

Boulder County Nature Association



"Our mission: To educate, inform, and inspire for the purpose of conserving and promoting resilient natural ecosystems in our region."

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On the Importance of Foothills Shrublands to Colorado Birds

Excerpts from an article by Jameson F. Chace, Alexander Cruz, and Heather Swanson*

Often overlooked in the northern, east slope of the Front Range, foothill shrub is squeezed between the expansive grasslands to the east and equally dramatic coniferous forests rising from the plains west to alpine tundra. Foothill shrub is highly variable across western North America in both structure and species composition, but all shrubland communities exist in rocky, xeric sites that lack perennial stream flow. Foothill shrublands are rare, comprising approximately one percent of the county at elevations ranging from 4,800 to 6,600 feet.

Along the Colorado Front Range north of Morrison (Jefferson County), foothill shrub communities generally consist of skunkbrush, mountain mahogany, chokecherry, wild plum, bitterbrush, and hawthorn. Despite the limited and patchy distribution of foothill shrub along the northern Front Range it is important to a variety of wildlife including ants, butterflies, reptiles, mammals, and birds. The avian species most commonly found in foothill shrublands are Black-billed Magpie, Black-headed Grosbeak, Virginia's Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Dark-eyed Junco (gray-headed form), Lazuli Bunting, Green-tailed Towhee, Spotted Towhee, and Brown-headed Cowbird. **

Very uncommon in the past and rare today in Boulder County are the Sage Thrasher and Canyon Towhee. However, birders taking time to carefully work through the foothill shrublands might be able to document the presence of these two rarities while also further documenting the expansion of the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher.

Specialists or species primarily confined to foothill shrub include Western Scrub-Jay, Virginia's Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Black-headed Grosbeak, Green-tailed Towhee, Spotted Towhee, and Brewer's Sparrow. These species tend to be insectivorous foliage gleaners or ground foragers, and therefore not especially adapted to foraging in adjacent grassland, the open understory of the ponderosa pine forest, or among the needle foliage of pine forests. The Western Scrub-Jay is one exception and may possibly be ecologically excluded from adjacent habitats by Steller's Jay in the ponderosa pine, and Blue Jay and Black-billed Magpie in riparian habitats. Foothill shrub provides migratory stopover habitat for a number of species, including the Sage Thrasher, as well as potential breeding habitat for some relatively rare species in Boulder County such as the Indigo Bunting and Blue Grosbeak.

(Continued on page 3)



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Megan Bowes

Greetings and happy fall to all. When Michael Delaney first approached me about the potential of my joining the Boulder County Nature Association Board of Directors many moons ago, I declined, saying I was busy with work, various native plant organizations and other volunteer activities. He tracked me down a year or two later and I finally agreed to run as an at-large board member. Five years later, I've been pleased to assist my fellow board members and many, many others with activities including the co-organization of a number of Ecosystem Symposiums, and I taught (and took!) educational classes and sat on the Research Grants committee. And this summer, when Michael had other personal obligations that took him away from BCNA, I became your interim President. The Board wholeheartedly thanks Michael for his *many* years of service to our association. I thank him for finally convincing me to serve a larger role with you all.

I became a Boulder County Parks and Open Space Volunteer Naturalist while a new CU Boulder undergraduate. I found BCNA's educational classes phenomenal, as they were immensely helpful to a Virginia transplant studying biology and related environmental studies. The lovely newsletter had terrific timely articles that I would regularly cut out and save, and the Ecosystem Symposium blew me away with great presentations about our regional ecology—and tasty lunch—all for free (especially helpful for a college student!). And I became a Winter Raptor surveyor because another member and BCPOS volunteer needed a partner; I had nothing to offer but young eyes to spot the birds but Mark taught me identification and habitat characteristics so that I can finally ID them myself now. I am awed by all this and much more that this organization does—all with dedicated and talented *volunteers*.

Please note that a number of board members' terms will expire this February at our Annual Meeting (more on the annual meeting in the next newsletter). The board has formed a search committee and luckily three members aren't yet term limited and so can run again—but that doesn't mean that you shouldn't consider nominating yourself or a friend for an officer or an at-large board position. We hope to soon post board job descriptions, organizational by-laws and potentially other policy-type documents for greater member understanding. In the meantime, please don't hesitate to contact me with your questions, any other thoughts and especially your board nominations! After a six year term, I'll be stepping down to pursue other things, but I can assure you these have been a fulfilling six years and

I am grateful to have gotten to know the individuals I have worked with. Consider how your service with BCNA might benefit both our ecological community *and* you . . .



