

Boulder County Nature Association



"The Boulder County Nature Association is a private, non-profit membership organization committed to preserving the natural history of our region through research, documentation, and public education."

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President's Column

BCNA is co-sponsoring, along with the Boulder County Audubon Society, a special showing of the film *Ghost Bird* on Tuesday, October 5, 7 p.m., at the Lafayette Public Library, 775 W. Baseline Road. The film chronicles the 2005 announcement that the ivory-billed woodpecker had been found in the swamps of eastern Arkansas and the subsequent furor. The 'ghost bird' had been thought to be extinct for 60 years. The Bush administration diverted millions of dollars (!) from other conservation projects to the largest-ever recovery effort for a lost species. Professional ornithologists and amateur birders flocked to the area. The dying town of Brinkley, Arkansas, was briefly resurrected on the hoopla. But repeated searches by experts only confirmed an absence of credible evidence. David Sibley concluded only that "If you go out looking with something in mind," your expectations lead you to find "the thing you're looking for." Six years later, the ivory bill remains absent and an emblem of our conservation failures. *Ghost Bird* is much more than a birding film. New York magazine called it "a cosmic lament for the forest primeval and man's search for environmental redemption."

It is great that BCNA and BCAS are cosponsoring. For both organizations, this showing is a chance to reach out to our members in the east county, and perhaps to attract new members. For a couple of years, the two organizations have been cross-listing field trips and events. We collaborate on birds of special concern monitoring and the ecosystem stewardship project. Many are members of both organizations. We have much in common.

So why are we two? Some have proposed a merger of the two organizations. The Boulder County Audubon Society's mission is "to participate in the conservation and restoration of natural ecosystems that support the region's biological diversity, focusing on birds and other wildlife. Toward this end, the Society provides outreach programs such as field trips and educational and enriching activities, programs to encourage and enhance nature education in the schools, and advocacy on behalf of

areas sustaining important bird populations." BCNA's mission statement, on the masthead above, focuses similarly on the preservation of the natural history of our region.

But I would argue that there is a difference, and cause for two vibrant organizations. BCNA's educational program is not limited to 'birds and other wildlife.' In 2010, we have offered or are offering classes on the ponderosa forest, wildflowers, orchids, mushrooms, aspen, and geology, in addition to several classes on birds. Also, our emphasis on research and documentation gives us the ability to talk with authority to governmental land managers, because we have the data to back our opinions. Twenty-five years of wintering raptor data and the changes in populations resulting from suburbanization of what was rural plains, 30 years of data on Indian Peaks area bird populations, and an even longer set of data (and more encouraging!) on resident and migrant birds in the Allegra Collister banding area and the changes in species resulting from the closure of a riparian area to grazing—all are examples of the valuable research and documentation that BCNA has accomplished. Finally, BCNA is a local organization with no ties to a national organization. This enables us to focus all our energies to documenting and preserving the natural and cultural history of our region. Perhaps most important, two organizations' voices are better than one when advocating for conservation.

From BCNA's standpoint, there are no financial reasons for merging. We are healthy. We have a stable membership—thank you for renewing year after year. Our education program is well subscribed and brings in the largest part of our revenue. A few generous individuals donate annually—I would be remiss not to single out the continuing generosity of the Woods Foundation.

Having said that, we have more in common than we have differences. We are both conservation organizations. We fight against the rapaciousness of our own species. Whether it is the logging companies that eliminated the habitat of the ivory billed

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

woodpecker, or the mining company that is threatening the entire ecosystem of the Bristol Bay region of Alaska, or the recreationists who demand ever more access to protected areas, both BCNA and BCAS will continue to raise our voices to protect our natural environments and their species diversity for future generations. *Ghost Bird* is very close to the missions and the spirit of both organizations. Come see it!

—Michael Delaney

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Northern Harriers, Long-eared Owls, and Lewis's Woodpeckers Nest Successfully
by Steve Jones

We're currently working on a 10-year update of the Boulder County Nature Association Avian Species of Special Concern List, and this summer's observations give renewed hope for several locally threatened species. Here's some of the good news concerning species currently classified as "rare and declining" (demonstrably declining, with three or fewer annual nesting observations within the county during the past 10 years):

American Bittern. Territorial adults were heard at Boulder Reservoir, Coot Lake, Sawhill Ponds, and South Boulder Creek State Natural Area. Nests are difficult to find, but volunteers saw two fledged young at Boulder Reservoir. Nesting populations appear to be stable or increasing, and the status of this species will be upgraded to "isolated and restricted" on the revised list.

