

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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Ecosystem Symposium Addresses "Fractured Landscapes"

This year's Boulder County Ecosystem Symposium, scheduled for Saturday, April 4, at the University of Colorado Ramaley Auditorium, investigates impacts of habitat fragmentation on plants and wildlife. The symposium is free and open to all. Ramaley Auditorium is located in the Ecology and Conservation Biology Department building opposite the main (east) entrance to Norlin Library. Public parking (\$3 all day) is available in the recreation center lot, just north of the library, and in the parking structure on Euclid just east of the University Memorial Center. The SKIP bus stops at Broadway and University, just a quarter-mile from the auditorium.

Symposium Schedule

8:30: Free registration and coffee

9:00: Welcome, Jeff Mitton, University of Colorado Ecology and Evolutionary Biology

9:10: Tim Seastedt, University of Colorado Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. "Fractured landscapes facilitate the emergence of novel ecosystems."

9:45: Pieter Johnson, University of Colorado Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. "Unraveling the causes of

amphibian population declines in Colorado."

10:20: Break

10:45: Will Keeley, Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks. "Ferruginous Hawk diet and behavior in two grasslands in New Mexico with differing anthropogenic alteration."

11:20: César Nufio, University of Colorado Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. "The effects of climate change on the grasshoppers of the Rocky Mountains of Colorado."

11:55: Complimentary buffet lunch

1:00: Connor Bailey, Center for Native Ecosystems. "Linkage models in integrative conservation planning."

1:35: Heather Swanson, Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks. "Lions and prions and deer demise: chronic wasting disease in the Table Mesa area south of Boulder."

2:10: Steve Jones, Linda Andes-Georges, and Paula Hansley, Boulder County Nature Association and Boulder County Audubon. "Riparian renaissance at Coal Creek: wildlife response to fencing and buffering of a prairie stream corridor."

2:45: Closing remarks, Jan Carnes, Boulder County Nature Association

Sponsored by: Boulder County Nature Association, Boulder County Audubon Society, Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks, Boulder County Parks and Open Space, Colorado Native Plant Society, University of Colorado

www.bcna.org
The online home of
Boulder County Nature Association

Sharp-tailed Grouse photo by Steve Jones



Viewing the Dance of the Ages

"They (prairie grouse) taught us how to dance... Their time is so perfect that even if it were performed in silence, it would be wonderful to look at. But the marvelous thing is that every bird makes a sound in his throat that is something like the double beat of a tom-tom."

-Luther Standing Bear, *My Indian Boyhood*

The first time I saw sharp-tailed grouse dancing on a hilltop at Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge, I felt as if I'd been transported back in time. The dancing seemed ancient and atavistic, recalling a wild prairie landscape known only to memory.

From my post in a frigid photographic blind, I watched the males spread their wings and careen across the lek like windup toys, occasionally facing off and leaping into the air. Their eerie, popping vocalizations and the machine-gun-like rattle of their quills and stomping feet blended with the whine of the dawn wind and the rustling of the prairie grasses. As a lone meadowlark warbled from his perch on top of the blind, the sun sneaked up above the eastern horizon, bathing the dancing grouse in amber light. Twenty years later, I still feel the warmth of that moment.

Here's how Jan Hambrick, of Erie-based Elegant Adventures, describes the mating ritual of greater prairie-chickens near Wray, Colorado:

Shortly after arriving on the lek, and long before the

sun even considers making an appearance, we hear an eerie 'hovering-spaceship' sound. The male prairie chickens have arrived. We can hear them but we can't see them. It's that dark. And cold. Huddled under blankets, clad in down parkas and ski pants, our hands wrapped in mittens and our heads covered with all manner of cap, hat or sou'wester, we anxious, curious lek infiltrators strain our eyes ahead.

At last, it's happening. Dim shapes begin to emerge from the darkness as dawn's fresh light seeps like warm honey onto the lek. We see forty to sixty prairie chickens, male and female. They don't disappoint. The males dance with the abandon that conveys innate intention. Mesmerized and awed at the spectacle they share, the cold temperatures forgotten, we sit transfixed by the simple splendor of the next generation of Greater Prairie Chickens in the making.

