

# Boulder County Nature Association



Volume 25, Number 4  
Fall 2007

## **Birds of Walker Ranch: Notes from an Eco-Steward**

*Editor's note: Laura Osborn is one of 40 ecostewards monitoring birds, mammals, plants, and recreational use in 27 wild areas in Boulder County. While monitoring birds at Meyers Gulch last summer, she saw a pygmy owl, families of dusky grouse, Williamson's sapsuckers, Townsend's warblers, and a black bear--among other wonders. Here are some of her notes. To adopt an area of your own, contact Steve Jones (303-494-2468; [stephen.jones@earthlink.net](mailto:stephen.jones@earthlink.net)).*

Some highlights from my observations this season that I want to share with everyone: I saw a Krider's Red-tailed Hawk twice in July perched and calling continuously at Meyers. I flushed a Northern Pygmy Owl in late-July. The only other owl I have observed at Meyers was a dead Long-eared Owl. Joyce Takamine found a Great-horned Owl while she was a bluebird monitor.

I believe that at least two families of Dusky Grouse have successfully bred. I had a few sightings of mother with young in June and July. Steve Jones and I have likely confirmed a successful Olive-sided Flycatcher nesting. Late July/early August there were two mornings in which the probable breeder was singing from the area historically occupied for the past 3 years by an Olive-sided Flycatcher. At the same time, a different, undeveloped song was broadcast from a totally different area. The second time, I was able to observe the individual(s) twice during my hike, coming and going. 4 August was my last observation/and hearing of an Olive-sided Flycatcher at Meyers.

I saw a Williamson's Sapsucker pair throughout the breeding season in the same area that a successful

nest hole yielded at least 2 young last year. The nest hole was occupied by squirrels this year. However, a pair remained in the area throughout their breeding season. A male Lazuli Bunting was singing in late July for a couple weeks at the stream bed at the end of the Green Trail. A singing male Lazuli was present last year at this time in the same place.

Hammond's Flycatchers were present in very high numbers this year. I feel that some other bird numbers were down: Warbling Vireos, Plumbeous Vireos, Western Tanagers, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Green-tailed Towhees and most notably Red Crossbills. I observed 58 different species at Meyers since 21 March of this year. Most of these are probable breeders.

Red Crossbills were present in very large numbers at Meyers last year. Many times I observed the young (bills not yet crossed) feeding and bathing in the company of the adults. In contrast, large group(s) of Crossbills have been congregating near Realization Point and upper Chapman Drive on Flagstaff most of the summer. Sightings are pretty much guaranteed.

Townsend's Warblers began arriving in late August. Here are my historical arrival dates:

2003 - 25 August; 2004 - 13 August; 2005 - 28 August; 2006 - 13 August; 2007 - 21 August.

Townsend's usually are present for 3 weeks or so, rather cooperative/comfortable with observers. They can be easily seen foraging at lower observable levels. Generally, they congregate in the aspen groves and deciduous vegetation at the convergence of fire roads 2 and 3 and upwards along the main trail almost to the end.