Northern Harrier. A pair nested west of Lagerman Reservoir for the first time in several years. The adults were observed bringing food into the nest during the first two weeks of June, then abandoned the nest, probably as a result of predation of the young. A pair nested successfully in the wetlands west of Boulder Reservoir for the second consecutive year, fledging 3 young on July 4. Boulder Reservoir and Coot Lake have been the only documented successful nesting sites in Boulder County since 1990, with a total of 15 young fledged from 4 successful nests during 2004, 2009, and 2010.

Eared Grebe. We've received no reports of successful nesting in Boulder County since this list was first developed in 1982, but pairs were seen this spring at Boulder Reservoir and Union Reservoir. Let's keep an eye out for floating nests near the shoreline of these reservoirs.

Burrowing Owl. Nesting pairs were reported at five prairie dog colonies on Boulder County Parks and Open Space and at least three prairie dog colonies on City of Boulder Open Space. We're still waiting for final reports of numbers fledged, but it appears that Boulder County's Burrowing Owls still are not fledging enough young to sustain a breeding population. Nevertheless, since there have been eight or more nests documented within the county during each of the past three years, this species will be upgraded to "isolated and restricted" on the revised list.

Long-eared Owl. A pair nested successfully in a park in Louisville, fledging at least three young. We suspect nesting in at least two additional locations (both prairie shelterbelts) within the county.

Lewis's Woodpecker. A pair nested successfully at Heil Valley Ranch, where another pair established a nesting territory. This was an area of forest that burned a half dozen years ago. The last report of successful nesting in the county is from 2002.

On the discouraging side, there are several rare and declining species that have not been documented nesting for at least 20 years: Northern Bobwhite, Red-headed Woodpecker, Loggerhead Shrike, and Brown Thrasher. We've received no nesting reports for Lark Bunting since the late 1990s.

If you have information about potential nesting of any of these birds or of others on the list, please let us know. The complete list is available at www.bcna.org.

Thanks everyone for your reports this summer, and I apologize for any names I've omitted: George Alexander, Linda Andes-Georges, Bev Baker, Julie Bartlett, Barbara Brandt, Matt Claussen, A. D. Chesley, Nathen Colts, Sharon Daugherty, Merrit Dexter, Carol Dozier, Dave Hallock, Paula Hansley, Nancy Haupt, Finneus Ingalls, Brenda Kick, Chuck Klomp, James Krick, Petrea Mah, Adam Massey, Joy Master, Christian Nunes, Laura Osborn, Linda Palmer, Dana and Pam Piombino, Mark and Sue Ponsor, Gary Rabourne, Susan Spalding, Gary Stevens, Cara Stiles, Darin Tohey, Brian and Will Toon, David Waltman, Nan Wilson.

Lewis's Woodpeckers successfully nested in Boulder County after eight years of bad luck (see page 2). Photo by Steve Jones.



BCNA Fall Calendar

"Ghost Bird" screening at Lafayette Public Library

Tuesday, October 5, 7 p.m..

Every year another bird species vanishes forever. What are the chances of one coming back? Boulder County Nature Association and Boulder County Audubon are proud to cosponsor this free screening of the much acclaimed documentary chronicling the search for the ivory-billed woodpecker.

"A multi-layered story that will fascinate practically everybody." - *New York Times*

Lafayette Public Library is located at 775 W. Baseline Rd. Please join us for the film and a short discussion afterward.

Wintering Raptor Survey Training at North Foothills Nature Center in Boulder

Wednesday, October 13, 7 p.m.

Both new and experienced surveyors are welcome! See page 4 for complete details.

"Uganda: Life in the Pearl of Africa," with Robert Andrews

Thursday, October 21, 7 p.m.

Boulder Reynolds Branch Library

Uganda – the Pearl of Africa – is a land of friendly and gentle people, moderate climate, scenic lakes, rivers, hills, and mountains and stunning biodiversity, but also with a harsh history and poverty. In this program, Bob will discuss the educational work he did for four years at a small college, introduce the daily life of rural Uganda, and give a sampling of the rich flora and fauna.

