

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."

Volume 29, Number 3
Summer 2011

Greetings from your BCNA Board of Directors!

As is usually the case, spring and summer are busy times for those of us who cleave to the bosom of "Mother Earth" and there are a number of interesting and important projects in which our Board and many members are participating:

The BCNA Publications Committee (Sue Cass, Chairperson; Jan Chu; Steve Jones; George Oetzel; Karen Swigart; Tom Van Zandt; Lysa Wegman-French) has been particularly productive having recently updated and republished *The Boulder County Avian Species of Special Concern-2010* compendium authored by David H. Hallock and Stephen R. Jones. Soon to go to the publisher will be the stunning field guide, *Butterflies of the Colorado Front Range: A Photographic Guide to 80 Species*, compiled and edited by Janet R. Chu and Stephen R. Jones with many gorgeous photos by the authors and other contributing naturalists in the area. These works are the first to be issued in a succession of short monographs titled *The Boulder County Nature Series* with more expected to follow. Thank you Publications Committee!

Several of you are supporting the Boulder County Parks and Open Space (BCPOS) 2011 Burrowing Owl Survey, a concerted multiyear effort to determine the status and breeding prerogatives of a species, until recently, believed extirpated from Boulder County. The survey is coordinated by Susan Spaulding, BCPOS Wildlife Specialist Supervisor, and monitored for continuity and adherence to protocol by Steve Jones and yours truly. BCPOS is to be commended for its continued and ongoing use of dedicated volunteer "citizen scientists" to best possible advantage.

Another important study receiving the benefit of countless hours of field work by BCNA naturalists is the Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas II project which is in the final year of an intense five year effort to update one of our most significant references for avian behavior and breeding biology. When you throw in the Allegra Collister Bird Banding Project, Wintering Raptor Survey, our Ecostewardship program and all

the other good work done by BCNA and our sister organization, Boulder County Audubon Society, I have only one thing to say....be proud! Be very proud! And Steve, you can come up for air any time now.

Other issues the Board of Directors expects to be involved with in the near future include support for and encouragement of BCPOS adherence to its approved and adopted prairie dog management policies and monitoring of the requested expansion of the Eldora Mountain Resort/Ski Area through our association with the Middle Boulder Creek Coalition (MBCC) and other interested organizations. As always, the BCNA Board of Directors values your input and perspectives and members are cordially invited to attend any regularly scheduled meetings of the Board.

*With much gratitude and respect from Sue Cass,
President, Boulder County Nature Association.*



American Badger at entrance of birthing den. Photo by Scott Severs.

Inside:
A Day in the Field Page 7

The Burning Question: One Woman’s Opinion

Last night, fireworks crackled in my neighborhood. July 4th firework insanity is here. And I’m just back from camping in the Comanche Grasslands (Droughtlands) which were on fire as we passed through; each range not burned was dried to a brown crisp. The brave sign “Not one more acre to the Army” got me wondering. How many ranchers might change their minds about military money if the drought takes an even firmer hold on the area? Yes, I’ve been thinking, obsessing, about fire.

Is there a difference between good fire (lighting, or prescribed burns) and bad fire (abandoned campfires, smokes, arson)? We often talk as though there is: “fire is a natural part of our ecosystem” BUT “never start fires.” As far as nature is concerned, it doesn’t matter a darn how the fire starts—only that it starts. Whatever its origin, fires burn where the fuel load encourages them to burn. It is dependent on the weather at the time. Winds can propel fire, snow or rain can douse fire. The system is random, unpredictable, and renews ecosystems.

Trouble comes when there are human structures in the way. Then the fire becomes “bad.” The more valuable the structures, the more we feel obliged to save them. When structures were one-roomed mining cabins, it was tough for the individual owners to lose them, but of relatively minor consequence to society in general. Also, the risk was more readily accepted because fire-fighting technology was known to be primitive. Now, with slurry bombers and fire-jumpers, we’ve come to expect far more. And with 10,000 square foot mansions built in the foothills easy-burn zone, there’s more at stake financially.

