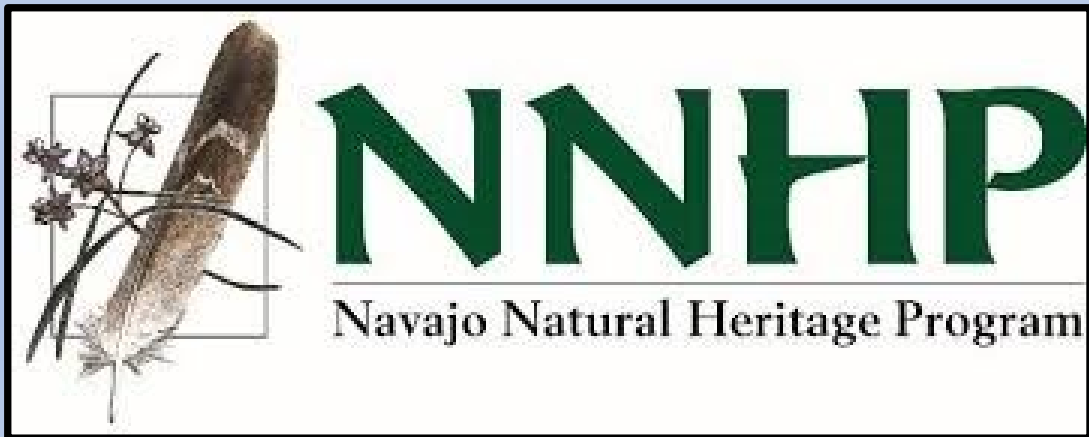


Importance of Birds: A Navajo connection to place

Brent I. Powers

