

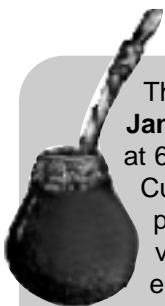
Cows, Drought, and Songbirds: Riparian Renaissance on Coal Creek

While much of Colorado was experiencing severe drought conditions this past spring, songbirds flocked to the greening cottonwoods and shrubs along Coal Creek. During our May count we observed 54 species and 811 individuals, the highest numbers recorded during five years of surveys. House wrens, spotted towhees, and blue grosbeaks chattered in hawthorn and chokecherry thickets. Eastern kingbirds and rough-winged swallows swooped over the trickling stream, while yellow-rumped warblers, Bullock's orioles, and American goldfinches flitted through the riparian overstory.

In July, as the creek dried up, things got much quieter. By August most of the warblers, sparrows, and orioles had moved on. By early fall, bird numbers had reached five-year lows.

Boulder County Audubon Society and the City of Boulder Open Space Department initiated the Coal Creek Riparian Renaissance Project in 1998. One goal was to create a 100-200 m wide cattle enclosure along a 7 km stretch of Coal Creek between Superior and the Jefferson/Boulder county line. With the help of a \$200,000 grant from the Terra Foundation and funds raised through Boulder County Audubon bird-a-thons, fencing was completed in December 2000. Open Space and Mountain Park staff have initi-

Renaissance: continued on third page



This year's **BCNA Annual Meeting** will be on **Saturday, January 18, 2003** at Mike & Naseem's house. Festivities begin at 6 p.m. The potluck theme is Andean cuisine. So bring some Cueca music, brush up on your Quechua and throw on a poncho and chulu. The evening will begin with eating and visiting, as usual, followed by a brief meeting and Board elections, and then the slide show, presented by Graham Hill on the future of energy-efficient vehicles. If there is time (and energy), we may also light a bonfire. Anyone for some Maté?

Inside . . .



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Mountain Tundra
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Around Town

BCNA Directory



Extra copies of the newsletter are available from the BCNA or sometimes at the Wild Bird Center.

To submit BCNA-related material to the editor, email susanwinter@qwest.net or call 303-581-0783.



winter calendar



jan

Saturday, January 18: *Annual Meeting and elections* at Mike & Naseem's house at 6 p.m. The potluck theme this year is Andean. See cover article for more details. For directions, call Naseem or Mike at (303) 673-0933.

Saturday, January 25: *Raptor tour by Jim McKee.* Jim will lead a driving tour of northern Boulder County to look at wintering raptors from 10:00 am until 2:00 pm. Participants should bring binoculars, telescopes (if you have one), water, lunch, and an insatiable appetite to see these beautiful hunters of the sky. We will meet at the trail head parking lot on Neva Road on the north side of the East Beech open space property. If you have any questions about this location, call Jim McKee at (303)494-3393.

Sunday, February 2: *Candlemas hike on White Rocks Trail.* Steve Jones (303-494-2468; stvjones@peakpeak.com) will lead a leisurely 3-mile hike to search for sunlight and early signs of spring. Bring something "light" (your interpretation) to share with the group. Meet at the Teller Farms Open Space south trailhead, on Valmont Road 0.6 miles west of 95th Street, at 11 AM. Return around 2 PM.

Saturday, March 22: *Spring welcoming breakfast hike at Sawhill Ponds.* Meet at the Sawhill Ponds main parking area, west of 75th Street between Valmont and Jay roads, at 7 AM. Bring finger food to share at a potluck breakfast along Boulder Creek. Return around 10 AM. Steve Jones (303 494 2468; stvjones@peakpeak.com).



Jason Fee and Rachel Lee are happy to welcome their son, **Miles William Fee**, to the family. He was born on October 17, 2002, and weighed in at 8 lbs. 8 oz.



**Have you
renewed
your
membership?**

Announcement of open board positions

We have the following positions open for election at the annual meeting on January 18th:

President
Vice President
Secretary
5 open board seats

If you are interested in getting involved, please contact Naseem at tobird@earthlink.net.

Take the Challenge!