We don’t like to see valuable resources—timber—go up in smoke either, because we think we can use those resources better (i.e. make money from them). This attitude won’t change until we factor into economic equations the value of ecological services that result from periodic fires: fertilizer, seed release, forest thinning and so on.

It may seem a worthy goal to protect structures when we can and let wild forest burn in “harmless” places

until we finally return to the kind of forest structure we imagine to have existed pre-settlement. At least, that might hold true if we hadn’t already skewed the system. Can we sensibly expect to return to pre-settlement forest growth, if human-caused global climate change is under way? Will we experience longer growing seasons, less snowy winters, more frequent and more severe droughts? It’s too soon to say with utter certainty.

Should we expect forests here at all? Perhaps, at lower elevations, we’re due to go thoroughly grassland again?

We humans are always so keen to get in there and “fix” things that need “fixing” because of something we “fixed” long ago in the wrong way. I contend we should stop meddling, (stop expecting guarantees of safety for our structures built in untenable places?) and accept we don’t know enough (yet) to better the workings of nature.

—Ann Cooper



Scaled Quail in southeast Colorado. Photo by Scott Severs.

WANTED: Newsletter Layout Editor

I will be stepping down as layout editor for the BCNA newsletter. This is a fun job and someone else should have an opportunity.

**Please contact me for details:
Scott Severs 303-218-0830,
scottsevers@gmail.com**

Bus Birding

It's a bird! It's a plane! It's a bus?!

Bus Birding is a newly invented art/science/transportation project on the JUMP bus route starting August 8th and running through October 31, 2011. Conceived by nationally recognized visual artist Brian D. Collier, the project is created in collaboration with EcoArts Connections, RTD, GO Boulder, the CU Museum of Natural History, and birders, ornithologists, climate scientists, transportation specialists, and others.

Bus Birding is designed to inspire people to ride the bus while interesting bus riders to look for birds on their travels and at selected bus stops - all to become better acquainted with their avian neighbors and surroundings. The JUMP route was selected as a pilot because it traverses between rural, suburban, and urban settings between Lafayette and Boulder, enabling viewers to spot different species in a variety of habitats.

Bus Birding includes bus panels, an informational brochure, bus stop signs, an interactive website, and inclusion in a major visual art exhibit at the CU Museum of Natural History August 22-December 31 called "Bird Shift: The Anthropogenic Ornithology of North America."

Activities July-October include bird walks, talks, panel discussions, and more. Plus, people waiting at bus stops can get involved by calling the BB phone number to report what the birds they see are up to. Messages will be automatically transcribed and appear on the special Bus Birding website. As Tony McCaulay, RTD's Senior Manager of Marketing said, "Bus Birding offers yet another great reason for people to ride the bus. RTD is delighted to be a collaborator on this project." busbirding.societyrne.net

Bus Birding collaborators include the Boulder County Audubon Society, Boulder County Nature Association, and Environment for the Americas, among others.

For more information visit:

Museum website <http://cumuseum.colorado.edu/>

Bus Birding website busbirding.societyrne.net

EcoArts Connections www.ecoartsonline.org

More Bus Birding Events . . . Page 4

BCNA Summer Calendar

Mount Galbraith Bird Atlas Trip with Steve Jones

Saturday, July 30, 6 a.m. to Noon

Steve Jones (303-494-2468) will lead an early morning hike up the Mount Galbraith Trail in Golden Gate Canyon to confirm nesting birds within the Ralston Buttes Southeast atlas block adopted by BCNA. The more eyes the better for this final atlasing trip of the season. Expect to see nesting scrub jays, catbirds, yellow warblers, green-tailed towhees, lazuli buntings, Bullock's orioles, and many other species. Bring binoculars and meet at the Eldorado Springs junction parking area (northeast corner of SH 93 and Eldorado Springs Drive) at 6 a.m.; or at the Mount Galbraith parking area (Golden Gate Canyon Drive 1.5 miles west of SH 93) at 6:30.

eBird Tutorial with Ted Floyd

Saturday, September 8, 7 p.m.

