

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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Fall 2013

Monitoring Species of Special Concern: Scary Year for Northern Harriers and Ospreys at Boulder Reservoir

Steve Jones

For the second consecutive year, Northern Harriers failed to nest in the wetlands west of Boulder Reservoir. This area, along with the wetland to the west of Coot Lake, are the only places in Boulder County where Northern Harriers have been documented nesting successfully during the past 30 years. Since intensive monitoring of nesting birds of special concern in wetlands surrounding Boulder Reservoir began in 2004, volunteers have documented 10 Northern Harrier nesting attempts, only 4 of which were successful, fledging a total of 15 young. Eighteen volunteers devoted more than 200 hours to this year's monitoring effort.

Low prey populations may have discouraged harriers from nesting in Boulder Reservoir wetlands during the past two years. Biologists doing mammal trapping for the Boulder Reservoir Management Plan biological inventory found only a few deer mice and no voles within the Little Dry Creek and Dry Creek wetlands during April to June 2013 (J. Powell, pers. comm.) In addition, as cattail growth in the Little Dry Creek marsh becomes exceedingly dense, there has been a clear trend for nesting Northern Harriers and American Bitterns to abandon this area.

We also believe that predator pressure on Northern Harrier ground nests in the Dry Creek and Little Dry Creek wetlands west of the reservoir is limiting nesting success. We often see Coyotes nosing around Northern Harrier nesting territories and Red-tailed Hawks harassing foraging harriers. It's possible that these small, isolated wetlands simply aren't large or diverse enough to enable the harriers to adequately conceal their nests or find enough rodent prey to provision their young. No matter what the causes, Northern Harrier remains the most threatened nesting bird species in Boulder County.

Ospreys also had a rough year of it at Boulder Reservoir, with all three nests failing. The North Rim and Dry Creek nests apparently failed during incubation. The Little Dry Creek nest, clearly visible from the reservoir main entrance, failed in early June after two fluffy young were seen peering out over the rim.



The latter two nests have been productive in the past. In fact the Dry Creek nest fledged a total of 20 young from 2004 to 2010 before failing each of the past three years. The Little Dry Creek nest fledged three young last year.

We have no evidence that human disturbance caused any of these nest failures, though monitors have observed people and their dogs hiking illegally through protected areas on the west side of the reservoir on numerous occasions. With the Dry Creek Osprey pair, we suspect that a young and inexperienced or infertile adult may have replaced one of the two previously successful adults in 2011. The current pair seems absolutely devoted to nesting—courting and bringing sticks and grass to the nest platform from early April through late July—they just don't seem to be able to produce any young. But the situation bears close monitoring, and we can only hope that the harriers and ospreys are more successful next year.

Continued on page 3

Inside:
Protecting Walker Ranch, page 2
Wintering Raptor Survey, page 2
Autumn Calendar, page 4

Protecting Walker Ranch: Sweet Success!

Sue Cass

In the Spring 2013 issue of your BCNA newsletter, President Peter Kleinman laid out, in great detail, BCNA's concerns regarding the Boulder County Parks and Open Space (BCPOS) staff proposal to include Meyers Gulch for future consideration of a regional multi-use trail in the Revised Walker Ranch Management Plan. By their own analysis, BCPOS staff recognized the important role Meyers Gulch plays as a major wildlife migration corridor for bear, mountain lions, bobcats, mule deer and elk. The varied and, more importantly, intact wildlife habitats and plant communities found in Meyers Gulch support over 50 species of breeding songbirds, as documented by BCNA's Ecosystem Stewardship program and Eco-steward Laura Osborn. Thank you, Laura! Why did BCPOS counter their own findings and the tenets of the Environmental Conservation Area (ECA) element of the Boulder County Comprehensive Plan (BCCP), wherein Meyers Gulch resides, with this recommendation? One can only surmise pressure from certain recreational groups played a part. It was time for a little environmental activism!