Visit this website to test your bioregional knowledge:
<http://www.asle.umn.edu/archive/readings/quiz.html>

submitted by Tim Hogan



Renaissance: continued from cover page

ated restoration work and a variety of studies within the riparian corridor.

Boulder Audubon and the City have received a grant to create a video documenting the project. Boulder Audubon and BCNA volunteers began monthly bird surveys in 1998. We count all birds seen or heard during an 8-minute period at each of 30 point-count stations. Since we accumulated two years of data prior to fencing, we can observe impacts of cattle exclusion on bird populations. The opportunity to track effects of the 2000-2002 drought has been a bonus.

Since fencing was completed, we've watched increasing numbers of blue-gray gnatcatchers, gray catbirds, yellow-breasted chats, and spotted towhees forage and nest in the expanding shrub understory. Despite dry conditions during the 2000 and 2002 breeding seasons, overall numbers of shrub-nesting birds have increased. (see table, below). Numbers of cavity-nesting birds also are up.

Mean Breeding Season (June-August) Numbers of Selected Species before and after Fencing	Mean Individuals/Station/Count	Species 1998-99	2000-02	% Change
Shrub-nesters	1.01	1.29	+28%	
Cavity-nesters	1.29	2.08	+60%	
Tree canopy nesters	1.31	1.08	-18%	
Ground-nesters	3.71	3.47	-7%	
Urban-adapted	5.44	3.44	-37%	
Total	12.66	11.36	-11%	

One of the most surprising outcomes has been a steep decline in numbers of some habitat generalists, including European starlings and brown-headed cowbirds. We are not sure why this is happening, but we wonder whether the elimination of cow dung within the fenced corridor has deprived these generalists of foraging opportunities. Many birds, including starlings, cowbirds, and even

sandhill cranes, glean insects and other invertebrates from cow dung.

Drought conditions during 2000 and 2002 seem to have impacted ground-nesting birds (including vesper and grasshopper sparrows) and tree canopy nesters (including western wood-pewees and yellow warblers). Grasshopper sparrows abandoned most of the area during summers when grass cover throughout the valley became sparse. Western wood-pewee and yellow warbler numbers declined during the three summers when the creek dried up completely.

Overall we've observed 137 bird species within the Coal Creek drainage, including common loon, bald eagle, broad-winged hawk, merlin, peregrine falcon, short-eared owl, northern mockingbird (nesting), sage thrasher (nesting), rose-breasted grosbeak, and lark bunting. During the past two winters a herd of more than 100 elk has migrated down the drainage to an area just west of State Highway 93. We often find black bear scat beside the creek. On summer mornings yipping and squealing coyote pups follow us along our survey routes. However, we're also accompanied by the constant roar of traffic on Highways 128 and 93, a grim reminder of how isolated and fragmented our remaining grassland parcels have become.

We plan to continue this work for the next several years, so if you are good at recognizing prairie birds by their songs and "chips" and care to help out, please give me a call. Let me know if you'd like an electronic copy of the five-year data summary.

Steve Jones (303-494-2468; stvjones@peakpeak.com). 1998-2002 volunteers: Beverly Baker, Andy Cowell, Ruth Carol Cushman, Gary Emerson, Linda Andes-Georges, Ivan Getting, Paula Hansley, Maddy Goldhawk, Connie Hulsinger, Trevor Munoz, Pam Piombino, Scott Severs, David Waltman, John Weller.

Winter Poems by Ruth Carol Cushman

I.
Ice-encased branches,
like silver calipers, clasp and measure
the width of a waning moon.

II.
Rising sun softens snow mounded on
branches-
A gentle breeze brings down drifts of
snow dust
Wrapping me in white veil spangled
with diamonds.
Someone once said snow doesn't give
a soft what damn whom it falls on.
Thank you, snow, for falling on me.

III.
A hundred white gulls wheel against
blue sky.
White snow molds prairie dog mounds
into volcano-cones
casting blue shadows.
I should write a poem-
But why?
This moment is poem enough.



Allegra Collister Nature Preserve Bird Banding Report Spring and Fall 2002

By Joe Harrison

Rather than a seasonal report, this report covers banding for the year 2002. Despite being a quasi annual report, there is very little to report. Activity at ACNP was minimal.