George Reynolds Branch Library (Table Mesa Drive one block west of Broadway)

Ted Floyd, Editor of Birding magazine, will offer a tutorial on how to use eBird, a free, web-based, major new data-sharing resource for birders. Learn how to become an eBirder! You'll become a better birder in the process, and you'll help with valuable monitoring of at-risk bird populations. Ted is a regional editor for eBird, and he will be happy to answer all your questions. Learn more about eBird online: ebird.org. For more information, tfloyd@aba.org



Bus Birding Summer Events

Saturday, August 13 Bus Birding for Everyone!

8:30 am – 11:30 am - Please be on time – the bus will not wait. **Meet at Scott Carpenter Park.**

Join city of Boulder Open Space naturalist Dave Sutherland for a bus ride to bird watching – on the JUMP! We'll meet in Scott Carpenter Park (30th and Arapahoe in Boulder) and bus out to Teller Farm Open Space for a couple of leisurely hours of birding. During the bus ride we'll talk about birding. Once we're at Teller Farms, who knows what we'll find? Hawks and eagles? Ducks and geese? Tropical migrants? Maybe a great-horned owl? Birders of all abilities are welcome. Please bring water, snack, footwear suitable for easy trail hiking, and bird guides and binoculars if you have them. RTD will provide complimentary round trip bus passes for the first 10 participants. Otherwise, please bring exact change (\$2.25 for adults, \$1.10 for seniors 65+, individuals with disabilities, Medicare recipients, and students in elementary, middle and high school, ages 6-19. Children five or younger ride free. Active duty members of the U.S. military currently ride for free) for each ride up and back. Eco-passes welcome.

Bus Birding information: busbirding.societyrne.net
Program information: Dave Sutherland at 720.564.2057 sutherlandd@bouldercolorado.gov

Sunday, August 14 Bus Birding for Kids! (Ages 6 and up)

8:30 am – 11:30 am - Please be on time – the bus will not wait. **Meet at Scott Carpenter Park**

Birding is a great way for kids to learn about nature, and riding the bus teaches them how to get around. City of Boulder Open Space naturalist Dave Sutherland will take your family on the Long JUMP bus route for a bird exploration at Teller Farm Open Space to show kids the basics: how to "spot" birds by ear, how to use a bird's color and behavior to identify it, and how to use a field guide. Be warned: Bird watching can become addicting – and so can riding the bus! Meet at Scott Carpenter Park (30th and Arapahoe in Boulder). Please bring water, snack, footwear suitable for easy trail hiking, and bird guides and binoculars if you have them. This event will include Bus Birding 101 on the 5 tips to riding the bus from Ellen Orleans of GO Boulder. RTD will provide complimentary round trip bus passes for the first 10

participants. Otherwise, please bring exact change (\$2.25 for adults, \$1.10 for seniors 65+, individuals with disabilities, Medicare recipients, and students in elementary, middle and high school, ages 6-19. Children five or younger ride free. Active duty members of the U.S. military currently ride for free) for each ride up and back. Eco-passes welcome.

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Program information: Dave Sutherland at 720.564.2057 sutherlandd@bouldercolorado.gov

Sunday, August 28 Science Stop: Barn Swallows by the Bus

9 am – 11 am – Come any time during this time period. Foothills **Parkway Long JUMP Bus Stop**

Have you ever wondered about the fork-tailed birds seen whirling around the intersection of Foothills Highway and Arapahoe Road? What could they possibly be interested in at a busy traffic intersection? These are barn swallows and they are catching a ride on warm air vents that rise from the concrete at that intersection, enjoying aerial insects - their primary food source - that are also found in these locations. Researchers from the CU Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology study these birds in Boulder and around the world. Assistant Professor Rebecca Safran will give you a close up view of their work locally and a big picture perspective of their work internationally. You will hear from a student working on swallow song in Turkey, Romania, and Taiwan; learn from another student who studies the aging process in these birds and how that effects mate choice; and hear from yet another student who is discovering how predators shape the behavior and appearance of individuals in our local Colorado populations of swallows. If the weather is nice, we may try to catch a swallow or two for some close-ups, but if not, we will bring plenty of visual aids to delight both the young and old alike! We can also tell you about how Boulder County residents are helping us collect data on the ways in which climate change is affecting populations of birds here and most everywhere in the world.