Zoologist, Navajo Natural Heritage Program

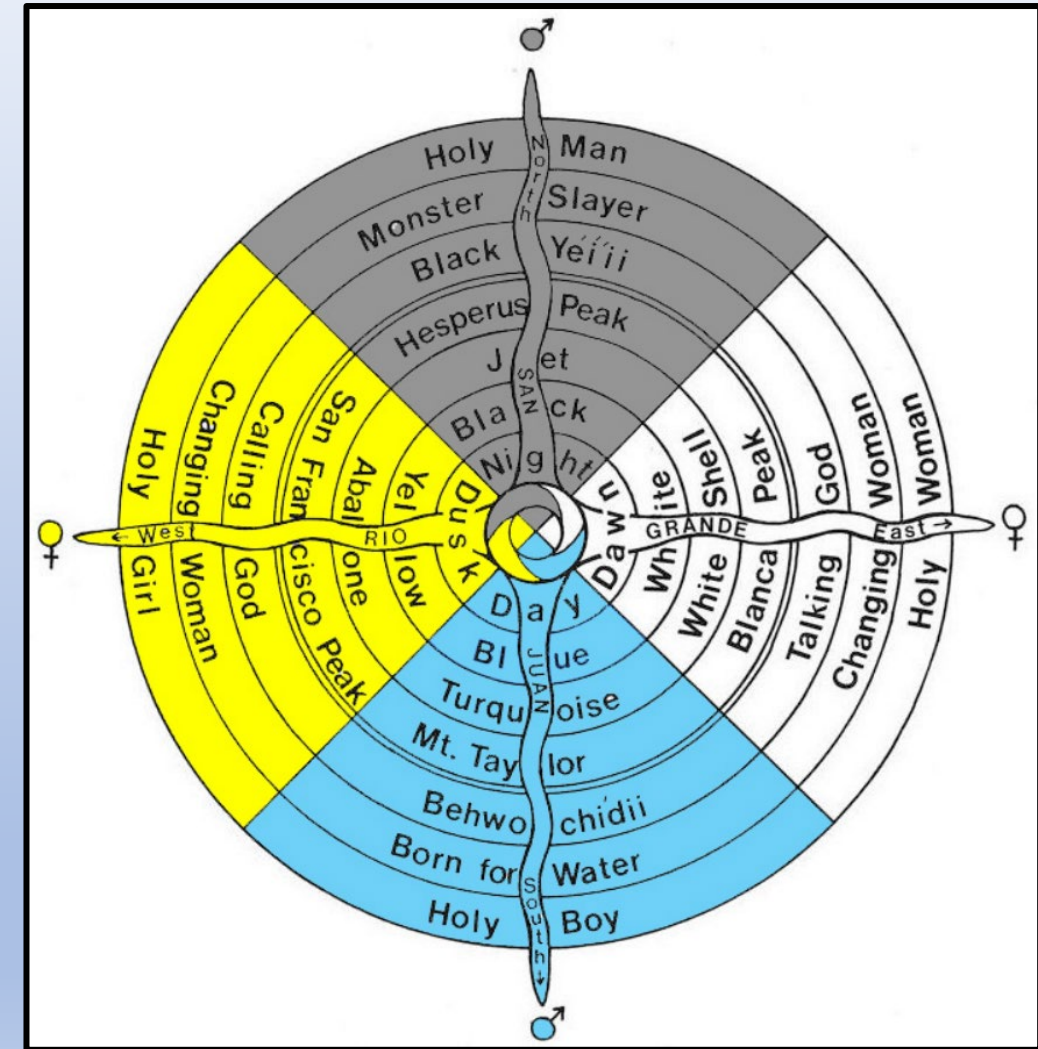
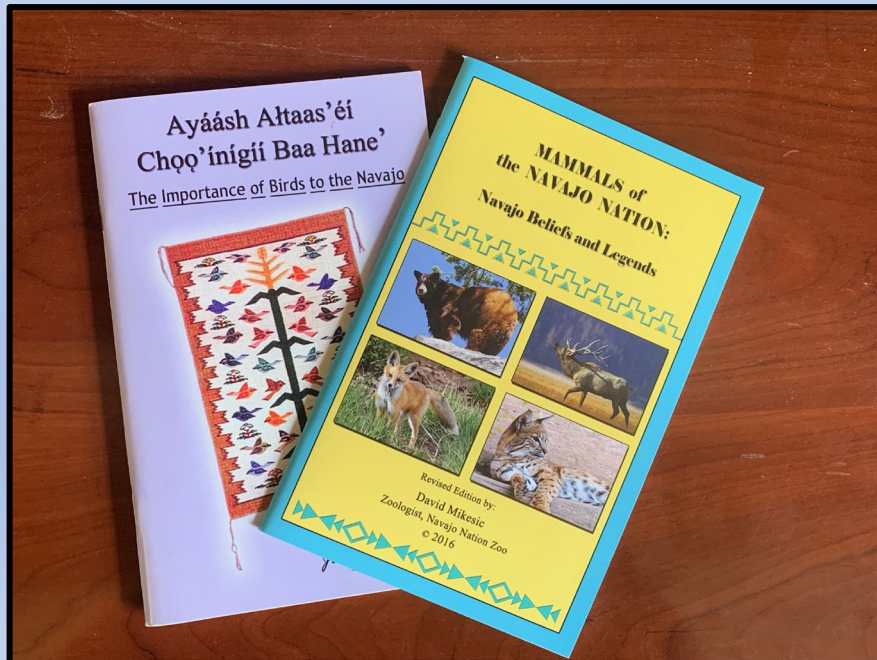
bpowers@nndfw.org