Then there are the greater sage grouse, Gunnison's sage grouse, and lesser prairie-chicken, each with its own distinctive and surreal display. I try to spend at least one morning with one or more species each spring. Fortunately, there are lots of opportunities to do this, ranging from remote blinds at national wildlife refuges to guided and catered expeditions:

Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge, 28 miles north of Oshkosh, Nebraska. Sharp-tailed grouse dance from early April through early May. A three-person photographic blind can be reserved free of charge. You must arrive at least an hour before sunrise, and no camping is permitted within the refuge. You can stay at the Shady Rest motel in

(Continued on page 3)

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Oshkosh or camp at Lake McConaghy. <http://www.fws.gov/crescentlake/>

Elegant Adventures offers guided trips to see dancing greater prairie-chickens and greater sage grouse. They also offer a sandhill crane trip to Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge. 970-214-7409; www.elegantadventuretours.com.

Greater Prairie-Chicken Leks near Wray, Colorado.

The Colorado Division of Wildlife, in conjunction with the local agencies and private landowners, offers package tours to see dancing prairie-chickens. Mid-April through early-May is usually best. 970-332-5063; <http://www.colorado.com/Articles.aspx?aid=42123>.

Greater Sage-Grouse Mating Ritual Tour. The Colorado Division of Wildlife sponsors this tour to North Park in mid-April. Visit the Colorado Birding Society website for information: <http://home.att.net/~birdertoo/grouse.htm>

Lesser Prairie-Chicken Lek, Comanche National Grassland. Sad to report that the public viewing blind at Comanche has been closed the last two years due to lack of strutting activity on the main lek. Lesser prairie-chickens have been stressed first by drought, then by the catastrophic snows of 2007. Visit the Comanche website for updated information. Nearby Elkhart, Kansas and Cimarron National Grassland may have opportunities for viewing these species.

Sandhills Motel, in Mullen, Nebraska, conducts small schoolbus tours to a private lek where sharp-tailed grouse and greater prairie-chickens dance. Expect close-up views of 12-20 grouse dancing at dawn. 308-546-2206; <http://sandhillsmotel.com/motel/default.htm>

Valentine National Wildlife Refuge, south of Valentine, Nebraska. Greater prairie-chickens and sharp-tailed grouse sometimes dance on the same lek, where a free photographic blind can be reserved. A peaceful campground and a comfortable bed and breakfast are located nearby. <http://www.fws.gov/valentine/>

- Steve Jones

BCNA Spring Events Schedule

Saturday, April 4, 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.: Boulder County Ecosystem Symposium, "Fractured Landscapes." Free. University of Colorado Ramaley Auditorium (in the biology building opposite the Norlin Library main entrance). See details on page 1.

Saturday, April 25, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. *Volunteer training for Boulder Reservoir birds of special concern monitoring.* Help conserve nesting American bitterns, burrowing owls, northern harriers, and osprey. Two hours per month, April-July. Contact Mary Malley, with Boulder Parks and Recreation, for details: malley@m@bouldercolorado.gov.

Sunday, April 26, 7:30-11 a.m. *Wildlife inventory in Chapman Canyon.* Leaders: Petrea Mah and Steve Jones (303-494-2468; curlwsj@comcast.net). Join the stewardship group for a casual stroll down Chapman Drive to look for forest birds and mammals. Bring something to share for a potluck picnic brunch somewhere down the canyon. It's a gentle 3 miles round-trip. Meet at the Flagstaff Summit turnoff (on the right 3.5 miles up Flagstaff Mountain Road) at 7:30.

Saturday, May 9, 7 a.m. to noon. *International Migratory Bird Day celebration at Walden Ponds.* Visit the Boulder County Audubon website for details: www.boulderaudubon.org.

Saturday, May 16, 7-10 a.m. *Birds of tallgrass prairies and cottonwood woodlands.* Leaders: Janet McLachlan and Steve Jones (303-494-2468; curlwsj@comcast.net). Ecostewards Janet and Steve will lead a leisurely walk along the South Boulder Creek Trail to look for and listen to summer resident birds, including western kingbird, western bluebird, lark sparrow, grasshopper sparrow, and blue grosbeak. Meet at the South Boulder Creek Trail west trailhead, just west of Broadway 0.5 miles north of Eldorado Springs Drive.

Saturday, July 11, 6-10 a.m. *Breeding Bird Atlas Lyons blockbusting party.* Leaders: Maggie Boswell and Steve Jones (303-494-2468; curlwsj@comcast.net). Help complete the Lyons block by observing nesting behaviors of foothills and grassland birds. Meet at the Heil Ranch open space main parking area off Left Hand Canyon Drive.