All of the banders were preoccupied, at one time or another, during the usual banding seasons. Everyone did want to do at least a little bit of banding, when time permitted, in spite of the fact that their sabbatical was overdue. We tried.

In late spring, two days of banding produced 9 different species totaling only 15 birds. One of the days (June 8th) was the gulch clean up party. For those who stayed late, they were treated to the capture and banding of an uncommon species --- a Yellow-billed Cuckoo. That was the payoff for having put in a hard days work. A bonus.

The fall effort wasn't much better. Only four days of banding for 32 birds of 11 species.

No new species were either banded or sighted.

There were a few returning birds that are worthy of note. A male Bullock's Oriole first banded in spring 1999 came back to enjoy the gulch again. From spring of 2001: a male Blue Grosbeak, a Western Wood Peewee, and an Orange-crowned Warbler. Smart birds know that ACNP is special and keep coming back for more. Who were the local returnees? Black-capped Chickadee from the class of fall 2000 and an Oregon Junco banded in fall 2001. They can't stay away either.

Routine walk throughs were accomplished on several occasions. Nothing out of the ordinary was noted. A bear continues to leave its calling cards. Water was in short supply. The springs never stopped flowing; but, the flow rate had decreased significantly. The gulch seems to be healthy and is supporting the usual variety of critters.

What are the prospects for bird banding in the 2003 seasons? It's somewhat uncertain as of this writing. No one has stepped forward to assume the role of lead bander. A few of the tools of the trade are in need of repair or replacement. Many of the nets are suffering severe UV damage and/or are in need of mending. Some nets are beyond repair and will need to be replaced. At least the bridges have new decking and the work table is in good condition.

It's safe to assume that bird banding will continue at ACNP. Will it be attended to as diligently as in years past? Maybe. What's needed is an infusion of young blood. Volunteers full of energy and enthusiasm who are willing to make a commitment. Who can we recruit?

The history and tradition of bird banding at the gulch, ACNP, is extremely valuable. The data collected will prove to be a rich and rewarding resource for a many investigators and researchers.

The bird banders: Virginia Dionigi, Tony Esposito, Joe Harrison, Maggie Boswell, Tom Delaney





Birds Banded: Spring and Fall 2002

Species		# sightings 2002	Total since 1991
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	Coccyzus americanus	1	2
Dusky Flycatcher	Empidonax oberholseri	1	200
Black-capped Chickadee	Poecile atricapilla	10	216
Brown Creeper	Certhia americana	2	15
House Wren	Troglodytes aedon	2	197
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Regulus calendula	1	126
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	Poliptila caerulea	1	24
American Robin	Turdus migratorius	1	490
Orange-crowned Warbler	Vermivora celata	3	502
Yellow Warbler	Dendroica petechia	2	408
Yellow-rumped Warbler	Dendroica coronata	1	275
American Tree Sparrow	Spizella arborea	3	67
White-throated Sparrow	Zonotrichia albicollis	2	8
Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow	Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelli	4	561
Slate-colored Dark-eyed Junco	Junco hyemalis hyemalis	1	15
Oregon Dark-eyed Junco	Junco hyemalis mearnsi	4	79
Brown-headed Cowbird	Molothrus ater	1	27
Bullock's Oriole	Icterus bullockii	7	210



Wildlife Update

By Jim McKee

Black-Tailed Prairie Dog Status

Contrary to recent newspaper headlines, Black-tailed Prairie Dog acreage hasn't tripled since the EDAW study in 2000. Neither has Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) management had anything to do with the surprisingly large occupied acreage found in the recently completed survey. . My own, personal belief is that farmers and ranchers tolerate some level of prairie dog activity on their land. In addition, it isn't cheap to poison prairie dogs and some landowners probably have more grassland than is needed for livestock grazing. Whatever the reason, Colorado currently has 631,000 plus or minus 60,000 acres with a 95 % confidence level. 87 % of this acreage lies in eastern Colorado and only 13 % along the urban front range.

