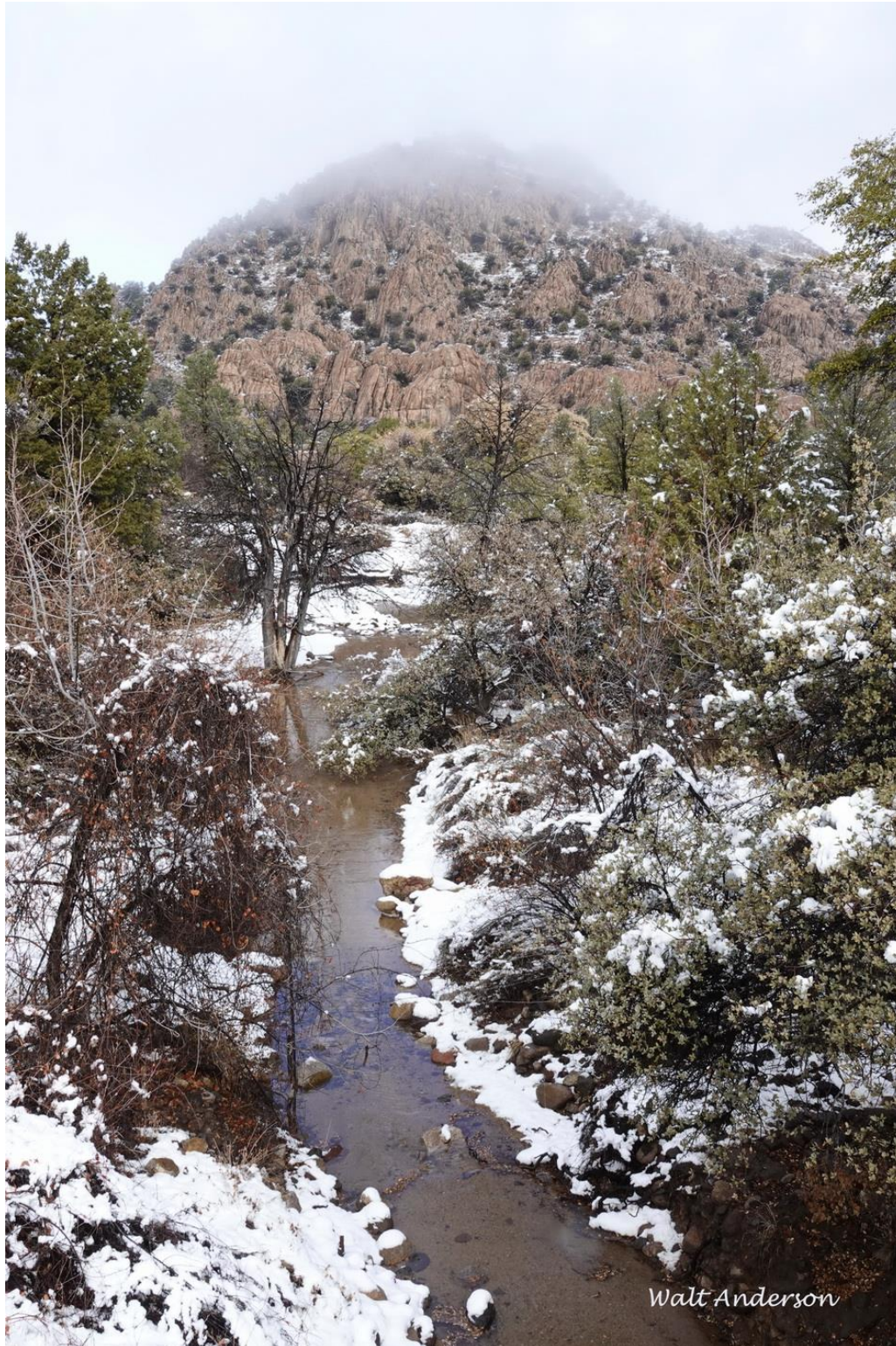


**Wild Wednesday. 3 February 2021. Melt.** By Walt Anderson

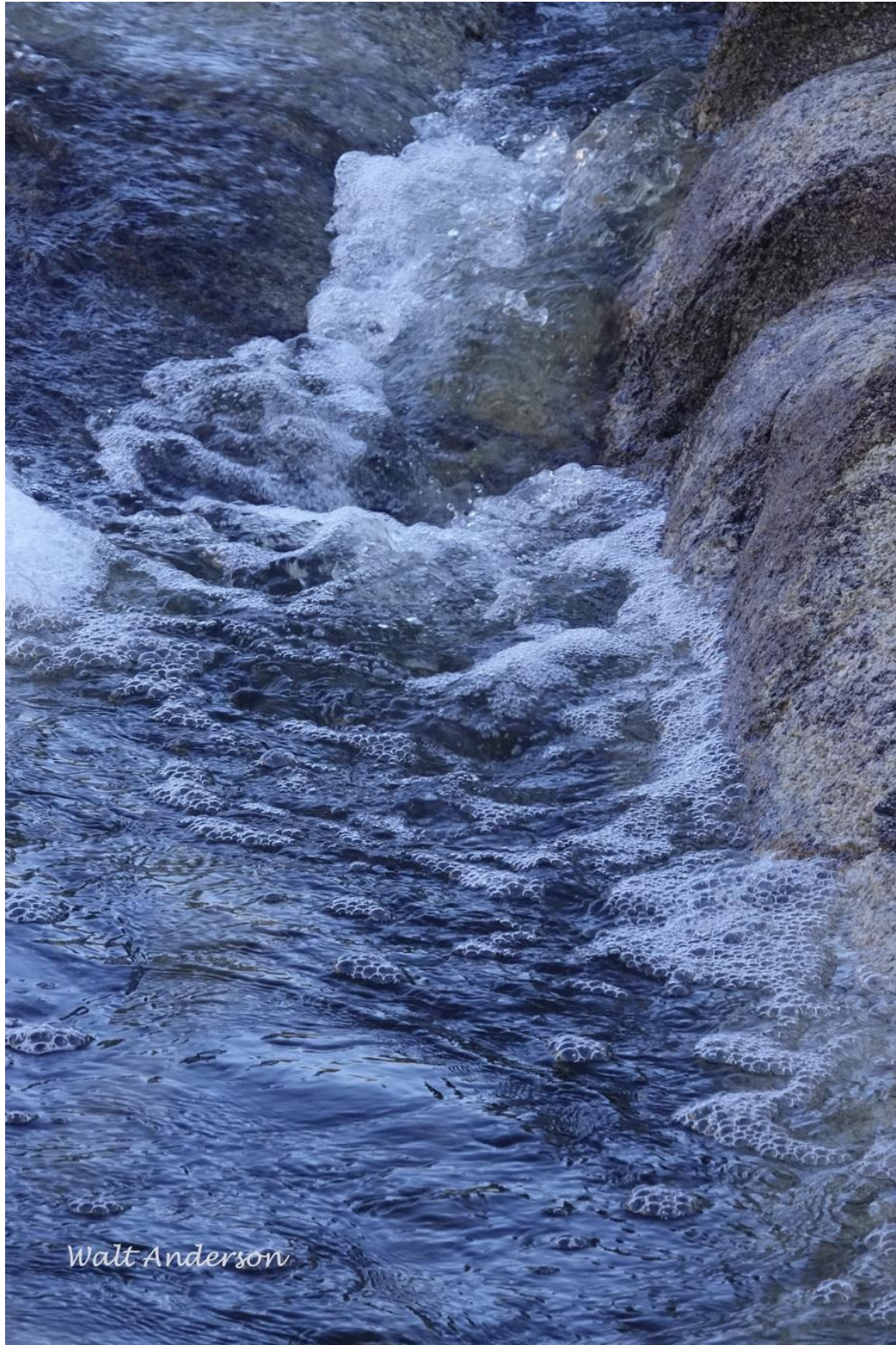
In the past ten days, the Granite Dells has gone from a parched, pinched landscape to one with deep snow—both conditions challenging birds to find enough to eat. Then came meltdown (that is, water released from its crystalline prison to flow in creeks large and small). What a dramatic turn of events in such a short time! Here are some images taken during this turn of events to show how the landscape and wildlife have responded. Along the way, nature provided some irresistible photo subjects that I hope you will enjoy.



Emory Oaks are normally evergreen, though they do a quick leaf turnover around April, but the long drought has strained the oaks to complete withdrawal of chlorophyll. Many leaves fell in this snow, which came too late to keep them green, but I hope the wet soil will last and permit new growth in the spring.



No-name Creek along the Iron King Trail just after the first snow. It had been dry for many months. Gradual melting should keep it flowing for a while.