BCNA 2008 Volunteer Projects Summary

More than 200 volunteers contributed at least 3000 hours to BCNA projects during 2008. If you'd like to join one of these efforts, contact the listed coordinator. No prior experience is required. We do not have room to list all the volunteers, but thank you to all for your contributions to the nature of Boulder County!

Allegra Collister Preserve Bird Banding. We caught our first northern pygmy-owl, which was quite a thrill. Last fall we caught our first northern saw-whet owl. Can a boreal be far behind? Yes. Usually Wilson's warblers dominate early fall banding, but 2008 did not measure up to previous years, with a mere 55 banded (210 in 2007, 148 in 2006). On the other hand we banded a record number of American tree sparrows. They arrived early and we banded a bit later than our norm. 7 volunteers, 400+ hours. Maggie Boswell (303-684-0369; picab@yahoo.com).

Avian Species of Special Concern Monitoring. We received more than 20 reports from individuals monitoring potential nest sites of birds of special concern. American bitterns nested in at least five locations, and green herons exhibited territorial behavior at Sawhill and Walden Ponds. A new great blue heronry appeared along Boulder Creek just west of Walden. Seven burrowing owl nests, which fledged at least 20 young, was the largest number reported in Boulder County in more than 20 years. We now know of six recently active long-eared owl nest sites, another 20-year high. Five bald eagle nests fledged 6 young, and at least 10 osprey pairs nested in the county. Two northern harrier nests in the wetlands west of Boulder Reservoir failed. There have been 8 consecutive nest failures there during the past 4 years. 40 volunteers, 500 hours. Steve Jones (303-494-2468; curlewsj@comcast.net).

Cliff-nesting Raptors: While most of the monitoring has been assumed by local agencies, Nan Lederer and Mike Figgs continue to track nesting success from the Wyoming border to southern Jefferson County. 2008 nesting success of cliff-nesting raptors in the three-county study area was high, especially in Boulder County where numbers of fledged golden eagles and prairie falcons matched their all-time highs. Peregrine falcon production was moderate. 20 hours.

Coal Creek Riparian Renaissance, with Boulder County Audubon. We completed our 11th year of monitoring bird populations inside the six-mile-long

Coal Creek grazing and recreation enclosure south of Boulder. Numbers of shrub-nesting, cavity-nesting, and deciduous canopy-nesting birds have more than doubled since fencing was completed in December 1999. Elk continue to graze sporadically within the study area, and bald eagles have nested successfully for three consecutive years. Hooded warbler and bobolink were new finds for the counts, bringing the total observed to 157 species. 10 volunteers, 200 hours.

Ecosystem Stewardship. We received reports from 23 of 27 adopted areas. Several stewards observed mountain lions and black bears. Other interesting mammals reported included mink, short-tailed weasel, bobcat, and white-tailed deer. Western and mountain bluebirds continue to expand throughout the county, and blue grosbeaks were observed in 8 adopted areas. Stewards reported nesting activity for 18 raptor species, including 6 owls. 40 volunteers, 500 hours. Steve Jones (303-494-2468; curlewsj@comcast.net)

Field Ecology Classes. During 2008 BCNA offered several new and very successful field classes, some taught by instructors new to BCNA: Spotting Sparrows (Scott Severs and Paula Hansley), Bird Sketching (Susie Mottashed), Exploring Colorado Hummingbirds (Steve Bouricius) and Pika Encounter (Chris Ray). Ideas for new class topics are always appreciated by the Education Committee. We were delighted to welcome Evelyn Leigh as a new member on the committee in 2008. Her extensive writing, editing and layout skills have been invaluable in the production of BCNA's field class schedules. 10 volunteers, 300 hours. Carol Kampert (303-499-3049; kampert@comcast.net)

Indian Peaks Bird Counts. These high-altitude, four-season bird counts completed their 27th year. The cold and wet spring seemed to set the tone for the spring count as well as for the areas west of the Peak-to-Peak Highway on the summer count, as overall numbers were down. But there were still some good finds. Sandhill cranes were observed for the first time on the spring count. New finds on the breeding count included wild turkey, black-chinned hummingbird, white-faced ibis, bufflehead, and Eurasian collared-dove, which nested near Nederland.. Wild turkey also showed up for the first time on the winter count. Its recent occurrence west of the Peak-to-Peak Highway may be a sign of global warming. 45 volunteers, 455 hours. Dave Hallock (eldoradh@rmi.net)