Haiku

*Sweet House wren parents
Dive-bombing wily squirrel
Summer babies safe*

—Mary Balzer

Grants Approved by BCNA Board – April 25, 2011

The Boulder County Nature Association (BCNA) has had a ten-year tradition of supporting local County-level research initiatives investigating local ecosystems and habitat. Funds available have been small grants, usually one thousand dollars, to assist in developing or furthering worthy projects and are done on a competitive basis. The results have been rewarding and interesting.

This year three grants for one thousand dollars each were awarded at our BCNA Board meeting. We thought you would enjoy reading about these projects.

Janet Chu is conducting A Ten Year Study of Butterfly Populations in Boulder County. It represents an ongoing inventory within properties of County Parks and Open Spaces, and records data for species and populations of butterflies, as well as blossoming host plants, weather, and GPS locations. This inventory about the vitality and diversity of habitats affect County conservation planning and look at local influences of climate change.

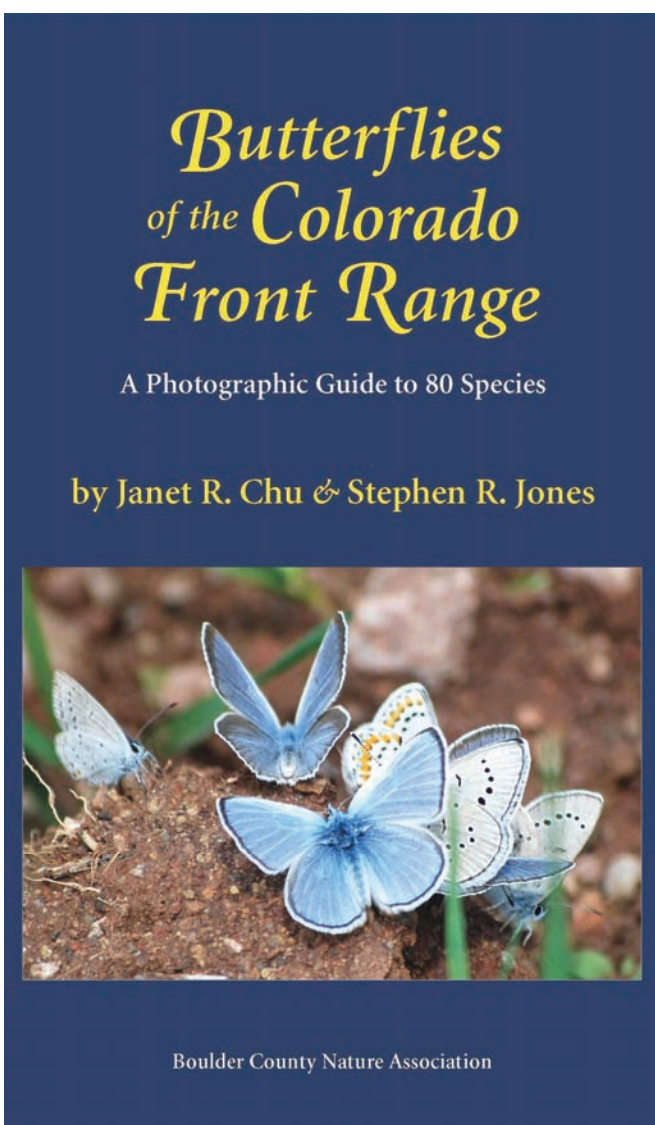
The Front Range Pika Project was also awarded one thousand dollars to pursue its goals of helping to protect remaining pika populations and habitat in the Southern Rockies, of involving citizen volunteers in the collection of data on pika distribution and change through time, and of inspiring participants to advocate for the conservation of native species and ecosystems in general. Pikas are known to people who hike in the high country as friendly, playful friends, but sadly have experienced steep declines in populations in recent decades as global warming has intruded on their ecosystem. This study will document evidence for the presence of pikas using direct observation, GPS coordinates, photos of surrounding vegetation, and correlate it with habitat variables such as surrounding vegetation, water availability, and depth and size of talus patches. This project will help join BCNA with many other worthy organizations involved with this conservation issue.