-Laura Osborn

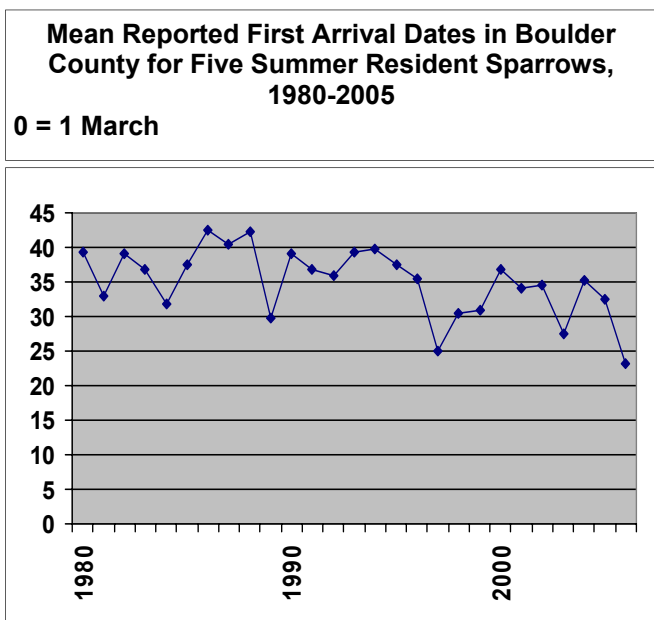
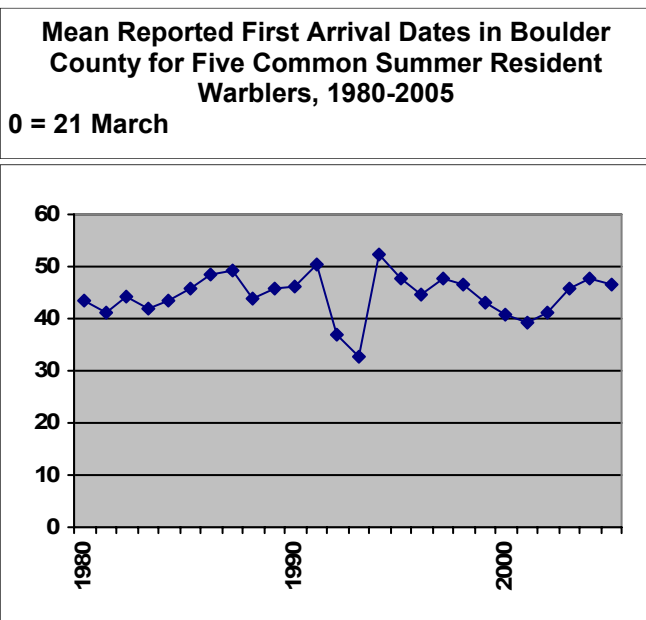
**High Country Spring Bird Arrivals**

Are birds arriving to the high country earlier? There is some indication that this is the case. The following table provides information from my Eldora (elevation 8,500') records since 1982 about the return of bird species. The average date of arrival was calculated for the first thirteen years and the second thirteen years. This was done for those species that arrive in late April through early June.

it would make sense that there would be little change in arrival dates of some long-distance migrants.

Most, if not all, of the species listed in the table can be found at lower elevations prior to being seen around Eldora. Though many of these species may not be returning to the county earlier, the table on page 3 indicates that they may be making the vertical migration up to their breeding grounds earlier.

Observations suggest that local weather influences



Seventeen of the twenty-four species have earlier arrival dates, six are later, and one is unchanged. Six of the species are arriving at least a week earlier, and some nearly two weeks: rock wren, yellow warbler, MacGillivray’s warbler, western tanager, and black-headed grosbeak (see table opposite page).

when birds arrive in the high country. Periods of mild weather often coincide with early arrival, while storms and cold can delay arrival. And it is possible that the current warming trend may be contributing to earlier arrivals in the mountains. During the month of May for this 26-year period, average temperature was 3.86°C during the first 13 years and 5.13° C during the last 13 years. Monthly average precipitation decreased from 77.6 mm to 66.7 mm (data from the University of Colorado Mountain Research Station C-1 station).

Information provided by Steve Jones at the recent Boulder County Ecosystem Symposium indicated that most warblers were not arriving earlier to Boulder County, while most sparrows were (see graphs). This is based on first arrival dates since 1980 from the Boulder County Wildlife Inventory of the Boulder Audubon Society. And since for most bird species the length of day helps trigger the migration process,