Publications. Our "Dawn Chorus in the Colorado Rockies" CD has sold 450 copies, and we've sold out

the original printing (870 copies) of *Owls of Boulder County*. We are planning several new publications during the next couple of years: a cliff-nesting raptor summary, an update of the Boulder County avian species of special concern list, a 25-year winter raptor survey summary, a butterfly booklet or checklist, and a 25-year Indian Peaks Bird Count summary. 10 volunteers, 100 hours.

Wintering Raptor Survey. Numbers of wintering ferruginous and rough-legged hawks remained very low this season, but it was a good year for voles, along with their frequent predators, northern harrier and American kestrel. A short-eared owl was seen at Boulder Valley Ranch on January 31 and February 1. This was our 26th year of the survey, and we are preparing a publication. 50 volunteers, 500 hours. Sue Cass (suecass@comcast.net).

Raptor Survey Volunteers:

- Maggie Boswell
- DeAnna Williams
- Jim and Darleen Eide
- Gary Stevens and Nan Wilson
- George and Marti Oetzel
- John and Jan Carnes
- Michael and Jean Delaney
- Sue and Alan Cass
- Jim McKee
- Chris and Deb Abrahamson
- Bev Baker
- Sallie Greenwood
- Joan Wolbier
- Chuck Hundertmark
- Chris Petrizzo
- Bill and Becky Eeds
- Megan Bowes
- Billy Schweiger
- George and Patrea Mah
- Mark and Sue Ponsor
- Mark Pscheid
- Steve Jones
- Ron Butler
- Mort and Lysa Wegman-French
- Cyndy Johnson
- Joe and Becky Pem
- Tom and Tineke Van Zandt
- George Coffee
- George Young
- Fern Ford
- A.D. Chesley and Paul Culnan
- Jean Sobolik
- Cheryl Froelich

BCNA Board of Directors

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- Vice President.....Kim Graber 303-494-7971
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- A.D. Chesley 303-938-8150
- Carol Kampert 303-499-3049
- Peter Kleinman 303-554-5320
- Mort Wegman-French 303-543-0150

Committees and Contacts

- Avian Species of Special Concern:*
Dave Hallock (dheldora@rmi.net) and
Steve Jones (stephen.jones@earthlink.net)
- Ecosystem Stewardship:*
Steve Jones (303-494-2468)
- *Education:*
Carol Kampert (303-499-3049)
- *Indian Peaks Bird Counts:*
Dave Hallock (303-258-3672) and
Bill Kaempfer (303-954-8998)
- *Membership*
A.D. Chesley (303-938-8150)
- *Newsletter*
Steve Jones, writer (303-494-2468)
Scott Severs, layout (303-684-6430)
and
George Oetzel, support (303-543-3712)
- *Publications:*
Steve Jones (303-494-2468)
- Research Grants:*
Michael Delaney (303-494-8583)
- State and Regional Wildlife Issues:*
Peter Kleinman (303-554-5320) and
Jim McKee (303-651-2414)
- Website:*
George Oetzel (303-543-3712)
- Wintering Raptor Survey:*
Sue Cass (303-494-5345) and
Jim McKee (303-651-2414)

Penstemon species photo by Scott Severs



Wanted: Forest Crew Leaders

Get into the backcountry! Boulder County Parks and Open Space is recruiting volunteers to lead small groups at forest restoration projects to help maintain healthy tree density and diversity, while improving wildlife habitat for birds and mammals. Your efforts will also reduce wildland fire hazards and prepare areas for prescribed burns. Crew leaders must be 18 years or older, be able to attend a training session on Saturday April 11, from 9:00-2:30, and commit to leading three forestry projects a year. For an application and more information, please contact Matt Bruce at 303-678-6216 or mbruce@bouldercounty.org. Application deadline is April 5.

Seed Collection Crew Leader Training
Parks and Open Space is partnering with Wildlands Restoration Volunteers to train volunteers to lead native seed collection projects. Seed collected on Open Space is well adapted to local soils and climate, and is utilized in future ecological restoration projects. Volunteers who would like to become crew leaders must attend training on Saturday, June 13 from 8:30 to 2:30. For an application and more information, please contact Erica Christensen at 303-678-6200 or echristensen@bouldercounty.org. Application deadline is Wednesday June 7.

