

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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Summer 2016

ECOSYSTEM STEWARDSHIP PROJECT CELEBRATES FIRST DECADE, 2006 to 2015

Steve Jones

We just completed our first 10 years of this project, and the data I am seeing are amazing--lots of details particularly about breeding bird populations in Boulder County that enrich our knowledge of how the birds are doing and what we need to do to protect them.

Breeding Bird Observations of Interest

Four **Northern Harrier** nests fledged nine young in Boulder County during 2015. This was the greatest number of active nests and fledged young reported during the past 20 years.

Bald Eagles nested successfully within the Coal Creek Riparian Conservation Area from 2006-15. Bald Eagles nested at eight additional Boulder County locations in 2015.

Seven **American Bittern** active territories were observed around Boulder Reservoir and Coot Lake during 2014 and 2015.

Green Herons appear to have nested successfully at Walden Ponds most years from 2010-15.

Great Blue Herons established new heronries at Boulder Reservoir (2013-15), Sawhill Ponds (2014-15), and Walden Ponds (2012-15).

The **Lewis's Woodpeckers** who fledged two young at Crescent Meadows in 2015 are one of only four nesting pairs observed in Boulder County during the past five years. One pair nested near Lyons, and the other two pairs have nested recently in a burned area on Eldorado Mountain.

Both **Williamson's** (4 years) and **Red-naped Sapsucker** (6 years) nested successfully at Walker Ranch from 2006-15. This is among the lowest elevations these woodpeckers have been reported nesting in Boulder County.

Bushtit nesting populations have exploded recently in Boulder County. From 2012-15, they appear to have nested in most of our foothills sites. Has global warming contributed to this trend, or is it mostly a result of proliferation of shrub vegetation after removal of cattle from these areas during the 1970s and 1980s?

(Continued on page 4)



Gary Rabourn Watching Harrier
by Nancy Morrison

BCNA Publications Committee Report

Sue Cass, Chair

Amazon has placed new orders for both *Butterflies of the Colorado Front Range* by Jan Chu and Steve Jones and *Dragonflies of the Colorado Front Range* by Ann Cooper. The CU Museum of Natural History is running an exhibit titled “*Becoming Butterflies*” which will run through March 31, 2017 and has purchased 20 copies of our butterfly book. Thank you, Lysa Wegman-French for making that contact! After its run in Boulder the exhibit will move to the Wildlife Experience in Parker, now part of CU South Denver, where additional sales are possible. Inventory on hand is about 300 books which should last about two more years at the current rate of distribution. The *Butterflies of the Colorado Front Range* e-book app should be up and running this summer and will include 15 additional species and more photos. To date, *Butterflies of the Colorado Front Range* has contributed about \$7000 in profits to BCNA’s coffers.

All the other BCNA publications--*Dragonflies of the Colorado Front Range*, *Dawn Chorus* and *Sandhills Serenade*--are modestly in the black. Sales from the website through Paypal have been minimal. All inventory has been accounted for and is distributed among members of the committee. Lysa Wegman-French handles all Amazon sales and Steve Jones is accounting for local retail sales and sales from the BCNA website via Paypal. See our website, www.bcna.org, for additional information about BCNA’s publications and how to purchase them.

Letter from the President

Michael Delaney

As you know, the Boulder City Council voted in May to accept the recommendation of the Open Space Board of Trustees that a multi-use trail be constructed on the west side of US 36 north of Boulder. That this trail will bisect a habitat conservation area was brushed aside. It is enormously disappointing. The more so because the vote was seven to two (thank you Lisa Morzel and Mary Young for your votes for conservation). As Oakley Thorne and Ruth Wright speculated before the vote, it places in grave danger the long tradition of Boulderites protecting and conserving open spaces and their habitats for ourselves and future generations. Instead, the city now is all about recreation, no matter the environmental cost.

Is there anything that can be done to change this attitude? Frankly, I don't have a lot of hope for this. We have lost the ethos of preservation for preservation's sake as we have become more of a mecca for outdoor recreationists. Nevertheless, we need to keep lobbying for those future generations. And we can appreciate the much more conservation-oriented Boulder County Parks and Open Space. Thankfully, that department and the County in general are still interested in preservation. Thank them as you have opportunity and enjoy, carefully, their properties.