Elizabeth Paulson is a Graduate Student in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Colorado who is interested in landscape connectivity and habitat fragmentation as it influences local populations of butterflies as they move between habitat patches in Boulder County. Butterflies are often considered to be indicator species giving us information about the ecological community in general. This project will use genetic

data to follow gene flow between habitat patches using one species, the variegated fritillary (*Euptoieta claudia*) as its subject. The thousand dollar grant will help support kits used for genetic analysis.

We hope people will follow results as they are made available. In a small way, supporting projects such as these has the advantage of informing the local community of the resources which exist here in abundance, but which are endangered by encroaching populations and climate change.

—Peter Kleinman
Grants Committee (BCNA)



**Coming soon to a bookstore
near you!**

Wildlife and Nature Lovers Need Dog-Free Trails

On June 20 I watched a white-tailed deer in the meadow south of the South Boulder Creek Trail and east of Hwy 93 "herding" a coyote -- just as an Australian sheep dog herds livestock. Although I didn't see a fawn, I assumed she was moving the coyote away on purpose. About a half hour later, further along the trail, I encountered a woman who had just finished watching a deer "hide" her fawn.

Are more fawns are seen near this trail because it is a "no-dog" trail? I recall that Steve Jones has reported seeing fewer deer in the Shanahan area as dog use has increased. Certainly the research (go to http://www.friendsofboulderopenspace.org/recreation_effects.php) shows that dogs impact wildlife -- causing deer to flee and decreasing the nesting success of birds.

You will have a chance to influence the selection of more dog-free trails in the WTSA in August (the date is tentative) with City Council. Please speak out for more dog-free trails in places that will benefit deer, birds and their habitats ... and that will provide quiet users more opportunities to observe nature. For details on the trails that the Open Space staff recommend for designation as no-dog trails and meeting times/places, go to http://www.bouldercolorado.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=13324&Itemid=3763

The 2010 Resident Survey showed that 48% of hikers reported that their visits to open space were "less pleasant" due to dogs off-leash, but city officials are swayed by the people who turn out for meetings. Please speak out for the your natural areas. And if you're away, please express your views in writing. Our native wildlife and plants will appreciate your efforts.

—Karen Hollweg

STOP THE DROP Update
The Middle Boulder Creek Coalition (MBCC) is a group of citizens and organizations (including BCNA) banded together to stop the Eldora ski area from building new ski lifts and runs beyond its current location down towards Hessie and Middle Boulder Creek. It is our contention that the lands on the south side of Middle Boulder Creek between the community of Eldora and Hessie remain as high quality habitat and a wildlife movement corridor, a scenic backdrop for a major gateway into the Indian Peaks, and an

BCNA Board of Directors
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-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)

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- Publications:
Steve Jones (303-494-2468)

-Research Grants:
Peter Kleinman (303-554-5320)

-State and Regional Wildlife Issues:
Peter Kleinman (303-554-5320)

-Website:
George Oetzel (303-543-3712)

-Wintering Raptor Survey:
Sue Cass (720-684-6922) and Jim McKee (303-651-2414)

acoustic buffer between the noise of snowmaking and winter recreationists heading up the Fourth of July road. We anticipate that the ski area will soon submit a formal application to the Forest Service for a portion of their expansion. MBCC has been organizing, assembling alert lists, taking officials to the site, and setting up social media. To learn more and sign up for action alerts, go to

www.middleboulder creekcolition.org

A Day in the Field

It seemed like the right thing to do, participate in the Burrowing Owl Project, get a chance to do some real citizen field work, enjoy great scenery, solitude, and feel useful. Being a bit tardy, I was given one of the last blocks of County land to cover, three viewing points to scan for burrowing owls nesting in prairie dog burrows, and was assured there was little chance of seeing an owl in this patch of land. Just maybe, this prediction would be proved wrong.