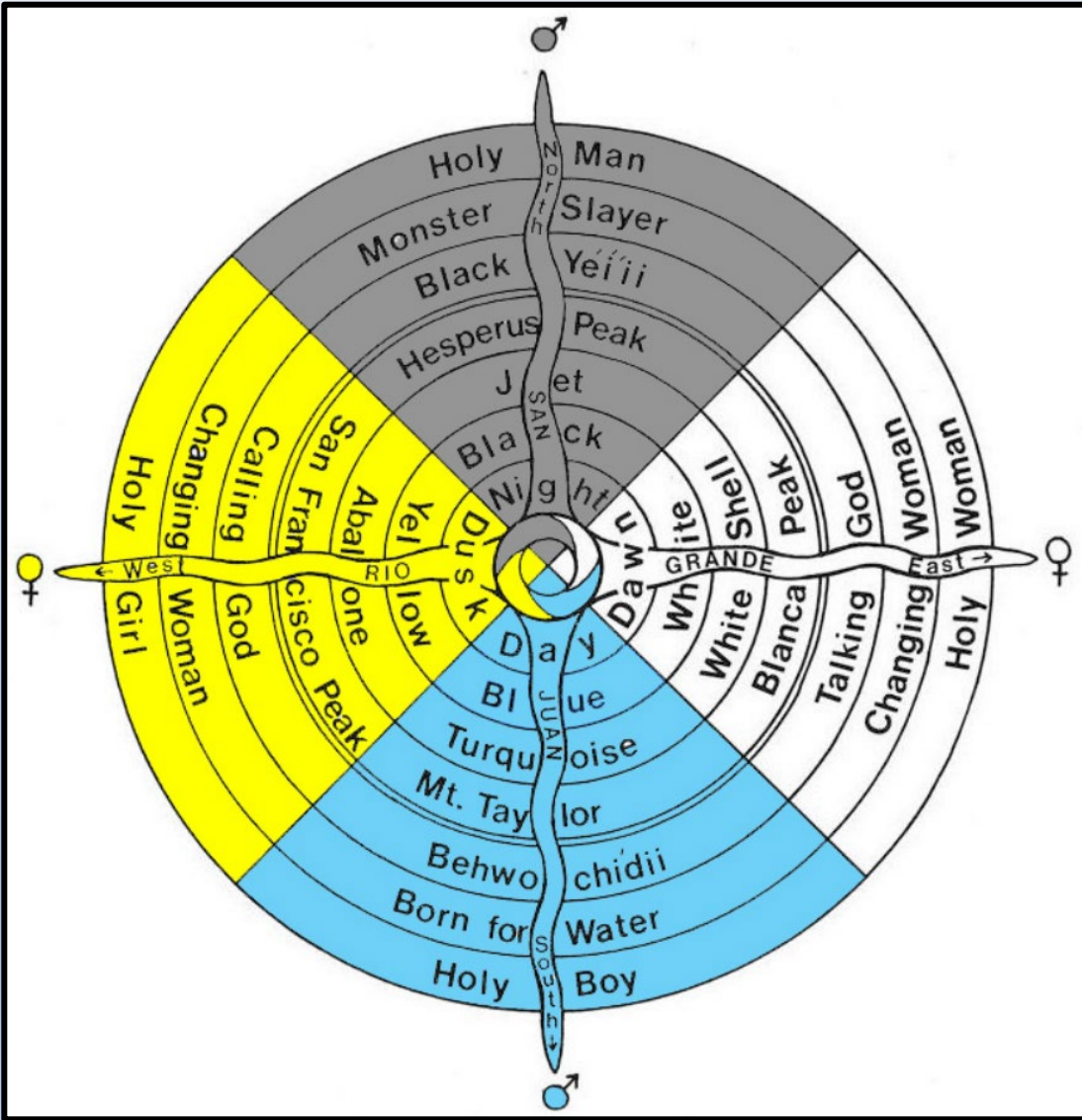
TEK in Scientific Study of CO River Corridor

TEK has historically not been included in research proposals designed to inform management decisions

- Excludes tribal values and interests
- Loss of connection to this place



Navajo Worlds



- 1st Black = 1st man and 1st women, black ants, bees and wasps live here. Fighting among these beings led to everyone leaving through a hole to the east
- 2nd Blue = **Blue birds** and big insects. Destroyed by the gods using wind, **escaped through a reed that grew to the south**
- 3rd Yellow = **Turkey**, deer, spiders and water monster live here. **two rivers = Male N/S and Female E/W**, Coyote stole Water monster's babies which started a heavy rainfall and flood, the beings in this world **escaped by a reed that grew into the sky**.
- 4th White = Changing women and Holy people created Water monster's baby returned and floods receded. Placement of 4 scared mtns, stars, sun and moon. **War with monsters took place making the land safe for people**

Cultural Resources Includes Wildlife



Use of Birds and Bird Parts

Remedies for illness
Offerings



Ceremonial paraphernalia,
Oral stories and songs.
Bird specific songs in Navajo Shoe
Game



Limitations of Current Research Along CO River

Significance of wildlife as a cultural resource and it exists above the high-water zone (old or new) along the river



Tsénoolch'óshii - (Canyon Wren)

Story – Long ago, different birds were trying out what kinds of skills they had. So they decided to have a contest for shooting arrows.