BIRDWATCHING IN LAFAYETTE

Beginning birders are invited to experience the fun and discovery of birdwatching at Greenlee Wildlife Preserve, 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. on the first Sunday of each month, June through November 2016. Knowledgeable birdwatchers will be on hand each Sunday with binoculars, spotting scopes and learning tools to bring the world of birds alive.

View ducks, herons and other water birds as well as a variety of songbirds. Learn how to use binoculars and field guides and even how to recognize birds by sound! "Bird" is a verb . . . come join in the fun!

Greenlee Wildlife Preserve, a marsh adjacent to Waneka Lake, is a property of Lafayette Open Space. To reach the site, park at the east parking lot for Waneka Lake (where Emma St. ends at Caria Dr. in Lafayette) and walk 1/3 mile around the northeast side of the Waneka Lake trail. Signs will direct participants to the viewing platform at the marsh. This program is also made possible by Boulder Audubon and Environment for the Americas. Please note: Children and youth must be accompanied by parents. If you have questions, please contact Martin Ogle at Martin@EntrepreneurialEarth.com

2015 Financial Report

Howard Witkin, Treasurer

Our anticipated positive cash projection of \$1,065.00 was greatly surpassed as we ended 2015 with approximately \$12,427.26 in additional cash reserves. Dues and contributions were significantly lower than 2014. In 2014 we received \$9,732.45, in 2015 only \$7,875. A negative difference of \$1,857.45. Finally, our expenditures were considerably under what had been budgeted.

Cash Reserves:

- First Bank Checking \$27,262.75
 - First Bank CD \$28,045.18
 - First National Savings \$11,479.20
- Total cash on hand \$66,787.13

Restricted Funds: (which are included above, but can only be used for the purposes of the fund)

- Allegra Collister Fund \$5,527.89
 - Native Cat Fund \$2,191.50
 - Woods Foundation \$2,319.65
 - Pre-collected Sales tax \$5.59
- Total restricted funds \$10,044.63

LONG-EARED OWL PROJECT

Debra Sherrill

I work with CARRI (the Colorado Avian Research and Rehabilitation Institute, Scott Rashid, Director). The Long-eared Owl project is new for us this year. We received a grant to build nest structures for the owls and placed several throughout Boulder County and Estes Park before the beginning of spring. The owl in the photograph is a parent of two babies in one of our nest structures located on private property in unincorporated Boulder County. She was keeping an eye on us as we banded the babies. We found what we thought was ideal habitat for them and placed the nesting structures among the trees. We had a hint that they liked the area because we heard their call in that location last fall and the property owner had reported seeing the owls on his property in past years. The owls simply found the structures and nested. We have even seen them perching on the edge of their nests during the day.

Annika, my eleven-year-old daughter, often comes along on projects and takes pictures or helps with nest monitoring. She has been interested in owls since fall of 2012 when we first learned about her favorite owl, the Northern Saw-whet Owl. She's pretty good at "tree scratching" at sites where we suspect a nest. If there is an occupant, they will usually peer over the edge of the nest. It's a quick way to confirm nest occupation from the ground with little disruption to the occupants, since we make it a point to vacate as soon as we confirm occupancy.

Feather Tufts*

The feather tufts that give this owl its name, not really ears, play an important role in the complex body language of owl communication. Much of this interplay takes place at night, and the tufts work like signal flags in silhouette, visible to other owls in dim light.

Decline of the Long-eared Owl*

Competition with the bigger Great Horned Owls for limited prey resources or interspecific intolerance at nest sites may partly explain declines of the much smaller Long-eared Owl.

Ultimately, land-use changes accelerating along the Front Range may correlate with population declines. The demise of shelterbelts for more efficient farming, degradation of riparian areas, and loss of rural lands to urban development all pose problems for Long-eared Owls. Such habitat changes remove nesting and roost sites, reduce foraging areas or rodent prey, and may increase populations of nest predators such as raccoons and of potentially competing Great Horned Owls.

*Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas, Hugh E. Kingery, editor, 1998.



Long-eared Owl, adult by Annika Andersen, age 11
location: unincorporated Boulder County
west of Longmont

**Jim McKee Honored with Boulder County
Environmental Stewardship Award**

The Environmental Stewardship Award recognizes individuals, families or organizations that make significant contributions in land protection and/or management. Jim McKee was a volunteer naturalist for the department from 1991 until his death in 2015. He was a well-informed and well-rounded naturalist, and an expert on plants, wildflowers and weeds, birds, wildlife, and ecosystem preservation issues. McKee was a tireless advocate for conservation of natural resources and open space, and a member of the Boulder County Parks and Open Space Advisory Committee from 1996 to 2006. He also volunteered for the City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks Department, Boulder County Nature Association (BCNA), and served on an advisory board for the State of Colorado Division of Wildlife. -- Boulder County Commissioners and Parks and Open Space staff.

(Ecostewardship, continued from page 1)

Marsh Wrens nested at Walden Ponds in 2013-15 and were observed singing territorially at Sawhill Ponds in 2015. These are the first nesting records for the species in Boulder County.

A singing **Ovenbird** has been observed on upper Shanahan Ridge for six years in a row. However, nesting has never been confirmed in Boulder County. Singing ovenbirds were heard in Skunk Canyon during 2013-15 and during recent years on Eldorado Mountain.

Thanks to all the Volunteers Reporting since 2010:
Linda Andes-Georges, Dale Ball, Ron Butler, A.D. Chesley, Jan Chu, Jo Clark, Larry Crowley, Patricia Cullen, Ruth Carol Cushman, Tony Delaney, Christine Guzy, Paula Hansley, Elaine Hill, Janet Jamison, Steve Jones, Carol Kampert, Gerry Kelly, Sandra Laursen, Maureen Lawry, Janet McLaughlin, Michael Moore, Jean Morgan, Tony Merino, Betty Naughton, Nancy Neupert, Laura Osborn, Bay Roberts, Leonard Sitongia, Shari Southard, Mike Sportello, Karen Swigart, Claudia VanWie.



Northern Harrier by Dale Ball



Young Northern Harrier by Dr. Kerrie Bryan

Goals of the Ecosystem Stewardship Initiative

The Boulder County Ecosystem Stewardship Initiative, a volunteer project launched by the Boulder County Nature Association and Boulder County Audubon, has three goals:

1. Monitor natural processes in Boulder County native ecosystems.
2. Use data collected to improve management and influence policy-making.
3. Recruit a cadre of naturalists to monitor and protect natural areas in perpetuity.

You, too, can become an Ecosystem Steward!

1. Choose a protected area in Boulder County that you would like to adopt.
2. Decide on the extent of the area you wish to adopt and survey--extent cannot be greater than one square mile.
3. Commit to visiting your area at least four times year (including a visit during the May to July breeding bird season).
4. Attend one of our periodic field training sessions to get a better understanding of the process.

No prior experience with field ornithology or any other natural history topic is required. We are just looking for folks who are committed and willing to learn.

If you are interested in monitoring a wild place in Boulder County throughout the year and helping protect this area through your efforts, please contact Steve Jones at curlwjsj@comcast.net.

Colorado Butterflies on the Web

For many years, Cathy Cook and Joe Krieg have been building and adding to a web site on butterflies of the Northern Colorado Front Range. BCNA now sponsors this site which was recently upgraded to work on all devices, just in time for your spring/summer/fall butterfly needs!

Please take a look at <http://coloradofrontrangebutterflies.com>.

If you have good photos of any of the butterflies for which we don't yet have any or only have a couple of photos, please help us out by submitting them to the webmaster (contact information is on the butterfly site). We will meet periodically as a committee to review submitted pictures and to update the site.

Thoughts on What to Expect from BCNA Classes
 Mary Stuber, Chair, Education Committee

What should you expect when you sign up for a BCNA class? Once the Instructor has a complete list of participants he/she will send out an email shortly before the first meeting with information about what the class will cover, goals for learning, what you might want to bring along, and maybe a bit about the field class (or classes) that will follow.