Bob Andrews, born and raised in Denver, is a long-

time Colorado field ornithologist and naturalist. He has led birding field trips and is the senior author of *Colorado Birds*. He graduated from the University of Colorado with a Master's in biology. He lived in Africa for 13 years, 9 years in Namibia and 4 years in Uganda, where he was a biology and geography lecturer, Academic Registrar, and Assistant Vice-Chancellor at Central Buganda University.

The Reynolds Branch Library is located in South Boulder on Table Mesa Drive one block west of Broadway and opposite the Table Mesa King Soopers.

"Prairie Summer," with Steve Jones

Wednesday, November 10, 7 p.m.

Boulder Reynolds Branch Library

We experienced a bountiful growing season on the western plains, with most weather stations reporting 125-175% of average precipitation through August. One area in Nebraska's North Loup River Valley received more than 20" of rain during the month of June, alone.

Winter Solstice Sunrise Hike

Tuesday, December 21, 7-11 a.m.

Teller Farms North Trailhead, Valmont Road one-half mile west of 95th St

Join us for this friendly and illuminating BCNA tradition, now in its 23rd year. We meet at the Teller Farms North parking area at 7 and walk a mile or so to the bridge crossing Boulder Creek, where we enjoy a frosty sunrise as the Indian Peaks light up to the west. If you wish, bring a poem, thought, story, or song to share during our short sun-welcoming ceremony at the bridge. Optional breakfast follows around 9 at Garden Gate Café in Niwot. RSVP for breakfast to Steve Jones (curlwsj@comcast.net; 303-494-2468).

BCNA Wintering Raptor Survey begins October 15th

Can it be! As I write, summer is, thankfully, cooling into autumn and winter will be upon us before we know it. BCNA's Wintering Raptor Survey season begins October 15th and, once again, all of you who have so graciously done so in the past are encouraged to participate in the 2010/2011 season.

Scanning the survey spread sheets, my brain struggles to extrapolate the statistical summary the figures represent, yet some things are obvious even to me. Bald Eagle sightings continue their downward trend on all routes except Stearns Lake, most likely due to the strong intraspecific defense of territory attributed to our resident/breeding Bald Eagle pairs. This season five nesting attempts produced five young, all in the eastern half of the county.

The numbers tell us observations of Ferruginous Hawks were up slightly on all routes except South County which surprises me a little. I distinctly remember the excitement of some South County surveyors when Ferrugs were spotted on a number of forays. Likewise, sightings of Rough-legged Hawks were up by roughly 35% on all routes over the previous season, but don't get too excited. Thirty-five percent of nearly nothing is still...nearly nothing. When you spot a Ferrug or Rough-leg my advice is to savor every moment. I know I do!

Finally, you may not be surprised to find out that of the eight species (Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, Ferruginous Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk,

Golden Eagle, American Kestrel, Prairie Falcon) delineated on the survey spread sheets, Red-tailed Hawks account for half of all sightings. Gosh, is that all! Once again, may I offer some motherly advice. Enjoy our Red-tails! Seemingly ubiquitous, our western race, *Buteo jamaicensis calurus*, presents in more polymorphic forms than any other diurnal raptor in North America, light morphs being most common and intermediate (rufous) and dark morphs accounting for 10% to 20% in our area. In winter, typically November through February, *calurus* is joined by the subspecies *harlani*, Harlan's Hawk, which confounds observers with a strong melanistic tendency that makes dark morphs the norm and light morphs rare to uncommon. So don't take Red-tails for granted. They present more of a challenge than you might think.

As is the custom, BCNA invites new surveyors to join the team at the beginning of each season. Surveyors choose one or more of seven routes, all in the eastern half of the country, and agree to survey those routes once a month for five months, October 15 through March 15. Training in protocol, methodology and field identification will be provided to new surveyors at the North Foothills Nature Center in Boulder on Wednesday, October 13 at 7:00 PM. Experienced surveyors are welcome to join us. For additional information contact Sue Cass, 720-684-6922, suecass@comcast.net or Jim McKee, 303-651-2414, jimmckee3@comcast.net

Raptor data in spreadsheet form through the 2010 field season are available at www.bcna.org.



Winter Solstice Sunrise Hike, Tuesday, December 21, 7-11 a.m. (see page 3). Photo by Steve Jones.