-Dave Hallock

**Average Spring Return Dates to Eldora Area 1982-2007**

Species	1982-1994	1995-2007
Broad-tailed Hummingbird	May 3	April 30
Olive-sided Flycatcher	May 25	May 21
Western Wood-Pewee	May 29	May 30
Hammond's Flycatcher	May 23	May 17
Dusky Flycatcher	May 18	May 14
Cordilleran Flycatcher	May 30	May 24
Warbling Vireo	May 19	May 20
Violet-green Swallow	May 14	May 9
Rock Wren	May 14	May 7
House Wren	May 8	May 8
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	April 25	April 24
Swainson's Thrush	May 25	June 4
Hermit Thrush	May 14	May 13
Yellow Warbler	May 28	May 17
Yellow-rumped Warbler	May 2	April 30
MacGillivray's Warbler	May 27	May 17
Wilson's Warbler	May 20	May 22
Western Tanager	May 28	May 20
Green-tailed Towhee	May 8	May 5
Chipping Sparrow	May 5	May 3
Lincoln's Sparrow	May 9	May 13
White-crowned Sparrow	May 11	May 7
Black-headed Grosbeak	May 25	May 13
Brown-headed Cowbird	May 1	May 6

**New CD Highlights  
Boulder County Bird Songs**

Dawn Chorus in the Rocky Mountains, a new CD produced by the Boulder County Nature Association Bird Song class, features songs of more than 55 species, including flammulated owl, sora, hermit thrush, Virginia's warbler, American redstart, and fox sparrow. These multi-textured, natural recordings were made at dawn from Boulder Reservoir on the plains to Fourth of July Cirque on the high tundra. There is no narration, so you can use the CD either for meditation and relaxation or for learning bird songs. A 12-page insert identifies and describes the songs as they appear.

Dawn Chorus will be available at the Wild Bird Center beginning October 20 and at BCNA and Boulder Audubon meetings.



**Ptarmigan in a Snow Hollow-Joyce Gellhorn**

**Book Review: A Celebration of Ptarmigan and other Alpine Miracles**

Gellhorn, Joyce. 2007. White-tailed Ptarmigan: Ghosts of the Alpine Tundra. Photographs by Joyce Gellhorn and Calvin Whitehall. Johnson Books, Boulder.

We all remember our first encounter with white-tailed ptarmigan, the "ghost birds" portrayed in this gorgeous new book. Joyce Gellhorn and Calvin Whitehall take us beyond that initial state of wonder and lead us through a year in the ptarmigans' unique lives.

We learn about snow roosts; feathered feet and nostrils; the art of invisibility; and the dangers posed by weasels, coyotes, and ravens. We go into the field with researchers to experience ptarmigan courtship, nesting (right on the ground) and winter foraging (they actually gain weight!). A final, poignant chapter summarizes challenges to ptarmigan survival, including overpopulated moose and elk, human recreation, and global warming. More than 100 striking color photos provide intimate views of the ptarmigans' world.

Described by naturalist Robert Pyle as "one of the most compelling natural history books I know," White-tailed Ptarmigan is a lyrical paean to these remarkable birds and the wild, windswept ecosystem they inhabit. It's the kind of book you will consult time and again and will want to display in a prominent place on the mantel.

- Steve Jones



**The Owls of Boulder County**

Tuesday, October 30; 7:00pm to 8:30pm  
 George Reynolds Branch Library, 3595 Table Mesa Drive, Boulder  
 (overflow parking available in King Sooper's parking lot across the street)

Owls have been regarded with fascination and awe throughout recorded history and across many cultures. To some people they are symbols of wisdom, while to others they are harbingers of doom and death. Over half of the owls recorded in the U.S. have been seen in Boulder County, and most of those owls nest here. Join Don Cook, Cathy Cook, and Cindy Maynard to explore these fascinating creatures of the night, and to learn about their diversity and special adaptations which make them such expert hunters.

**White-tailed Ptarmigan  
 with Joyce Gellhorn and Calvin Whitehall**

Thursday, October 25, 2007, 7:00 PM; REI Boulder store

The presentation is based upon the book, *White-tailed Ptarmigan: Ghosts of the Alpine Tundra*, published by Johnson Books, 2007 (see review page 3).

White-tailed ptarmigan, camouflaged to blend into their surroundings, are the only birds capable of survival in harsh, alpine environments throughout the year. This program follows these special birds through the seasons and highlights their unique adaptations to their high mountain world. We show their diet, courtship displays, nesting, and rearing of young. One of the few birds to molt three times per year, ptarmigan change from winter white to mottled summer plumage. Because ptarmigan live exclusively in cold regions, they may serve as a barometer of climate change.