BCNA, as an organization, and many of our members, including Laura Osborn, wrote letters, attended public hearings and lobbied County staff and the Boulder County Commissioners, all in an effort to convince the County to reverse course on this particular recommendation. Interestingly, while ardently promoting the preservation of Meyers Gulch, many of our legion urged BCPOS to develop an environmentally sensitive route for a regional multi-use trail in the area and to do so in a timely fashion. Just not in Meyers Gulch!

We've been here before. We've done this before on occasions too numerous for some of us to recall, but not always with the highly satisfying outcome our "labor of love" bore this time. Your well-reasoned and well-researched arguments convinced the Parks and Open Space Advisory Committee (POSAC), at their May 23, 2013 meeting, to "advise" the County Commissioners not to include Meyers Gulch for future consideration as a regional multi-use trail in the Revised Walker Ranch Management Plan. That "advisement" morphed into the staff's final draft as presented to the County Commissioners on July 30, 2013 and, on that date, was cemented into the Walker Ranch Management Plan, at least until the next revision in twenty years or so. Stay tuned!

Wintering Raptor Survey

The 31st annual BCNA Wintering Raptor Survey will begin **October 15, 2013 and run through March 15, 2014**. If you would like to participate in this season's survey contact Sue Cass to sign up. The survey requires a commitment to drive one or more of seven routes in the eastern part of the county once each month for the five-month survey period. A training session for new volunteers will be held at **7:00 PM on Wednesday, October 2, 2013** at the Foothills Nature Center, 4201 North Broadway in Boulder. Protocol, methodology, forms and field identification will be reviewed and birders of all level are welcome. As always, previous volunteers are encouraged to attend to offer insight into their survey experience and to team up with new volunteers.

Sue Cass
Volunteer Coordinator,
BCNA Wintering Raptor Survey
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As Peter did in his letter to you in last spring, I want to encourage all of you to become more involved in your BCNA. As demonstrated by our efforts above, we can make a difference! Join us! Help us make it happen!

Sue Cass is Secretary for the Board of Directors of BCNA and a member of the Boulder County Parks and Open Space Advisory Committee.



Walker Ranch, photo by Steve Jones

Scary Year for Harriers, continued from page 1

One piece of good news was the documentation of four American Bittern nesting territories in the Dry Creek and Coot Lake wetlands. Gary Rabourn and Chuck Klomp observed seven bitterns flying over the Dry Creek wetlands one evening in early June-- a pretty startling site in arid Boulder County. Linda Andes-Georges, Joy Master, and I observed a pair of calling bitterns in the southeast corner of the Coot Lake marsh on 9 and 11 June.

Volunteers and professional ecologists documented a total of 114 bird species, including 82 potential nesting species, at Boulder Reservoir this spring and summer. Species of special concern or special interest included Northern Bobwhite, American White Pelican, Great Egret, White-faced Ibis, Wood Duck, Cinnamon Teal, Semipalmated Plover, Marsh Wren, Bobolink, Dickcissel (11 singing males!), and Orchard Oriole.

We're grateful for the dedicated work of all the Boulder Reservoir birds of special concern monitors. If you'd like to join us next year, please get in touch with me at (curlewsj@comcast.net) or Mary Malley, volunteer coordinator for the Boulder Parks and Recreation Department. Malley@m@bouldercolorado.gov.

Observers reporting during 2013: Linda Andes-Georges, Pat Bohin, Carol Dozier, Tim Flynn, Ben and Susan Foster, Steve Jones, Chuck Klomp, Liz Litkowski, Mary Malley, Joy Master, Nancy Ries Morrison, Kitty Noonan, Linda Palmer, Gary Rabourn, Peter and Gretchen Ridgeway, Wendy Stokes, Roger Walker, Linda Whitman, John Wold.