Canyon wren was their target. Canyon wren could not be shot because it has special darting and dodging skills.

Unique song in the Navajo Shoe Game



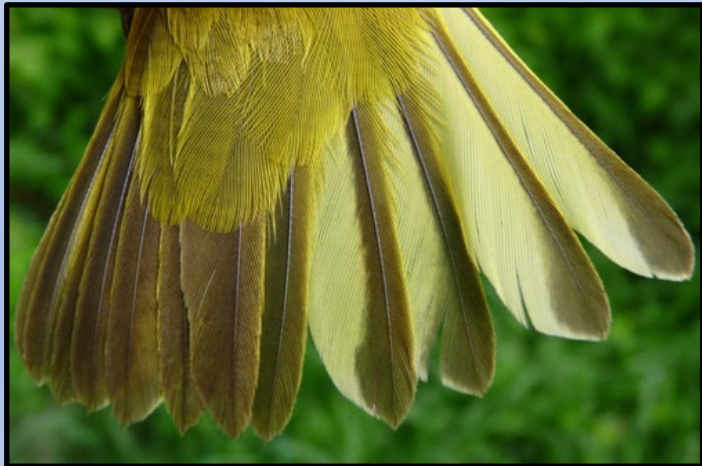
Bryan Calk
Macaulay Library

Dahtoo' yinooghaṭi – (Yellow Warbler)



Warblers splash dew drops from plants after it rains by wetting their wings and shaking them off. That's how they got their Navajo name.

These birds come from the blue world. They have songs and prayers in Navajo ceremonies. They are leaders of the bird kingdom. Their name is used ceremonially as spiritual beings.



Wings and feathers are used in times of drought by sprinkling water on a patient or on the ground to bring rain. Corn pollen dust from these birds is used in offerings.

Gáagii Ałchiní - (Raven)



Heads are used in the Enemy way ceremony

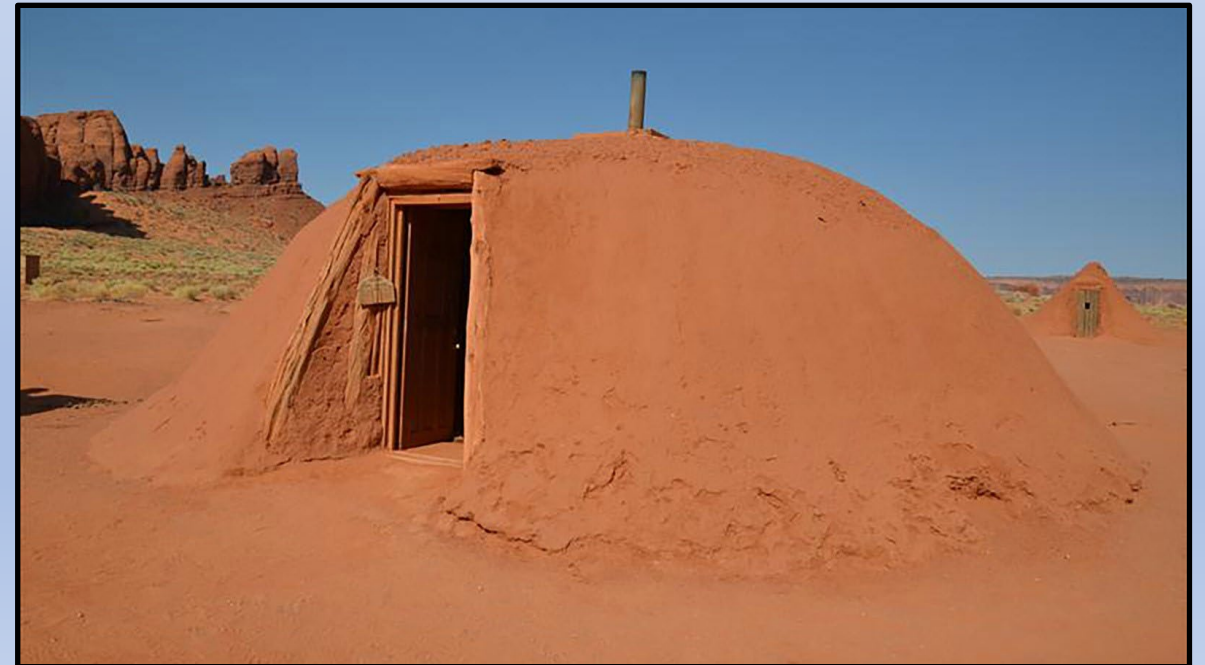
Claws are used as scratchers for patients

