhead. Before they could even be seen the people could hear their loud rattling calls. Evelyn says this experience should be a must especially for those of us who live right here in the San Luis Valley. By understanding and respecting migratory birds, we can help ensure

that they have safe habitats and resting areas along their migratory routes.

It is important to protect these areas such as the Monte Vista Refuge or the Blanca Wetlands so that these beautiful birds can continue their migratory journey year after year. The Monte Vista Crane Festival is a great example of cele-

brating and respecting migratory birds. The festival raises awareness about the importance of conservation and provides a chance for people to learn about local wildlife. People get the opportunity to connect with nature and understand the significance of protecting migratory pathways for the survival of these species.



Photo by: Kacey Hills

ANNUAL MIGRATION- The Sand Hill Cranes make their annual migration and travel through Alamosa and take a break in Monte Vista. People come from all around to see these amazing birds.

The Continuation of The Israel-Hamas Conflict



Sienna Gallegos
—Section Editor—

The day October 7th, 2023 marks the start of the Hamas-Israel Conflict. Over the past six months, war, death, and a hostile environment have plagued the Gaza Strip.

Palestinians living in Gaza have migrated south into the city of Rafah. Before October, Gaza contained around two million people.

Since then, the entire population has been displaced, killed, or are fighting for their lives.

Since the beginning of the war, there has been question on Israel’s behavior as it has started to cross the international boundary in terms of what can be considered a war crime.

Food, medicine, and water are necessities that are quickly diminishing within Gaza and aid is not coming in quick enough.

The humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip is severe, with nearly the entire population of two million people displaced. Necessities such as food, shelter, water, and

medicine are scarce, leading to widespread food insecurity and warnings of famine from the United Nations and NGOs. Aid delivery through Egypt and Israeli security checks has been slow and uncertain.

To address the situation, the U.S. Central Command is considering air drops, though the Biden administration is proposing to build a pier off Gaza’s coast to facilitate more efficient aid shipments.

As electricity has been mostly cut off, the inner workings of Gaza are not clearly shown nor broadcast however, as a result of social media, citizens can see Gaza life through creators such as Bisan Owda and Motaz Azaiza.

Azaiza, a Gaza native, initially focused on documenting daily life in Gaza through photography, aspiring to be known for his art rather than as a war journalist.

However, during the 2023 Israel-Hamas war, his profile skyrocketed. His Instagram following He gained recognition, being named GO Middle East’s Man of the Year and having his work featured in Time’s top 10 photos of 2023. Azaiza appeared on media platforms to discuss the dangers of reporting from

Gaza and eventually evacuated to Qatar after 108 days of intense reporting. Despite his efforts to raise awareness, he felt frustrated by the lack of tangible change. Azaiza embarked on a journey to continue sharing his experiences globally, receiving awards and participating in events to shed light on the situation in Gaza.

The war has been a deadly one. Since October, to March 5th 2024, over 31,000 people (30,228 Palestinian and 1,410 Israeli) have been reported as killed in the Israel-Hamas war, including 94 journalists (89 Palestinian, 2 Israeli and 3 Lebanese) and over 136 UNRWA aid workers, according to Al Jazeera.

In terms of Hostages, since October 7th many have suffered by being taken hostage on both sides of the war.

It is determined that Gaza contains around 100 hostages held by Hamas. At this point, a deal between Hamas and Israel is dire for both Gazan citizens and Israeli hostages.

As March begins, Ramadan, the Muslim holy month begins however, for Palestinians this is not a happy time to celebrate. Instead of feasting after their fast, they are met

with canned or dried foods, and fresh foods are much too expensive to eat.

Talks of a cease-fire have stopped as “Hamas is demanding guarantees that any such agreement will lead to an end to the war.”

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has rejected that demand, vowing to continue the offensive until “total victory” against the militant group and the release of all the remaining hostages held in Gaza.

Netanyahu said Monday that Israel had killed “Hamas’ number four” leader and added that more targeted killings were to come.” According to AP News.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged Israel and Hamas to honor the spirit of Ramadan by “silencing the guns” and releasing all the hostages.

“The eyes of the world are watching. The eyes of history are watching. We cannot look away,” he said.

“We must act to avoid more preventable deaths. ... Desperate civilians need action – immediate action.”

Many students at Alamosa High School are involved with the current news and

have formulated their own opinions.

A very passionate student, Eva Lopez a Senior at Alamosa High School states, “I think there needs to be a ceasefire because this has turned into a genocide and too many people are suffering. It seems so awful.”

The Palestinians are being tricked by moving and being told they will be safe and still continuing to be bombed.”

While this is her own personal opinion it shows that students are paying attention to current events and the world around them.

In better news, aid efforts to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Gaza are underway, with a ship carrying 200 tons of food departing from Cyprus to Gaza.

The initiative, led by World Central Kitchen and facilitated by the Spanish aid group Open Arms, aims to address the dire situation exacerbated by the Israel-Hamas war.

All in all, it is important that students and citizens alike stay up to date with current events. This event is one that has sprawled over 5 months with no end in sight.