Autumn

*In the mountains after the new rain
The evening is cool. Soon it will be Autumn.
The bright moon shines between the pines.*

Wang Wei (Chinese poet)

Northern Harrier (aka Marsh Hawk)

Excerpts from the *Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas* (profile by Michael E. Carter, in Hugh, E. Kingery, editor, 1998, Colorado Bird Atlas Partnership and Colorado Division of Wildlife):

Who hasn't watched, spellbound, the foraging flights of this hawk, which is more like an owl than a hawk? Northern Harriers hunt and find their prey on the wing by listening with ears asymmetrically embedded in an owl-like face. Even more impressive than the foraging flights are the male's roller-coaster courtship flights and the aerial prey transfer between males and females. Paradoxically, nesting, roosting, and resting all take place on the ground, relegating this accomplished flyer to a life spent mostly afoot rather than aloft.

Males feed the females during incubation and brooding and provide food for the young through aerial prey transfers. The male initiates prey transfer after catching a prey item. He calls loudly to the female, swoops in near her, and drops the prey. As the prey tumbles through the air, it seems impossible that this non-falcon will ever catch it—but the female swoops up and catches the food in her talons.

Venturing too near a harrier nest poses real hazards. Both adults vigorously defend the nest area with low dives, and occasionally make contact with the intruder. The annoying raucous calling by both male and female compels one to leave the immediate area even without the strafing attacks. With the conspicuous prey transfers between male and female, feedings of the young can be easily observed.

Cooke (1897) listed the Northern Harrier as one of the most common hawks of the plains. Other hawks now substantially outnumber harriers on the plains (Red-tailed and Swainson's, also kestrels). Harriers declined in the 1970s due to DDT, as did most raptors, but they continue to decline due to habitat loss. In Colorado, loss of wetland habitats probably poses the greatest threat.

Save the Thought!**Planning Underway for 2014****Boulder County Ecosystem Symposium**

BCNA is working with Boulder County Audubon, the Colorado Native Plant Society, the University of Colorado-Boulder, Boulder County Parks and Open Space, and Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks to plan the 2014 Boulder County Ecosystem Symposium. While the date hasn't been set yet, expect to reserve a Saturday in March; activities will once again be held on the CU campus. This year's theme will involve threatened and endangered plants, animals, and habitats in and around Boulder County. If you have thoughts or suggestions for speakers or would like to help with the planning and organization, please contact Peter Kleinman (peterk21@gmail.com) or Megan Bowes (bowesm@bouldercolorado.gov).

The Theme of the 2014 Ecosystem Symposium will be

Endangered Species in Boulder County and their Management

With a focus on research being conducted in the County and the surrounding area.

Saturday, December 21, 7:00 to 11:00 am, Winter Solstice Sunrise Hike on East Boulder-White Rocks Trail, with Steve Jones

Each Winter Solstice morning for over 25 years, BCNA members and fellow travelers have gathered on the banks of Boulder Creek to welcome the first sunrise of the New Year. Many participants read poems or quotes to commemorate the occasion. Geese, ducks, and circling hawks provide accompaniment. Breakfast follows at the Golden Gate Café in Niwot. Dress warmly for this one-mile stroll down to the creek. It's the cold, mist, and hoarfrost that attracted us to this venue in the first place! No RSVP is necessary, but for more information, contact Steve Jones: curlewsj@comcast.net; 303-494-2468.

AUTUMN CALENDAR

Saturday, October 5th, 7:00 am to 2:00 pm, **BBQ for the Birds**, Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory's Annual Picnic. Celebrate fall colors, harvest, and migration with RMBO as they mark their 25th anniversary. Bird banding, bird walks, kids' activities, live raptors, live music, workshops, exhibitors, silent and live auctions, and a harvest-themed lunch. See website for more information: <http://www.rmbo.org/v3/>

Tuesday, October 22, 7:15 pm, Richard Reading, Vice President of Conservation at the Denver Zoo, **Zoo-generated Conservation**. Denver Zoo's Conservation Biology Department, established in 1996, works with communities, local governments, and various non-governmental organizations to develop innovative solutions to conservation issues around the world. See www.boulderaudubon.org for directions.