But bothering nest, eggs or dropping has negative effects on people with ceremonial consequences. Some of the ceremonies used to cure these problems are extinct, such as the Bead Way.

When the First people were at war with the monsters, this bird was out there taking the eyes of the dead monsters. Today they still do that.

Táshchozhii - (Cliff Swallow)

When First People were planning how to design the first hogan, they went to the home of Cliff Swallow. His house was located in a curved place in an overhanging cliff. It was made of adobe mixed with grass, with the doorway located on the side. The people learned to mix adobe with grass and water to make their homes warm and protected. They gave Swallow some jet beads to thank him.



Yááh azhjool or Dééłdáá' - (Great Blue Heron)



Claws and beak are used in the Life Way and Water Way ceremonies

When First People were moving through the different levels of emergence, the bigger birds were significant in leading the people into the Blue World. When insects invaded the Blue World, Heron is said to have asked the insects to move on because they were eating their food.



Tazhii (Turkey)

Coyote stole water monster's babies

Turkey was the last to escape the flood nearly getting swept away in the fast rising water that was covered in white foam. Which is now the turkey got his white tipped feathers.

Feathers are used in Night Way Chant and in Ye'ii bicheii

Beard and internal organs are used to make a bitter medicine to revive someone who has fainted.



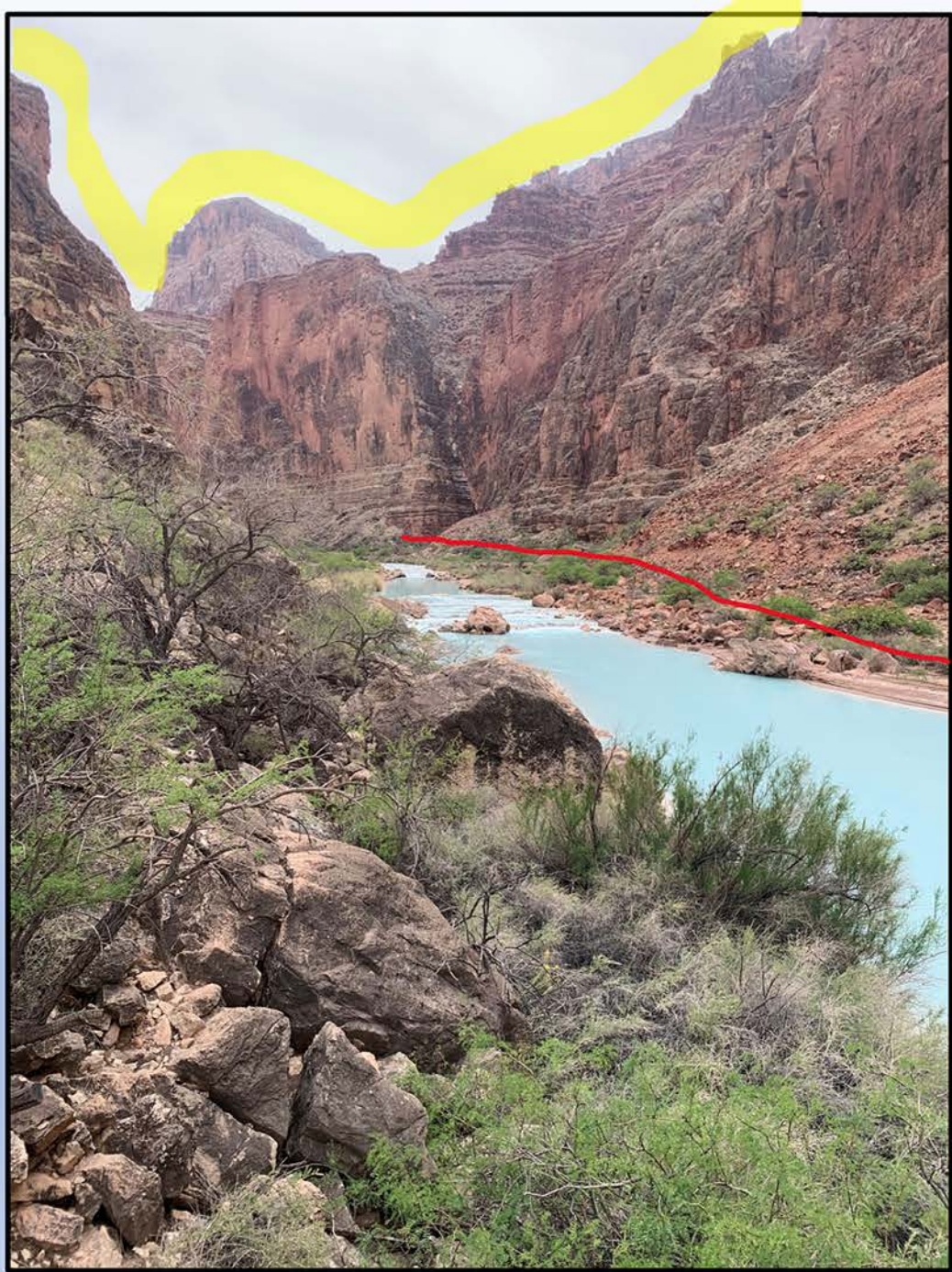
Ch'agiiłbáhí or Ch'agii (Cowbird)