*Walt Anderson*

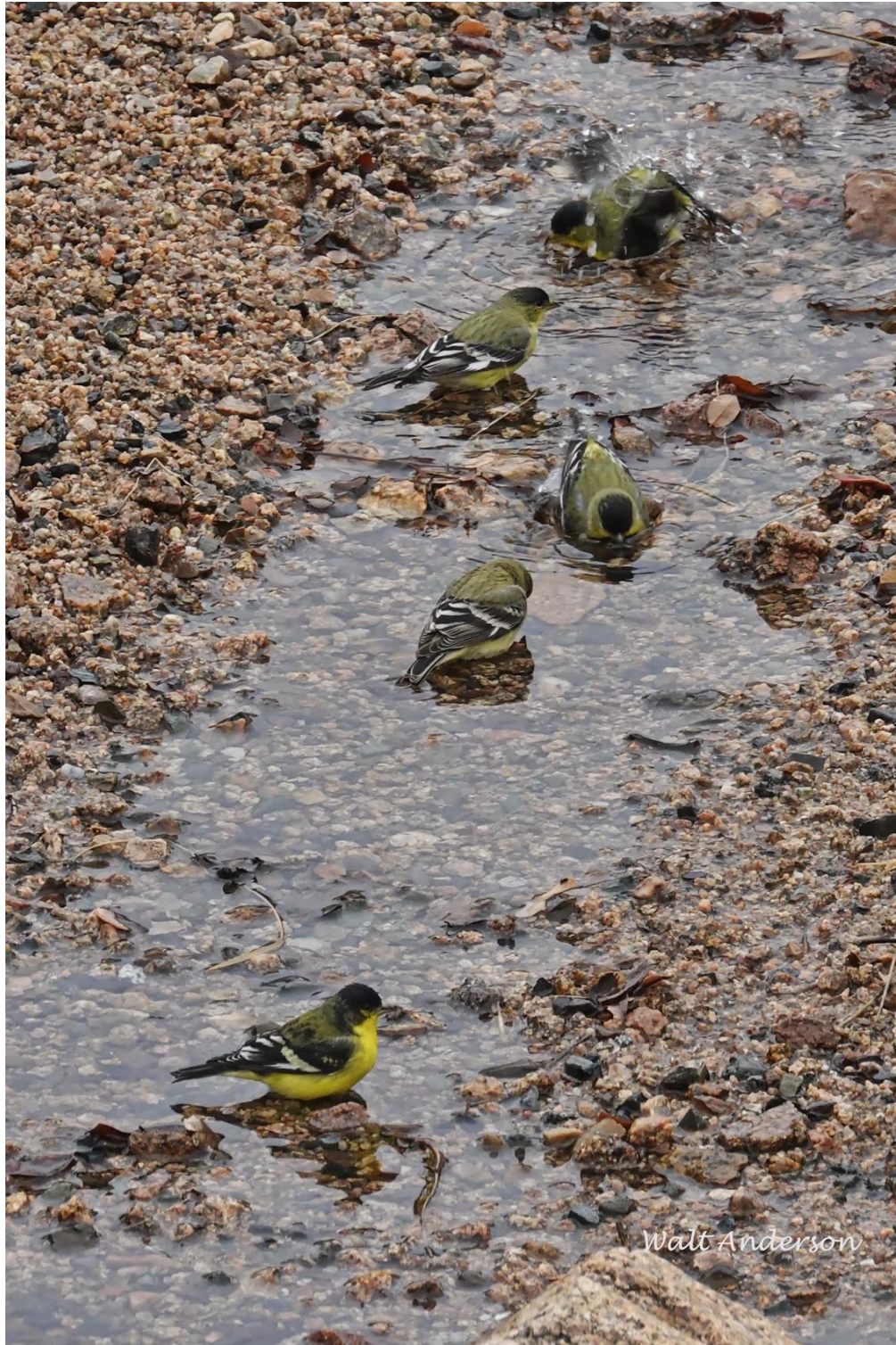
Fresh meltwater rushing down Boulder Creek, the major tributary of Granite Creek in the Dells.



This stock pond along the Iron King Trail suddenly filled with snow runoff, providing an irresistible oasis for thirsty birds.



Bluebirds were among the birds that flocked to this pond for vital moisture.



*Walt Anderson*

Lesser Goldfinches bathing and drinking in a meltwater creek.



Adult White-crowned Sparrow finally gets a much-needed bath!



Immature White-crowned Sparrow. Notice how its reflection clears up the glare on the water. The reflection creates a crest, suggesting that this is a wannabee cardinal.



While plants won't show the effects of the moisture until they can grow in response, lichens, those amazing compound organisms, are transformed immediately. These chartreuse lichens contrast dramatically with the pink granite.



Walt Anderson

Water racing through sculpted granite is colored by sunset light on the canyon walls.



Mammals also suffered through the endless months of drought, so when water appears in the creek, it is imperative to connect, even though the meltwater is icy. Hydrologists measure water in acre-feet; hikers do so in aching-feet.



The water is too cold for me to bare my toes, so I am content to enter the water vicariously as an image in dozens of bubbles.



One of the traits of a naturalist is perceptual flexibility—the ability to switch seamlessly from the grand landscape to the minute details. Icicles illustrate water’s amazing transitions as solid, liquid, and gas. Water is the ultimate shape-shifter.



All of these changes are powered by the sun. We are so lucky to be at that sweet spot in the solar system where life has been able to exist and morph into countless forms so beautiful. Recognizing this, we need to take responsibility so that we don't debase and ruin our special Eden.