An interesting discussion arose during a recent field class. We'd just completed our first day out and were talking about where we might go for the next one. Most people were excited about a suggestion to travel a little farther to a place where we might well see things not common closer to home. But it became clear that a choice to do so might prevent some people who already had other commitments from being able to go. We tried to problem-solve and came up with several options for those people to choose from. One thing we agreed to do was to leave earlier than had been originally stated in the class brochure. It all worked out, of course, but the questions posed during this collegial process left me feeling that some clarification might be a good thing.



Pleasing Fungus Beetle, found by Dave Leatherman at the Birding Under the Influence Class

We contact potential instructors during the fall and winter before the classes will occur. They must decide if they can teach a class for us, what subject they will cover, and provide dates and times in time for our newsletter deadline. Since this is all done far in advance of the actual classes, some changes may occur. In addition, most of them have not selected a specific site for their field trips yet. They want to wait and see just what seasonal conditions and recent sightings may be in play, and then select the best locations for their field trips as the time draws nearer.

We work hard to find instructors who are experts in their field. While we do pay them, it certainly doesn't equal what their experience demands. Many are busy professionals who do this more as a "labor of love" for BCNA than a way to support their income. Here's something one member shared that I'd like to offer as food for thought: "In general, I would say that anytime I am out with the experts, I value the information they impart. If I am taking a class, I would block more time than the class allotted 'just in case' it ran over. I would hate to cut a good learning experience short just because the class time might be exceeded."

There's also the question of travel time. If a class's scheduled times are "8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.", for example, that typically means that we would try to have everyone back to the meeting place by 12:00. The meeting place might be in Boulder, or it might be in Ft. Collins. And again, this typically has not been decided by the time the schedule comes out. The instructors usually announce it at the first or second session.

In another case, we have a photography class taking place in July taught by a professional photographer. He described his class in the January brochure, saying "We will be in the field early enough to get a good sunrise shot in the park [Rocky Mountain National Park]". But when he sent his email out to participants spelling out the early meeting hour and location in Estes Park, there were some who were surprised. He graciously agreed to change the time, but regrets that the class will miss "the golden hour" of light.

What's to be learned from all this? We do everything possible to provide interesting classes. And we try to describe them in as much detail as we can so you can decide whether to register for them or not. But it's not an exact science. There are some things we just can't nail down for you when the schedule goes out. *(continued on page 6)*



Class Participants in Birding Under the Influence, led by Dave Leatherman

BIRDS, BUTTERFLIES, AND PLANTS OF LIBERIA, WEST AFRICA

Presented by Bob Andrews on July 26, 2016

Many of you may know (or know of) Bob Andrews, co-author of *Colorado Birds* and one of Colorado's most esteemed ornithologists. Over the last several years Bob has been teaching at various colleges in Africa, and he recently returned from West Africa, where he photographed over 200 butterfly species and an equal number of bird species. The talk will focus on the biodiversity and ecology of the Nimba region of Liberia, West Africa. Bob is an excellent speaker, always engaging, and a fine photographer.

Bob will present this program on Tuesday, July 26th, 6:00 to 7:30 pm, at the Meadows Branch Library in Boulder (Baseline and Foothills Parkway).



Photo by Bob Andrews

(What to expect, from page 5)

At best, some things like end times, can only be a close approximation. There are too many variables out of our control: conditions, terrain, accidents, traffic, mechanical breakdown, or even a bumper crop of wildflowers or great bird sightings among them. We can only set an intention and do our best to meet it. Of course, some people have commitments that just can't be delayed. But those who can go with the flow, and who don't plan something else immediately after the class, will enjoy them the most and be positioned to take advantage of every minute an expert instructor is willing to spend.

WHAT'S NEW? We're excited to announce that we will be using Eventbrite for future class registrations. Moving to an on-line registration process will help make signing up for a BCNA class even easier! Watch for details as we roll out this great new system next year.