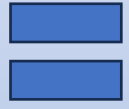
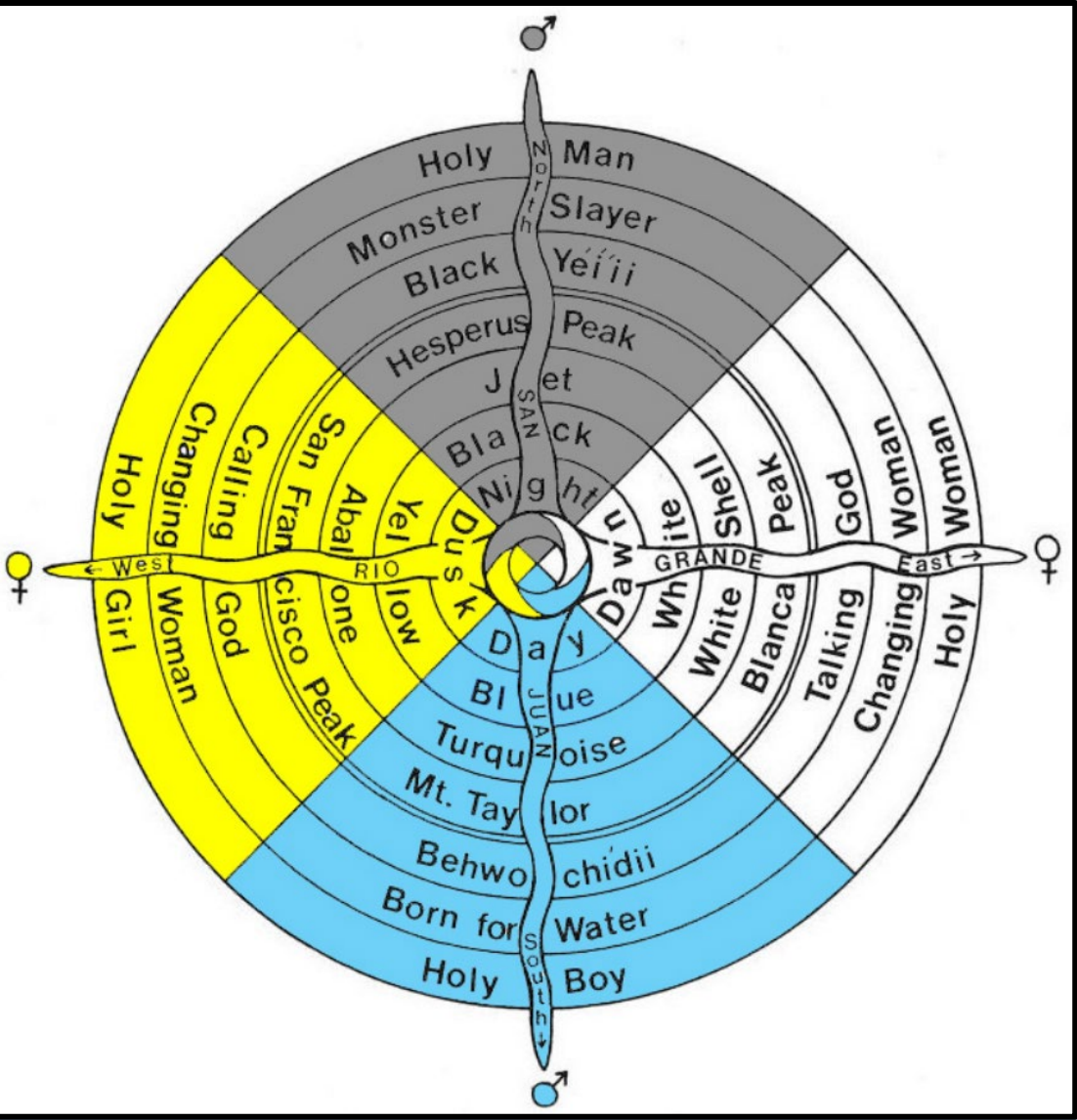
Invasive species

