Gilpin County News.com No. 2, 26 BLACK HAWK, CO WWW.GilpinCountyNews.com Www.GilpinCountyNews.com THURSDAY, JANUARY 26, 2006



Sandhill cranes returning to roost in San Luis Valley at sunset is unforgetable. p16

EDUCATION

Gilpin Board of Education plans. p2

SPORTS

Hockey action, p3
Nederland and Gilpin
basketball action, p8-9
Wrestling action, p15

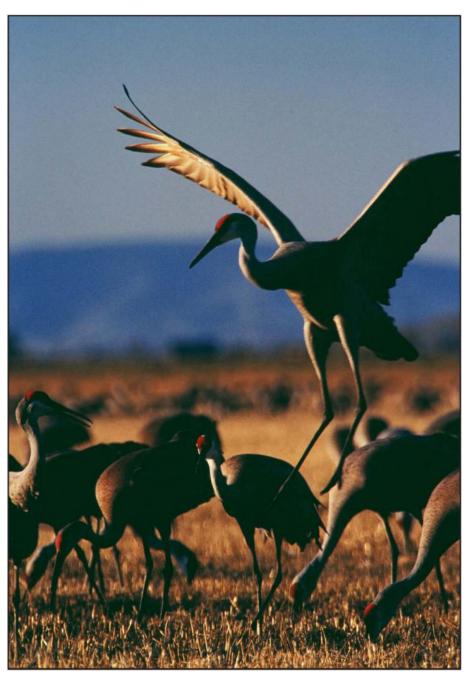
ENTERTAINMENT

Night at the Movies with Mr. & Mrs. Smith and King Kong. p11

THURSDAY, JANUARY 26, 2006 **16** Gilpin County News

San Luis Valley Sandhill Cranes





Monte Vista, CO

by Dave Gibson

For some, the first robin or the emergence of a pasque flower might be looked upon as a harbinger of a new beginning. I usuthe initial broad-tailed hummingbird on May 1st the start of a very short spring, quickly followed by summer . But in the San Luis Valley of southern Colorado, the sea-

at this time of year to provide forage for the migrating greater, lesser, and Canadian sandhill cranes. The greater cranes are larger and stone area and winter in the Rio Sunrise, sunset and raptor tours,

Apache National Wildlife Refuge, New Mexico, the lesser cranes summer in the Arctic, and the Canadian cranes in Canada. Cranes live to be twenty to thirty years old and mate for life. Both sexes tend to the two eggs, of which only ally consider the appearance of migration, with a sense of urgency about them, pair bonds are established. Courtship dances ensue, motion and flapping of wings.

From sunrise until mid-mornson more closely coincides with ing, and again from mid-afternoon the calendar as up to thirty thou- until sunset, the skies are filled sand sandhill cranes converge with cacophonous flocks of sandfrom mid-February through mid- hills commuting to and from the night heron, cinnamon teal, northsurrounding agricultural feeding ern shoveler, ring-necked pheas-Monte Vista National Wildlife grounds. In between, they may ant, and if you are extremely for-Refuge, south of Monte Vista on frequent wetlands to supplement Highway 15, harvests grain fields their diet with roots, tubers, or invertebrates. They sometimes go nowhere at all, preferring the sanctity and plenty the fields supply.

Monte Vista hosts the twenlighter in color than the others ty-third annual Monte Vista Crane linquish its icy grip just yet, it is and constitute eighty percent of Festival from March 10th through the cranes you will see. Most of March 12th and offers a variety of these breed in the greater Yellow- programs throughout those days.

Amazing sights near Grande Valley, namely Bosque del along with a Birder's Breakfast and a showing of the movie "March of the Penguins" are among the offerings. For information and reservations call (719) 852-2731 or the Chamber of Commerce at (719) 852-2731.

> If you have time during the week, one usually fledges. During spring you might want to plan your visit before or after the festival for a more intimate wildlife experience. Other bird species occurring at the characterized by a wild hopping refuge include: great horned owl, northern harrier, pie-billed grebe, common snipe, American coot, horned lark, snowy egret, common merganser, red-tailed hawk, redwinged blackbird, black-crowned tunate, whooping crane.

The sight and sounds of vast, never-ending waves of presaging sandhill cranes returning to roost at sunset is unforgettable. While winter may not be prepared to realmost spring at a place near here.

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