An Open Letter from a BCNA Member: The Future of Boulder Mountain Parks

Friends—I'm writing because I know many of you have a fondness for the Boulder Mountain Parks and the surrounding public lands. For the last ten months I've been attending meetings of the Community Collaborative Group (CCG) – the group of conservationists, recreationists, and neighborhood representatives charged with developing management recommendations for the stretch of City Open Space between Eldorado Springs and Mt. Sanitas. The process is at the point where serious proposals are being put on the table.

The Mountain Parks and its environs is the heart of the city's public lands. Here at the interface of the Great Plains and the Southern Rocky Mountains, these lands harbor an extraordinary number of breeding birds, a remarkable diversity of plant species, and a varied mosaic of vegetation communities that provide rich wildlife habitat. This ecological diversity has been noted by naturalists and researchers for decades, and is recognized in the two State Natural Areas included in this trail study area.

An additional conservation role served by the area is as a key node in the neighboring network of public lands. With other city parcels, county open space, state parks, and Forest Service lands surrounding the Mountain Parks, the value of the area to biodiversity is not insignificant. This natural area plays an important function in maintaining connectivity within these lower elevation foothills, reducing fragmentation of the landscape, and in helping to sustain populations of native species.

With the Flatirons as the defining feature of the area – a view that untold thousands of Boulder citizens turn to each day – the Mountain Parks deserve the most careful consideration as this process moves forward. This consideration involves the conservation of its biological riches, but also the preservation of the opportunities it affords visitors to enjoy a scenic natural area. It is important to keep in mind that sacrificing the first will, over time, surely result in the diminution of the latter. While a wealth of interest groups want their piece of the pie, we cannot let these lands suffer the death of a thousand cuts.

In these times when developers classify playing fields and golf courses as "open space", the Boulder Open Space program holds a national reputation for its commitment to resource protection, agricultural conservation, cultural heritage preservation, and

human enjoyment. The City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks is to be commended for its efforts to make the CCG an open and inclusive planning process, but in the end the department, the Open Space Board of Trustees, and City Council have the chartered responsibility to preserve this area for its ecological values and its perpetuity for future generations.

Proposals put forth in the CCG have dog guardians grouching over seasonal wildlife closures for bears and birds, and calling for fewer restrictions; climbers asking for expanded sport-climbing access; equestrians wanting permission to ride off-trail; and mountain bikers demanding a N-S route between Chautauqua and Eldorado. As a group, the recreation caucus has repeatedly questioned the validity of conservation management principles. A regular response to the specter of expanding population pressures along the Front Range has been to build more trails (the "L.A. freeway solution").

It is understandable why user groups with a singular focus on their particular pursuit have been able to generate significant political pressure from their members. My hope is that a quiet majority of the Boulder community who simply enjoys a peaceful walk in these relatively unspoiled natural areas will begin to respond. Many of you who read this forum not only enjoy quiet walks, you also have a profound appreciation for the diversity of life found in these areas, and an awareness of how important this biological richness is to the wellbeing of our human community.

In the upcoming months there will be opportunities for the public to examine proposals that come out of the CCG process. It will be very important to participate in these forums. But it is not too early to remind our city leaders of the values we hold regarding these lands, and of the responsibilities with which they have been entrusted to preserve these natural areas for future generations.

Thank you for your consideration ...

—Tim Hogan

Open Space Board of Trustees:
http://www.bouldercolorado.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2784&Itemid=1092

Boulder City Council:
council@bouldercolorado.gov

Good Year for Peregrine Falcons in Boulder

Three Peregrine Falcon pairs fledged at least 5 young in the Boulder Mountain Park this summer. Prairie Falcons nested in 4 locations, fledging 12 young. Golden Eagles nested successfully in Lefthand Canyon and lower Boulder Canyon, fledging 3 young.

The Bald Eagle nest on lower Boulder Creek was blown down in a spring windstorm, but a pair nesting along Coal Creek fledged 2 young. Three Osprey nests near Boulder Reservoir fledged 6 young.

More than 50 volunteers helped monitor raptor nests on Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) this year. The monitoring program was initiated by Boulder County Nature Association in 1982 and is now under the auspices of OSMP. Heartfelt thanks to Education and Outreach Supervisor Lisa Dierauf for coordinating the volunteer effort and providing this update.