Increases of the species in the canyon
Concerns for nest parasitism of warblers

Feathers are used in some ceremonies as offerings or burned as incense in the Night Way Ceremony.

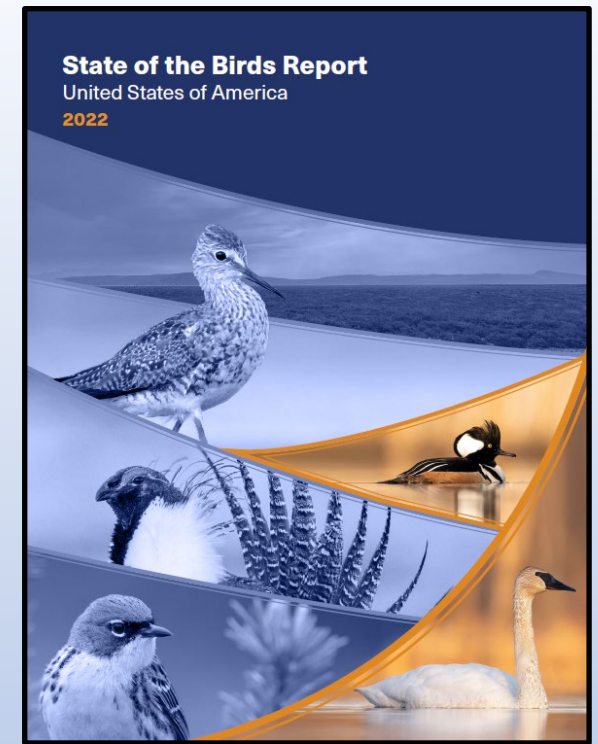






Tribal interest in Research

- Limited clay and silt resources for cliff swallow nesting
- Bird species diversity, richness and abundance across high, med and low human-use areas
- Bird diversity and richness in natural vs invasive plant communities (restoration)



1 in 4 breeding birds **lost** in North America over past 50 yrs.

70 species have **lost 2/3 population** in the past 50 yrs., on track to **lose 50%** in the **next 50 yrs.**

Bird trends are **down** across **every habitat** except wetlands (due to waterfowl hunting (funding) and environmental regulation)

Thank You