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--Avian Species of Special Concern
 Dave Hallock, Coordinator dheldora@rmi.net
 Steve Jones, Coordinator curlewsj@comcast.net
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--Wintering Raptor Survey
 Sue Cass, Coordinator 720-684-6922

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Learning Bird Song with Steve Jones
Mary Stuber

At the first Bird Song class in May, Steve Jones welcomed us with light refreshments and played recorded bird songs of several common species, sometimes slowing them down, while we looked at sonograms, studying them to understand just what we were hearing. The variation in songs is incredible – some are simple, while others are very complex. Some species’ songs are the same no matter where you hear them, and others exhibit regional “dialects”. We discussed learning to sort out the different sounds you hear when you are in the field as well as preparing to identify what you will hear before you go by knowing what birds are likely to be there, in that habitat, and at the time you are there. Songs and calls are different, and may vary by time of day. To complicate matters further, some birds can actually mimic others’ songs, or even car horns or airplanes. Why do birds sing? And do they all sing? These are the kinds of questions we delved into.

Our field trips took us to two very different habitats where our slow walks turned up numerous species – some I’d never seen before! If you can hear a bird, you may be able to spot it. At times we’d just sit quietly and listen, cupping our hands over our ears to hear more, or using Steve’s parabolic reflector microphone and headphones for an up-close and personal experience. It’s like the “spotting scope” of listening to bird song! Do I know every bird song now? No. But I’m sure enjoying my time outdoors a lot more now, recognizing a lot of what I hear, and taking a great deal of pleasure in my awareness of something old in a brand new way. Thanks Steve, and all my fellow participants, for a fun class.



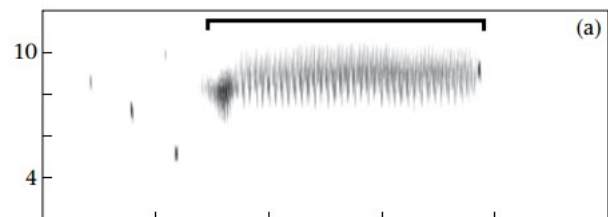
Singing Grasshopper Sparrow by Bill Schmoker

BCNA Winter Raptor Survey Report 2015-2016
Sue Cass, Winter Raptor Survey
Volunteer Coordinator

The 33rd BCNA Winter Raptor Survey wrapped up on March 15th with a total of 122 monitoring assignments completed by 65 dedicated surveyors during the 2015-2016 season who committed an estimated 360 volunteer hours to the cause. They are: John Adams, Kari Armstrong, James and Dale Ball, Johanna Beam, Jean Bettenhausen, Liza Boyle, Barbara Brandt, Kerrie Bryan, Sue and Alan Cass, AD Chesley, Karen Clark, George Coffee, Sue Coffee, Jean and Kevin Crawford, Pat Cullen, Michael and Jean Delaney, Robin and Phil Ecklund, Barbara Engel, Fern Ford, Robert and Shelia Frost, Linda Gathany, Bernie and Marlyn Gay, Ed Hall, Brinda Henley, Amy Iwata, Steve Jones, Will Keeley and sons Quinn and Sean, Kristin Laubach, Viki Lawrence, Joe Lupfer, Kathanne Lynch, Carol McCasland, Topiltzin Martinez, Zach Pesch, Carly Pierce, Sue and Mark Ponsor, Bev Postmus, Ira and Tammy Sanders, Carol Sazama, Paul and Mary Sue Schultz, Mary Stuber, Joel Such, Darin Toohey, Claudia Van Wie, Tom VanZandt, Mark Venzke, Mort and Lysa Wegman-French, Maribel Williams, Howard and Patty Witkin and George Young. Thank you, all!

The data collected has yet to be studied, but an area of concern includes multiple surveys conducted by experienced monitors with unusually low numbers of raptors observed and noted on reports.

This was the second season successfully conducted using the electronic data entry system (wufoo) developed by BCPOS IT staff and Wildlife Biologist/Volunteer Program Coordinator Michelle Durant. At a meeting in January, Michelle indicated staff is attempting to develop a 500 meter grid map transparency that can be overlaid on the paper maps used prior to 2014 to transfer many years of data to the wufoo system. When this occurs we will be looking for volunteers to take on this project.



Spectrogram of Grasshopper Sparrow buzz song

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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:
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