Northern Saw-whet Owl by Annika Andersen, age 12
Water color pencil on sketch paper

About the artist: Annika is 12 years old and lives in Boulder County. She is a homeschooler who enjoys art and nature. She has been volunteering for Colorado Avian Research and Rehabilitation Institute since she was 8 by making various items (mostly baked goods and owl crafts) to sell and raise money for CARRI. She has some of her owl items featured at Simply Bulk in downtown Longmont. Her favorite bird is the Northern Saw-whet Owl. In honor of her contributions to local owl research and protection, Boulder County Audubon recently presented Annika with a Junior Conservation Activist Award.

(Shrublands, cont. from Page 1)

If we were to include all the species that utilize foothill shrub in Boulder County in part of their breeding home range the list would easily exceed 50 species. This combination of species is a unique assemblage in Boulder County and representative of foothill shrub communities along the Front Range from Morrison north to just or the Colorado/Wyoming border.

The foothill shrub of Boulder County is an urban corridor and under threat of residential development, or when protected often is utilized for recreation trails. A relatively rare vegetation type along the Front Range of Colorado with a unique assemblage of species deserves greater study and further protection from both residential and recreational development.

Much of the intact shrubland habitat within Boulder County that has been protected from residential development is publicly owned by the USDA Forest Service, at higher elevations, and by the County and City of Boulder, at lower elevations. Shrubland habitats and the bird communities within them are focal areas for conservation by these agencies. The importance of these small, isolated habitats is highlighted by the Boulder County Comprehensive Plan that includes areas of shrubland in several of the designated critical wildlife habitats. In addition, several shrubland bird species including Indigo Bunting, Lazuli Bunting, Western Scrub-Jay, Sage Thrasher, Virginia's Warbler and Brewer's Sparrow are included as species of special concern.

On county and municipal open space lands, with the threat of development removed, the largest remaining threats to these habitats come from fragmentation due to recreational development and loss of habitat through encroachment of conifer forests due to fire suppression. Because of the small, patchy nature of these habitats, they are particularly susceptible to reduction in patch size due to trail development. As a result, in planning for recreational use, land managers work to avoid placing trails through these shrub patches whenever possible. City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks has included the guild of shrub-nesting birds as a conservation target in recent trails planning processes, striving to maintain and conserve the shrubland habitat. In addition, there is an increased effort to increase public education and interpretive signage explaining the importance of these habitats and the species that live within them. Where trail placement is not able to avoid shrub habitat patches, trails near, but not within, shrub patches allow an opportunity for users to observe and better understand this rare and important habitat and the diverse bird community that lives there. Because of high development pressure on private land, conservation of this unique and sensitive habitat and associated bird community along the northern Front Range will largely rely on public land management agencies and the support of the public for these efforts.

*Published in *Colorado Birds*, The Colorado Field Ornithologists' Quarterly, Vol. 50, No. 3, summer 2016. Reprinted with permission of the publisher. Latin names and references have been omitted for ease of reading.

**Breeding raptors, nighthawks, swifts, and swallows were removed from analysis because the home range size of these far-ranging birds exceeds the patchy distribution of shrubland habitat, even though this community may provide an important habitat component for some species.



Western Scrub-Jay
by Gerhard Assenmacher
From BoulderAudubon.org



Mountain Mahogany



Green-tailed Towhee
by Gerhard Assenmacher
From BoulderAudubon.org

2016 INDIAN PEAKS BIRD COUNT SUMMARY

Dave Hallock

This was the 35th year for the Indian Peaks Bird Count. The breeding count had below average numbers. This is the fifth breeding count in a row where the total numbers have been below average. The last extended below average stretch was 1997-2001. The period from 2002-2011 saw above average numbers. Eighteen American Three-toed Woodpeckers were observed, which is an all-time high for the count. Three-toeds have shifted their locations from lodgepole pine forests, where the mountain pine beetle is back in endemic levels, to the subalpine forests where Engelmann spruce and balsam fir beetles are on the rise. The warbler community within the montane willow carrs of the count area has changed over time. In the 1980s and early 90s Wilson's Warbler was the most common warbler. Now, Yellow Warbler is the most common, Common Yellowthroats appear to be increasing, and Wilson's Warblers have declined.