This is much greater than the 255,000 acre objective determined for the state by the eleven state regional work group. What it means is that we have the freedom to establish goals which are large enough to help protect other short grass prairie species without unduly restricting farmers and ranchers in managing their land. The work group is specifically focused on protecting the Mountain Plover, Burrowing Owl and Ferruginous Hawk as well as locating a prairie dog complex large enough to accommodate a self sustaining Black-footed Ferret population (at least 10,000 acres of occupied prairie dog town). Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory studies indicate that Colorado currently has a healthier Burrowing Owl population than many of the states around us. They attribute this to our larger prairie dog population.

In support of these and other conservation objectives, the Colorado Department of Natural Resources has established a new Colorado Species Conservation Partnership program in CDOW which is focused on Gunnison's Sage Grouse, Preble's Meadow Jumping Mouse, and short grass prairie species in general. Funding for this program is expected from the federal farm and interior funding bills and from GOCO. A significant portion of the available funds will be used to protect short grass prairie species in eastern Colorado.

Prairie dogs along the urban front range corridor have a different set of problems and the work group hasn't yet begun to address them. As we move to this issue, we will be taking testimony from the many interested groups and working toward plans to preserve as many colonies as possible. This issue is complicated by Senate Bill 99-111 and our inability to re-locate prairie dogs across county



lines without the permission to the county commissioners in the receiving county. I will report more in the future as the work group begins to focus on this issue.

Lynx

The Colorado Wildlife Commission has approved plans to release up to 180 more lynx in the state over the next six years. CDOW will release approximately 50 per year for the next three years followed by 10-12 per year for three years after that. CDOW is currently monitoring 35 lynx from the 96 previously released. Forty-three of the 96 are known to be dead and some may have thrown their radio collars or the radios may no longer be operational. At this time there has been no documented reproduction and there may not be enough lynx present to ensure that males find the females during estrus. The new releases, which will begin in April, 2003 are intended to achieve a population density similar to that in southern Canada, Montana, and Idaho where there are successful breeding populations.

Many farmers, ranchers, and sportsmen have been concerned that undue restrictions would be placed on their activities as a result of the lynx' "Threatened" status. In an attempt to reduce these concerns, CDOW has negotiated protocols with the US Fish and Wildlife Service which will allow the take of up to two lynx per year by ranchers in controlling predation and two "accidental take" by bobcat hunters. CDOW, in turn, is providing education to ranchers and hunters to help them know where they may find lynx and in identification. Only those who take part in this process and sign a contract acknowledging it will be protected by the protocols. After the take of two lynx by ranchers and two by hunters, the normal restrictions of the Endangered Species Act apply.



This article is a reprint of Clay Evans' review of Joyce Gelhorn's book, "Song of the Alpine: The Rocky Mountain Tundra Through the Seasons." It was originally printed in the Daily Camera on November 24, 2002.

Stark Symphony

By Clay Evans,
Daily Camera Book Editor

There is no more ferocious, lovely or intriguing landscape in Colorado than the Rocky Mountain alpine tundra. What the state lacks in latitude it makes up for in altitude: Conditions on Niwot Ridge west of Boulder at 12,264 feet of elevation include a mean annual temperature of 25 degrees Fahrenheit and an average annual wind speed of 19 mph. Compare that to Nome, Alaska, near the top of the world, which has the same temperature, but annual wind speed of only 10.6 mph.

Those numbers come from former Boulder High School science teacher Joyce Gelhorn's new sonnet to Colorado's high-altitude ecosystem, "Song of the Alpine: The Rocky Mountain Tundra Through the Seasons." Not quite an essay of the kind written by Terry Tempest Williams, but neither scholarly text, Gelhorn's richly illustrated book is a highly informative and genuinely engaging hybrid.

Gelhorn knows of what she writes. She spent "a dozen years" as a grad student, researcher and resident of the University of Colorado's famed "mountain research station" at the foot of Niwot ridge. And though her background is in science, she has a nicely evocative way of writing about the tundra landscape she fell in love with - and to which her family adapted like wild creatures.

"From our log cabin at 9,500 feet, my husband, children, and I celebrated the rhythm of the seasons. Summers passed, colors faded, and snow and cold gripped the land. One night, my husband and I lis-

tened to a winter storm pummeling down the mountain slope. The winds whistled around the eaves of our cabin, pelting ice shards against the walls. I feared the drifting snow would bury us," she writes. "Around 4 a.m., I checked on our three young sons and found their blankets were frosted with snow that had sifted through chinks in the cabin walls, but they were sleeping soundly. Perhaps my sons, just like small alpine mammals that live in winter beneath the snow cover, found snow a insulating blanket."