Saturday, November 9, 7:30 am to mid-afternoon, **Boulder County Fall Lakes Trip**. Join John Vanderpoel and Bill Kaempfer as we look for scoters, loons, gulls, late shorebirds and other waterbird migrants, including stops at Boulder Reservoir, Lagerman Res, McIntosh Res, Clark Res, Terry Res, Ish Res, Hamm Pond, Panama Res and Little Gaynor Lake. Meet at Niwot Park & Ride (CO 119 and Niwot Rd.). Bring lunch and water, cold weather clothing, sunscreen, sturdy walking shoes, etc. Contact Bill in advance at Kaempfer@Colorado.edu or 303-954-8998 to reserve a spot. Sponsored by Boulder County Audubon.

Sunday, December 15. The 72nd Boulder Christmas Bird Count. All are welcome, even those who think they know little about bird species. What birds are in town for the holidays? Help us find them and we'll help you find a compatible group. Contact count organizer Bill Schmoker (bill.schmoker@gmail.com) to join a group, adopt a vacant area or even sit home drinking Chardonnay and taking notes while you watch birds come and go at your feeder. Sponsored by Boulder County Audubon.

**Connect with nature:
nature-net-subscribe@yahoogroups.com**

On Looking

Ann Cooper

I like to think I'm an observant person—don't we all? At present, I am tuned in to insects. My focus is close, my obsession overwhelming. There's a lot to be said for developing a search image for the things of critical interest. Any birder will attest to that. So, I suspect, would any nervous hiker in cougar country!

At various times in my life I have concentrated on wildflowers, on fungi (during a six month time-out in damp Oregon), on New Zealand rock pool life. What I saw during my many and ever-changing phases depended a great deal on what I was looking for.

A recent book purchase reminded me how much what I see and hear hinges on my current interest, and how much I miss on every outing by being solidly single-minded. I guess the brain's ability to tune out non-essentials saves us from too much information, saves us from being overwhelmed by the extraneous. How else could we endure large gatherings if we couldn't tune out most conversations in order to concentrate on the one we are a part of? But this filtering makes us poorer as all around naturalists.

On Looking: Eleven Walks with Expert Eyes, by Alexandra Horowitz, explores the idea of really seeing. In the course of the book, she wanders Manhattan in the company of various people with different interests and agendas, and each time sees a totally different aspect of her neighborhood. It's an environment she believes she knows well, but with each excursion she sees a new facet of it. She's aware of one city when she ambles a few short blocks with her infant son and a completely different one when she trots several blocks following the nose of her dog. She hikes with an entomologist, an architect, a geologist, an illustrator, a wildlife scientist, a doctor aware of peoples' gaits as health indicators, and a blind friend. Each time, Horowitz sees her city newly through another person's honed perceptions.

I found this book an interesting and thoughtful read, one that has already subtly changed the way I see the trail. It also served as a memory jog of special times in my life I have seen a trail through someone else's eyes: whether tuning in to paw prints in concrete along the sidewalks of Boulder with a tracking expert, or marveling at the star-shaped perfection of plant hairs seen through a hand lens in the company of a passionate botanist.



Milkweed Bug, Photo by Ann Cooper

On Looking: Eleven Walks with Expert Eyes by Alexandra Horowitz was published this year by Scribner in New York.

***Kissed by a Fox and Other
Stories of Friendship in Nature***
Priscilla Stuckey (Counterpoint Press)

Congratulations to local author Priscilla Stuckey, recent winner of the WILLA Literary Award for Creative Nonfiction.

The award, named in honor of Pulitzer Prize winner Willa Cather, is awarded annually for outstanding literature featuring women's stories set in the West. Reviewer Graham Harvey says of the book: "We are offered stories of intertwined lives, encounters between members of different species, discoveries of intimacies with rocks, plants, galaxies, pets and wild things. We are invited to build an Earth-friendly culture by simply living respectfully among others. It is a compelling call."



Indian Peaks Bird Count

Fall 2012 to Breeding Season 2013

Dave Hallock

Highlights: During the 32nd year of the Indian Peaks Bird Count Common Redpolls made an appearance on the winter count (only the fifth time since 1982), though overall numbers were poor. The breeding count also had below average numbers, though greater than last year. First time finds for the breeding count were Sandhill Crane and Blue Grosbeak. Other good finds on the breeding count were Ovenbirds (in two locations) and White-winged Crossbills.