Three-toed Woodpecker
By Bill Schmoker

Several species have seen consistent increases and decreases since the start of the count. Green-winged Teal and Evening Grosbeak have declined in the count area. They also appear to be declining in Colorado, based on information comparing Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas II with Atlas I. Wild Turkeys appear to be expanding their range upward with more sightings west of the Peak-to-Peak Highway.

A total of 486 volunteer hours were spent on the count this past year. Participants included Linda Andes-Georges, Maureen Blackford, Barbara Bolton, Earl Bolton, Alex Brown, Gillian Brown, Diane Brown, Peter Burke, George Coffee, Todd Deininger, Marty Dick, David Dowell, Virginia Evans, Fern Ford,

Mike Figgs, Laura Fisher, Jean-Pierre Georges, Dave Hallock, Paula Hansley, Jim Holitza, Steve Jones, Bill Kaempfer, Luke Lucas, Greg Massey, Steve Koral, Nan Lederer, Lisa McCoy, Merle Miller, Sally Miller, Naseem Munshi, Carol Newman-Holitza, Cheri Phillips, Mark Pscheid, Susan Spaulding, Cara Stiles, Lucy Stroock, Mike Tupper, John Vanderpoel, Maribel Williams, and Patty Zishka.

**Update on Black-footed Ferrets
Reintroduction at Rocky Mountain Arsenal**

As a followup to the article in the BCNA Winter 2016 newsletter, we were very excited to see this on the RMA's Facebook page on September 14, 2016:

Refuge staff and agency veterinarians are conducting black-footed ferret surveys. Over the past 2 nights they've captured 17 ferrets and 7 are kits that were born at the Refuge! Surveys will continue for 6 more nights. Kits are implanted with a identification chip and vaccinated for canine distemper, plague, and rabies and released.

**Ron Stewart, Director of Boulder County
Parks and Open Space Department, Retires**

Ron Stewart retired this year after serving as Boulder County Commissioner from 1984 until 1998 when he was appointed Director of BCPOS. While a member of the Parks and Open Space Advisory Commission from 1978 to 1984, Ron, along with other community activists, developed the Boulder County Comprehensive Plan that was adopted in 1978.

Ron's unique position as County Commissioner and then Open Space Director provided the platform to develop and implement a broad set of land conservation tools. Ron would say that working with diverse people and interests in collaboration is the foundation of his success, perhaps like playing in a band. But a band needs a score and a director, and Ron has filled all those roles. Ron Stewart's legacy will always be one of conservation and preservation, foresight, and cooperation. He has truly left his mark on Boulder County. (Quoted from "Ron Stewart: Legacy of a Visionary Leader" by Tina Nielsen, in "Images," the newsletter of the Boulder County Parks and Open Space Department. See <https://bouldercountyopenspace.org/i/news/ron-stewart-visionary-leader/> for the entire article.)

BURROWING OWL SURVEY 2016

Sue Cass



The 2016 BCPOS/BCAS Burrowing Owl Survey, an open-ended study of Burrowing Owl populations in the county, ended with results we have seen repeated every year since the survey began in the spring of 2008. Conducted primarily on Boulder County Parks and Open Space (BCPOS) and City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) properties, the two governmental organizations have different approaches to this admittedly imposing task and perhaps for good reason. BCPOS monitors for Burrowing Owls on both public and leased agricultural properties that span more than 100,000 acres and has a long history of recruiting volunteer "Citizen Scientists" to support efforts that would be cost prohibitive and nearly impossible to execute with paid staff, seasonal or otherwise. OSMP chooses to monitor with staff only.

A Boulder County Avian Species of Special Concern, Burrowing Owl numbers remain perilously low, too low to guarantee a viable population despite efforts to protect them on large swaths of open space where limited suitable nesting habitat persists. As in the past several years on the same BCPOS property, a single nesting pair successfully reared and fledged a brood of four young, an indicator of strong nest site fidelity and well below the average clutch size of 7 to 9 eggs for this species. As I write in mid-September, the four juveniles remain on their natal territory weeks after their parents headed south. Instinct and a swift kick in the rear from an approaching cold front should get the youngsters moving! The simple, yet perilous task of migration only adds to the certainty that 75% or more of the young owls will not survive to return to their natal areas to breed, which also contributes to the reason Boulder County remains a "sink" for Burrowing Owls. Even with the four nests

that fledged twelve young on OSMP properties, we simply don't have enough nesting pairs rearing enough young to provide a stable population . . . yet!