Joyce and Calvin will autograph copies of their book after the program.



**Raptor Quiz (all photos by Steve Jones)**

Can you identify the 2 raptors on this page, and the bird on page 6? Answers on bottom of page 6.

**Birdsong****by Bev Melius**

*it is hard to know when you enter that dreamlike state  
and hard to know when you don't in the cool dawn  
of the montane forest, your ears pressed hard to the air  
to the waterfall of song falling from the trees  
to the startle of cheery-ups and chee-chee-chee's,  
to the loud zhree-pi-dees and lazy b-derrups,  
trying to decipher the whistles from the sneezles  
aspen leaf out with chickadees and juncos  
snags spill budding bluebirds, wrens, swallows and flickers  
willows sigh like newborn sap suckers and from the dark interior of  
conifers, soft as feathers, comes the legato of humming birds and nuthatches  
from the streams where orange fritillaries and twelve spot skimmers  
go about their summer lives, the tremolo of sparrows purrs  
in counterpoint to the lace of water and stone  
you wonder at the implacable vastness of a single organism  
in a single eco system rushing headlong into birth  
you wonder if the trees themselves might rise up and fly  
from riparian understory to mountain canopy branches are  
wreathed in ornament carefully and particularly placed  
by the hands of evolution on each patient tree, each a joy,  
a surprise, a room full of knowledge, a library without end  
you envy again Thoreau and the years he spent reading the books  
it is not the forest spaces that are startled  
nor the woodland breath that rushes but your own  
when you get home you do not want to bathe  
you want your new skin to sing like a bird forever*

Editor's Note: Bev was a student in this past summer's BCNA Bird Song class.



**BCNA Fall Calendar**

Sunday, October 21,: Winter Raptor Survey Training and 25th Year Celebration. All wintering raptor surveyers, both past and present are invited to join us for a potluck picnic to celebrate the beginning of our 25th survey year. Bring something to share and your own table setting to the picnic shelter at Lagerman Reservoir from 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM on Sunday, October 21. We will furnish a cake and drinks for all who have participated in this activity over the years. After the picnic, we will hold a training session for new surveyers. Call Jim McKee (303)651-2414 or Sue Cass (303)494-5345 for information.

Thursday, October 25, 2007, 7 p.m: "White-tailed Ptarmigan," with Joyce Gellhorn and Calvin Whitehall. REI Boulder store, 1600 26th St.. (see article, page 3).

Tuesday, October 30, 7 p.m: "The Owls of Boulder County," with Cathy Cook, Donn Cook, and Cindy Maynard. George Reynolds Branch Library, 3595 Table Mesa Drive (opposite King Soopers--see article, page 4).

December-January: Indian Peaks winter bird count. For information or to volunteer, contact Bill Kaempfer (kaempfer@colorado.edu).

Saturday, December 22, 7-10 a.m: Annual winter solstice sunrise hike on White Rocks Trail. Join us for this bracing and beautiful holiday tradition. Expect to see bald eagles, white-tailed deer, waterfowl, and a misty sunrise as we gather at the Boulder Creek bridge to share solstice messages. Feel free to bring a favorite quote, song, or poem to share with the group. Optional breakfast afterward at the Garden Gate Cafe in Niwot. Contact Steve Jones (stephen.jones@earthlink.net; 303-494-2468) to reserve a place at the breakfast table. Meet at the Teller Farms South trailhead, on Valmont Road 0.5 mi. east of 95th St., at 7 a.m. Note: the White Rocks Trail skirts, but does not enter, the White Rocks

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**Visit Our Website**

For the calendar, class offerings, research results, publications, newsletter pictures in color, and other related information: [www.bcna.org](http://www.bcna.org)

**Quiz Answers:**  
 Page 6: prairie falcon (top), ferruginous hawk  
 (bottom). This page: rough-legged hawk.

**Fall Natural Events Calendar**

Early October: Uncommon migrants, including sandhill cranes and snow geese, pass through. Listen for the rippling, rolling calls of the cranes high overhead during cloudy days with easterly winds. They're migrating from nesting areas in the northern Rockies to wintering areas in New Mexico and West Texas.