Participants: Linda Andes-Georges, Maureen Blackford, Barbara Bolton, Earl Bolton, Maggie Boswell, Alex Brown, Gillian Brown, Diane Brown, Peter Burke, George Coffee, Andy Cowell, Todd Deininger, Marty Dick, David Dowell, Libby Ellis, Virginia Evans, Mike Figgs, Ted Floyd, Peter Gent, Jean-Pierre Georges, Audrey Godell, Dave Hallock, Paula Hansley, Jim Holitza, Barbara Hoover, Steve Jones, Bill Kaempfer, Carol Kampert, Dave Kampert, Elena Klaver, Steve Koral, Nan Lederer, Topi Martinez, Gary Matthews, Lisa McCoy, Merle Miller, Sally Miller, Naseem Munshi, Carol Newman-Holitza, Christian Nunes, Joe Piombino, Pam Piombino, Mark Pscheid, Jeannie Reynolds, Cara Stiles, Jack St. John, Toni St. John, Lucy Stroock, Jeff Thompson, Mike Tupper, Tom VanZandt, Tom Wilberding, Judy Wright, George Young, and Patty Zishka. Hours: 595.

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HAVE YOU CHECKED THE BCNA WEBSITE LATELY?

Web-only features on miscellaneous topics.

- Boulder weather
- Rare and declining birds of Boulder County
- Prairie Dogs
- Colorado Wildlife management reports
- Boulder County Comprehensive Plan (1986)
- Books and Book reviews

CHECK IT OUT!

OTHER LOCAL NATURE PROGRAMS

Audubon Society, Boulder Chapter, www.boulderaudubon.org, programs and field trips
 Boulder County Parks and Open Space, www.bouldercounty.org, open space hikes and events calendar
 City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks, www.bouldercolorado.gov/osmp, nature hikes and programs
 Colorado Native Plant Society, www.conps.org, field trips, field studies, and workshops

BCNA 2013 Field Classes

By Carol Kampert

This was a wonderful year for BCNA classes, which were full of many enthusiastic participants. I participated in three of the nine classes offered: **Nature Drawing and Journaling** (Dale Ball, instructor), **Bird Song** (Steve Jones, instructor) and **Alpine Wildflowers** (Janice Harvey and Megan Bowes, instructors). They were all excellent. I wish I'd had time to take more of them. The instructors—experts in their fields—are wonderful in sharing their expertise through hands-on experiences in both the indoor and field sessions.

BCNA classes are more in-depth than field trips, usually consisting of two or three class sessions. During the introductory indoor session, which is usually on a weekday evening, participants often view slides or listen to recordings, receive written materials, species lists, and reading lists, and receive instructions on where to meet for field sessions.

During the field sessions—which are on weekends and usually last several hours—participants have the opportunity to explore a habitat on foot to observe (and/or listen to) the birds, mammals, insects, plants, rock formations, or other aspects of nature which are the focus of that class. Some field sessions are multi-day camping trips.



Alpine Wildflowers Class, Photo by Carol Kampert



Elephant Head Flowers, Photo by Carol Kampert

The BCNA Education Committee meets two to three times a year to decide on the classes to offer in coming years, in addition to other committee matters, such as promotion of classes, registration logistics, and recruitment of instructors. Some of our ideas for 2014 class topics are: ducks, bees and pollination, Front Range geology, Front Range birds, bat, dragonflies, large mammals, and insects. Ideas for 2015 classes are: birds in aspen habitats and crane ecology. Our next meeting is Oct. 6, 2013. We welcome any of your ideas for additional class offerings for 2014 and future years.

Please contact Carol Kampert at carolkampert@gmail.com or 303-499-3049, or Steve Jones at curlewsj@comcast.net or 303-494-2468 with your ideas for classes. Also, we are always looking for new people to join our committee, so let us know if you are interested. It's a great group of energetic, interesting, and committed folks.

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_____ 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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