Undeterred, both the City and County will continue to monitor these amazing little owls and, in so doing, will explore the complex limiting factors that are stifling their expansion in Boulder County. This worthy effort was made possible this year by the following dedicated volunteers: Linda Andes-Georges, Dale Ball, Bill Bolduc, Kerrie Bryan, Sue and Alan Cass, Karen Clark, Sue Coffee, Jean Crawford, Carol Cushman, Michael Cutter, Reneé Haip, Brinda Henley, Elaine Hill, Joan Jamison, Carol Kampert, Elena Klaver, Peter Kleinman, Lark Latch, Kristen Laubach, Sandra Laursen, Viki Lawrence, Maureen Lawry, Joe Lupfer, Petrea Mah, Carol McCasland, Janet McLachlan, Joe and Beccy Pem, Connie Redak, Jamie Simo, Joy Sommerer, Mary Stuber, Joel Such, Mort and Lysa Wegman-French, Cal Whitehall, Maikel and Susan Wise and Howard Witkin. Thank you!

In August, BCNA lost a great friend and longtime supporter when Calvin "Cal" Whitehall passed away in Honduras while on vacation with his family. Cal was an avid photographer who loved studying White-tailed Ptarmigan on the Rocky Mountain tundra and Burrowing Owls on the North American Great Plains. As good-natured as a naturalist can be, Cal was a volunteer for the BCPOS/BCNA Burrowing Owl Survey for several years. We send love and comfort to his family and to his Burrowing Owl Survey partner Connie Redak.

30TH ANNUAL WINTER SOLSTICE SUNRISE HIKE

Steve Jones, leader. Wed., December 21, 2016, 7:00 am. Free: Limited to 25, register: curlwsj@comcast.net This homage to the lengthening days of the Winter Solstice will meet at the North Teller/White Rocks Trail on the south side of Valmont, between 75th and 95th Streets. It is traditional to bring prose, poems, or serene thoughts to share in heartfelt fellowship. Share the magic of waterfowl in breeding plumages and soaring raptors, often including a lovely pair of Great Horned Owls. Breakfast at the Garden Gate Café in Niwot follows at 9:00 am. When you register with Steve, please let him know if you plan on joining the group for breakfast.

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

ANNUAL WINTERING RAPTOR SURVEY

Training for New Volunteers
October 7, 2016

The Boulder County Nature Association 2016-2017 Wintering Raptor Survey season will begin October 15, 2016 and run until March 15, 2017 and we'd like you to join us! Surveyors who sign on agree to drive one or more of seven routes in the eastern part of the county at least once a month during the five month season and report all raptors observed according to survey protocol. Training for new volunteers will take place at 7:00 PM on Friday, October 7, 2016 in the Prairie Room at the Boulder County Parks and Open Space offices at 5201 St. Vrain Road in Longmont. Please contact me if you would like to join this important long-running, open-ended survey of wintering raptors in Boulder County or if you have questions. For more information go to www.bcna.org and click on Activities/Winter Raptor Survey.



Ferruginous Hawk
by Carol McCasland

Sue Cass, Coordinator, BCNA Wintering Raptor Survey, 1524 Henry Court, Longmont, CO 80501-2585, 720-684-6922 (home), 303-641-4809 (cell), suecass@comcast.net

Sense of Place

Why are we not using our sense of place as an important criterion in making decisions about these lands that belong to all of us? We know intuitively that the ability to find peace, meaning, and solitude in the natural world replenishes our souls in a way that little else can. Who are we, as managers of public lands, to deny that and to justify our ignorance behind a veil of numbers? Who are we to value economy over our emotional and spiritual connection to our lands?