Park Patrollers Wanted!

Park Hosts have lots of opportunities to make a difference while patrolling some of Boulder County's premier open spaces. Volunteer Park hosts provide park visitors with information about the cultural and natural history of parks, recreational opportunities, facilities, and regulations. An important part of the department's field staff, park hosts keep visitors updated about current resource management issues and answer questions about the parks. Volunteers must be friendly, approachable, and have a general knowledge of Boulder County Open Space. Training is 8:30am to 3:30pm, April 25th and May 2nd in Longmont. For more information and an application, contact Michael Bauer at mbauer@bouldercounty.org or 303-678-6219.

International Migratory Bird Day
May 9, 2009
www.birdday.org

**International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD)**

May 9, 7:30-10:30am

The IMBD Theme this year is "Birds in Culture" to emphasize the importance of birds to the human condition. Join the Wild Bird Center Staff and the Boulder Bird Club for a celebration of birds at Walden Ponds Open Space. We will have walks leaving the Cottonwood Marsh Picnic Shelter about every hour, plus we will be conducting a "big sit" throughout the morning. Please drop by to talk and watch birds, have a treat and some shade coffee, buy an IMBD t-shirt, or go on a bird walk. Call the Wild Bird Center at 303-442-1322 for more information about this event or go to the IMBD ([link to birdday.org](http://link.to.birdday.org)) web site to find out more about the significance of IMBD.

IMBD Dawn Chorus Walk

May 10, 5:30-8:00am

Go for an early bird walk before IMBD with Wild Bird Center Staffer Marlene Bruning. Marlene has been leading this walk before IMBD for many years. Birding in May is too great not to go out early one morning. Come listen to the dawn chorus and watch the morning unfold! Meet at the Walden Ponds Cottonwood Marsh Parking Lot.

Wanted! Reports of wing-tagged Turkey Vultures

Working with colleagues in Venezuela, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary color-marked more than 350 Turkey Vultures over-wintering in northwestern Venezuela in 2006-2007 and 2008-2009. The tagged birds are members of the *meridionalis*, or western North American, subspecies and were tagged to study long-distance migration in the species. The birds are expected to begin migrating back toward their breeding areas in February. Their movements should take them through Central America and Mexico and into the western United States and Canada.

Reports of birds will help Hawk Mountain determine the timing and geography of migration in Turkey Vultures, as well as the breeding areas of the tagged birds. Some of the birds have red tags with white numbers, others have light-blue tags with black numbers. Please report the date and specific location of your sighting, color and number of the tag, the wing (right or left) to which the tag is attached, and the circumstances of the sighting, including whether or not the bird was alone or in a group of vultures, flying or perched, feeding or roosting, etc.

Report sightings to Keith Bildstein, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Acopian Center for Conservation Learning, 410 Summer Valley Road, Orwigsburg, PA 17961; bildstein@hawkmtn.org; 1-570-943-3411 ext. 108. All reports will be recognized, and individuals reporting tagged birds will receive summary information about the study. Thank you.



Turkey Vulture photo by Scott Severs



Green Gentian (*Frasera speciosa*) photo by Scott Severs

Wild Flowers and Wild Women, June 29 - July 1, 2009

Returning by popular demand, we ask the questions: **What's blooming? What's flying?** Women, come join us on an adventure to identify wildflowers in three life zones, alpine, sub-alpine and montane, and to explore the connections between flowers and butterflies. There will also be optional early morning bird walks for those who enjoy birding. Evening programs on wildflowers, birds and butterflies will help prepare you for walks on the following day.

Cost: \$195 Check in at 4:00PM on Monday, June 29th. The program ends at 4:00PM on Wednesday, July 1st. Limited to 12 participants.

Cost (based on quadruple occupancy) includes Retreat Center lodging, all meals and transportation to off-site locations.

Support the Boulder County Nature Association

Name _____

Address _____

Phone and/or E-mail (optional) _____

Type of Membership:

_____ Student/Senior (65 or over)	\$15
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_____ Family or Household	\$30
_____ Supporter	\$40
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_____ 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:
P.O. Box 493, Boulder, CO 80306.

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