I arrived early, took out my binoculars and scanned available prairie dog colonies. There were plenty of prairie dogs, meadowlarks feeding on the ground, distant horses and cattle, and, of course, great views of the foothills in the Northern Part of the County. My second and third view points were closer to the road and I was met by a number of animals who quickly became my friends. Two of the dogs led me across the field to view prairie dog colonies. As I scanned them, I realized the colonies were of great interest to the dogs as they rooted around in the colonies looking for lunch or some "dogs" to play with. As I moved on to the third of my sites, I was getting used to my companions which now included about eight friendly horses, all interested in what I was doing in their field. Then, as I raised my binoculars to scan the new complex of colonies, I experienced a rather strong shove from the rear, and was surprised to realize that a mule or donkey (not sure which) had taken a keen interest in what I was doing. She was placated by my befriending her and scratching her



Adult male Burrowing Owl near a nest site in southeast Colorado. Photo by Jessie Dulberger.

between the ears and rubbing her nose, but when I got serious about scanning my colonies, she began pushing me across the field. Oh, the life of a field researcher! As long as I scratched that noble head, the shoving stopped. Intrepid researcher that I was, I did not give in, however, and finished my observations. Finally, I drew the attention of the owners of the farm, and they hovered around wanting to see my papers authenticating my presence on their field, making me feel like the intruder that I was.

None of the above interfered with my task as amateur researcher and I was able to complete my assignment. I had made some new friends, enjoyed my time in the field, and had a chance to reflect on the perils and nuances of field research. By the way, no burrowing owls were found at this site. Despite all, I would recommend participation in projects like this for anyone who likes something a bit out of the ordinary in his life, or perhaps who likes to see the ordinary from a different point of view.

—Peter Kleinman

Editor's note: 50 volunteers searched for burrowing owls on 35 Boulder County Parks and Open Space properties this spring and summer. They found just two nests, both at Carolyn Holmberg Rock Creek Farm Preserve west of Broomfield. One of the nests had 6 young as of 25 June, and the other was either very late developing or had failed. In addition to the owls, our dedicated field workers documented red-headed woodpeckers, loggerhead shrikes, brown thrashers and other prairie-nesting species rarely reported in Boulder County. The study will continue next year. To volunteer contact Sue Cass: suecass@comcast.net

2011 volunteers: Linda Andes-Georges, Linda Berti, Julia Bond, Barbara Brandt, Kerrie Bryan, Brian Carpenter, Sue Cass, Charlie Chase, A. D. Chesley, Karen Clark, Jen Clink, Holly DeVaul, Martin Gerra, Sallie Greenwood, Bob Grossman, Renée Haip, Paula Hansley, Scott Harvey, Phyllis Hasheider, Brinda Henley, Leslie Hopf, Steve Jones, Elena Klaver, Peter Kleinman, Carolyn Kuban, Catherine Labio, Lark Latch, Sandra Laursen, Maureen Lawry, David Lucas, Joe Lupfer, Petrea Mah, Janet MacLachlan, Jim McKee, Carol McCasland, Ruth McCarrison, Jean Morgan, Tina Nielsen, Steve Noud, George Oetzel, Marti Oetzel, Beccy Pem, Joe Pem, Chris Petrizzo, Tom Skinas, Tim Smock, Joel Such, Marcel Such, Oak Thorne, Alan Vajda, Kevin Winseck, Kristi Winseck, Howard Witkin, Lysa Wegman-French, Mort Wegman-French.

Support the Boulder County Nature Association

Name _____

Address _____

Phone and/or E-mail (optional) _____

Type of Membership:

_____ Student/Senior (65 or over)	\$15
_____ General Member	\$20
_____ Family or Household	\$30
_____ Supporter	\$40
_____ Founder	\$100
_____ Life Member	\$300
_____ Corporate	\$500
_____ Donation to General Research Grants	
_____ Donation to Evenson Big Cat Research Grants	
_____ Donation to General Research Fund	

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

Please make checks payable to "Boulder County Nature Association" or "BCNA" and mail to:
P.O. Box 493, Boulder, CO 80306.

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