—Steve Jones



Set in a murky swamp overrun with birders, scientists, and reporters, Ghost Bird explores the limits of certainty, the seductive power of hope, and how one phantom woodpecker changed a sleepy Southern town forever.

In 2005, scientists announced that the Ivory-billed woodpecker, a species thought to be extinct for 60 years, had been found in Eastern Arkansas. Other creatures have wrongly been presumed extinct, but the reappearance of the Ivory-bill was celebrated around the world as the rediscovery of a lifetime, prompting the largest recovery effort ever undertaken for a lost species. Millions of dollars poured in from the government while ornithologists and birders flooded the swamps to find the rare bird. Down the road, the town of Brinkley, Arkansas - itself on the brink of extinction - was transformed by the hope, commerce and controversy surrounding their feathered friend. But continued sightings by expert birders only highlighted the mysterious absence of credible evidence. Now six years later, the woodpecker remains as elusive as ever. Ghost Bird brings the Ivory-bill's blurry rediscovery into focus revealing our uneasy relationship with nature and the increasing uncertainty of our place within it.

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www.bcna.org

Groups Challenge EPA Position on Lead Ammunition Petition Denial

(Washington, D.C., September 9, 2010) American Bird Conservancy (ABC), the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD), and other members of a diverse coalition of conservation, animal health, and hunting groups have challenged the recent decision by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to deny their petition to ban the use of lead as a component of hunting ammunition. The groups contend that, contrary to the EPA's assertion, the agency does have the authority to act under the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA). The petition also called for a ban on the use of lead in fishing gear, and that part is still under consideration by EPA.

"The EPA erred, either purposely or by not reading the applicable laws we cited in our extensive, well-researched petition, in their rush to dismiss the hunting ammunition portion of our complaint before the November elections. Their authority to regulate lead in hunting ammunition is abundantly clear from the most cursory reading of the House of Representatives portion of the legislative history of TSCA," said Darin Schroeder, Vice President of Conservation Advocacy for ABC.

The legislative history of TSCA plainly states: "..... the Committee does not exclude from regulation under the bill chemical components of ammunition which could be hazardous because of their chemical properties."

In addition to ABC and CBD, the petition was also signed by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, Association of Avian Veterinarians, and Project Gutpile (a hunter's group). Since the petition was originally filed on August 3 (www.abcbirds.org/newsandreports/releases/100803.html), about 40 additional groups have also signed on in support, giving the petition even more broad-based support.

Since the EPA denial of the petition on August 26, CBD has filed a Freedom of Information Act request with EPA to obtain copies of all documents and materials related to the EPA decision. In addition, ABC has requested a meeting with EPA Assistant Administrator Steve Owens, in the hopes of receiving an explanation for the basis for the Agency's sudden and remarkable decision.

"Unfortunately, our request for a meeting with EPA officials has so far gone ignored. The EPA's

dismissal of the ammunition portion of our petition is clearly not grounded in the law or well-established congressional intent, and it is the obligation of the Administration to accept its legal responsibility and affirmatively act on this issue within 90 days time. Without question, we are looking at all options for recourse," Schroeder said.

"The paint industry got the lead out of paint, the auto industry got the lead out of tire weights, the toy industry got it out of children's toys, the petroleum industry got it out of gasoline and the home building industry got it out of the pipes. We also need to get lead out of ammunition and fishing gear," Schroeder said.

"Studies tell us that for every month that is wasted deliberating on this action, over one million wild animals are dying slow and gruesome deaths from lead poisoning – including Bald Eagles – our national symbol. All it takes to stop that carnage is swapping out lead ammunition and lead fishing gear for the myriad of available non-toxic alternatives," said Schroeder.

Lead is an extremely toxic substance that is dangerous to people and wildlife even at low levels. Exposure can cause a range of health effects, from acute poisoning and death to long-term problems, such as reduced reproduction, inhibition of growth, and damage to neurological development.

Animals are poisoned when they scavenge on carcasses shot and contaminated with lead bullet fragments, or pick up and eat spent lead-shot pellets or lost fishing weights, mistaking them for food or grit. Some animals die a painful death from lead poisoning while others suffer for years from its debilitating effects. —American Bird Conservancy



Red-tailed Hawk, photo by Scott Severs

Support the Boulder County Nature Association

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Type of Membership:

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_____ Supporter	\$40
_____ Founder	\$100
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_____ 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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