October 26: Full moon rises at 6:10 p.m., MDT  
When Elk Bellow (Ponca)  
Falling Leaves (Cheyenne, Ojibwe)  
Raccoon Breeding (Osage)

Late October: Golden-mantled ground squirrels, thirteen-lined ground squirrels, and meadow jumping mice enter into hibernation.

October 31: Samhain (Hallowmass). At the onset of the Celtic year, the final fruits of summer wither away and winter begins. During this dying time the gates open between the spirit worlds, allowing the dead to walk among us. Spirits of the dead are invited to family feasts and encouraged to warm themselves by the fire while sharing honey, sweet cakes, and beer. Samhain means "summer's end."

November 1-30: Venus is prominent in the eastern sky at dawn.

November 17: The Leonid meteor shower is best viewed after midnight (when the quarter moon is low in the west). Look toward Leo.

Early November: Overwintering bald eagles and rough-legged hawks arrive. Data from the BCNA wintering raptor surveys suggest that a second wave of bald eagles arrives in Boulder County in January. No one knows how many of our wintering balds come from Southeast Alaska and how many simply move down a few hundred miles from the northern Rockies. Numbers of rough-legged hawks observed on the winter raptor counts have declined by 90% since 1990. We suspect these open country hunters avoid highly fragmented grassland and wetland ecosystems near urban areas.

November 24: Full moon rises at 4:28 p.m., MST  
Rivers Start to Freeze (Arapaho)  
Storms (Cheyenne)  
Baby Bear (Osage)

Early December: American dippers migrate down from the mountains to forage for aquatic insects in

Boulder and St. Vrain creeks. Look for winter-singing dippers along Boulder Creek just west of 75th St.

December 13-14: The Geminid meteor shower peaks high in the southern sky around midnight. *Sky and Telescope* says this should be a great year for the Geminids since their progenitor, the "defunct comet" Phaeton, passes close to the earth on December 10. A first-quarter moon should make viewing even better. Anyone want to rendezvous in the Pawnee National Grassland for a quick overnight?

December 23: Full moon rises at 4:10 p.m., MST  
Frost on Lodge (Lakota)  
Popping Trees (Arapaho)  
Win the Deer Run Together (Cheyenne)

For more natural events and KGNU nature almanac recordings, visit "Nature Almanac" at the BCNA web site ([www.bcna.org](http://www.bcna.org)).

**Spring 2007 Banding at Allegra Collister Nature Preserve**

This spring we began banding on April 28 and continued until June 2. We put in almost 600 net/hours over 13 days and banded 125 birds of 35 species and captured 17 that had been banded previous seasons. Most of these had been banded in spring of 2006, although a Lark Sparrow had been banded spring of 2004. Several days we could not open all of our nets because irrigation water was flowing in the net lanes.

We banded more Yellow Warblers than any other species, with Gambel's White-crowned Sparrows second most common. We did capture two Northern Rough-wing Swallows, a first for us. The other highlight was a male Black-throated Blue Warbler. We had banded a female in 1991 and no others since.

Three new nets, an up-dated Tabular Pyle (the banders' handbook), and new calipers for measuring flycatchers' bills were much appreciated. A big thanks is due to BCNA for their support in providing these items!

-Maggie Boswell

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Type of Membership:

_____ Student/Senior (65 or over)	\$15
_____ General Member	\$20
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_____ Founder	\$100
_____ Life Member	\$300
_____ Corporate	\$500
_____ Donation to General Research Grants	
_____ Donation to Evenson Big Cat Research Grants	
_____ Donation to General Research Fund	

The membership year is January 1 to December 31. Those who join after October 1 are considered members in good standing through the following year. All members receive this quarterly newsletter. Supporter-level members and higher also receive a complimentary copy of each BCNA publication.

Please make checks payable to "Boulder County Nature Association" or "BCNA" and mail to:  
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