Gloria Flora, former Forest Supervisor, Lewis and Clark National Forest, Montana, in her essay, "Standing in Relationship to Myself and Nature"

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--**Avian Species of Special Concern**

Dave Hallock, Coordinator eldoradh@rmi.net

Steve Jones, Coordinator curlwsj@comcast.net

--**Burrowing Owls Survey**

Sue Cass, Coordinator 720-684-6922

--**Butterfly Surveys**

Jan Chu, Coordinator 2chuhouse2@gmail.com

--**Ecosystem Stewardship Project**

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--**Indian Peaks Bird Count**

Dave Hallock, Coordinator eldoradh@rmi.net

Bill Kaempfer, Coordinator 303-954-8998

--**Wintering Raptor Survey**

Sue Cass, Coordinator 720-684-6922

OUTREACH

--**Facebook Moderator and BCNA Buzz Editor**

Cindy Maynard, 720-203-8211 cmaynardre@gmail.com

--**Membership Committee**

Cindy Maynard, Chair, 720-203-8211

cmaynardre@gmail.com

--**Nature Net Moderator**

Scott Severs, scottesevers@gmail.com

--**Newsletter**

Dianne Andrews (content editor) dandrews@boulder.net

Carol McCasland (layout) 303-635-6433

--**Website and Support for Newsletter**

Claudia Van Wie 303-494-2250, webmaster@bcna.org

George Oetzel 303-543-3712

REUSE VERSUS COMPOSTING

Laurie Dameron

The photo of a garbage truck and tons of garbage bags was taken outside of a Starbucks in Manhattan. I wish I had a better photo; you wouldn't believe how many garbage bags there were! I went in and I asked the manager, "How often do you get your trash picked up?" and he said, "Oh, every day it's like that."

He then estimated that his store uses about 2,000 coffee cups (plastic-coated, non-recyclable) every day. When I returned home to Boulder, Colorado, I called the Starbucks corporate office and they told me there are 171 Starbucks in Manhattan alone. I exclaimed, "Are you sure? 171?" and they assured me that was correct. So I'm being conservative by multiplying 1,500 cups per store per day by 171 to reach 256,500 cups – that's a quarter of a million cups every single day just in a 23 square mile area! That's BILLIONS of cups in the world that go to the landfill EVERYDAY!"



When I was traveling in 2010 by bus on the South Island of New Zealand we stopped at a lot of cafes. They serve their coffee, tea and food in real cups and plates. When I told them what we do in America they replied, "Why, that's preposterous!!!" I think it's not just preposterous, it's insanity!

I don't mean to pick on Starbucks, as there are a lot of things I like about them. They give away their used coffee grinds to any customer who requests it and it's great for their gardens. A few years ago they introduced a reusable cup for only a buck and they give you ten cents off every time you reuse it.

There are a lot of coffee shops that serve their coffee in compostable cups and I'm sure that most of them end up in the trash. A lot of folks are mistaken in thinking that if it's biodegradable it's okay to send to the landfill. But the whole purpose of composting is to keep it out of the landfills, as organic and compostable materials create methane gas which is over 20 times more potent than CO2!

Most coffee places, including Starbucks, have real cups and glasses. So if you're getting your coffee "for here" you can ask for a real cup. I keep a ceramic mug in my car, along with my reusable shopping bags and small containers for leftovers at restaurants. I get ten cents off each time I use my own cup. If I need it "to go" I have a stainless steel mug that I use.

Personally, I feel that compostable products are just another way of being "disposable". I have wanted to research how much energy and resources it takes to make all this compostable stuff. Maybe I will have some time in the coming months for that topic. I mean, it's good when it's needed, but again "reduce and reuse" is SO much more important!

YOU ARE A PART OF THE SOLUTION!

Contact Laurie at: WindchimeL@aol.com or visit www.LaurieDameron.com Please visit and LIKE <https://www.facebook.com/WhatCanIDoSpaceshipEarth>

Migration

Standing there on the ground, you can feel the land filling up, feel something physical rising in it under the influence of light, an embrace or exaltation. Watching the animals come and go, and feeling the land swell up to meet them and then feeling it grow still at their departure, I came to think of the migrations as breath, as the land breathing. In spring a great inhalation of light and animals. The long-bated breath of summer. And an exhalation that propelled them all south in the fall.

Barry Lopez, in "Arctic Dreams"

Support the Boulder County Nature Association

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Type of Membership:

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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:
P.O. Box 493, Boulder, CO 80306.

Boulder County Nature Association
P.O. Box 493
Boulder, CO 80306