Here is a sort of "year's log" of the high country, taking the reader through the seasons at and above treeline. Here are descriptions of the animals and plants that live there, and explanations as to how they manage to survive in such a harsh environment. There also is plenty of history and anthropology detailing how humans have interacted with the alpine tundra, from descriptions of American Indian hunting technique to the methods of miners and mountain climbers.

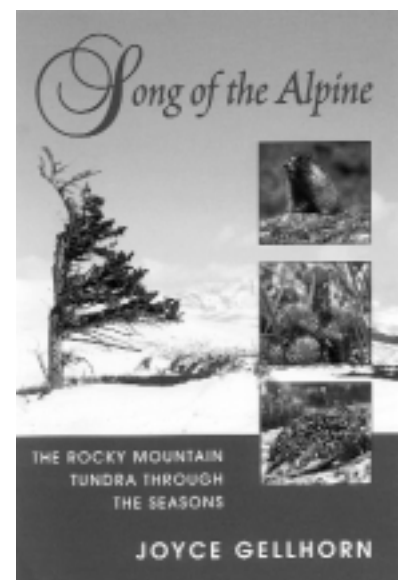
But even for someone who speaks not a word of English, this book is an invitation to spend hours poring over its details. Gellhorn's own photos make up the majority of the illustrations. The pictures were made over a quarter of a century wandering the high country and are appealing and remarkable. There are wide shots of the landscape itself, animals - pikas, marmots, ptarmigan, bighorn sheep - weather, and a variety of plants, ice formations and remnants of human activity. Small local publisher Johnson Books is to be commended for the wealth of color photos and illustrations here, a rarity in these times.



At the end of her exploration, Gelhorn also is kind enough to provide an alpine tundra glossary, taxonomic lists of plants and animals and an extensive bibliography.

In her concluding words, she taps the music she experiences in the "song" of harsh and glorious landscape: "A melody accompanies each season. Changes from year to year add new variations. Listening to the music of the seasons over and over, I discern the underlying composition with its hidden harmonies. The song of the alpine emerges as a powerful symphony, evoking joy and exultation."

Gelhorn's book, too, is a symphony of many elements that entwine to create a "biography of the land" that is both informative and lyrical.



For more information about this book and how to purchase it, contact Joyce Gelhorn at jgellhorn@sprynet.com.



Boulder Chapter of the Colorado Native Plant Society

Join us for free programs on the second Thursday of each month at 7:00 p.m. We will meet at the City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks offices, 66 South Cherryvale Road. For more information, contact Chapter President Kathy Damas at 303.543.1492.

Thursday January 9, 2003

Walker Ranch Fire Revisited

Claire De Leo, Boulder County Parks and Open Space Plant Ecologist and Pat Murphy, plant ecologist and owner of Ecotone will share their findings after monitoring the Walker Ranch fire for a second season.

Thursday February 13, 2003

Botanical Art Inspirations and "Eye Candy"

Carolyn Crawford, our own renowned botanical illustrator, will describe the inspiration she received by Ida Pemberton to pursue art.

Thursday March 13, 2003

25 Years of Plant Conservation at the Colorado Natural Areas Program

Program Manager Ron West will summarize CNAP's long history of plant and plant community work across the state.

Thursday April 10, 2003

Comparative Ecology and Botany of Southern Peru

Join local restoration ecologist Dr. David Buckner as he shares fascinating observations (through photos and discussion) made while working in Southern Peru.

Become a Volunteer Naturalist

If you enjoy exploring and sharing the natural wonders of Boulder County with others, then you should consider becoming a Volunteer Naturalist with Boulder County Parks and Open Space! Volunteer Naturalists lead interpretive nature hikes, present public natural history slide programs, and provide hands-on environmental experiences for participants of all ages. A 10-week-training program is required and will take place on Thursdays, from 8:30am to 4:00pm, beginning February 7th. Training includes an overview of the department's mission and resource management activities; Native American history; local geology; plants and ecosystems; wildlife and birds; agricultural lands and weed management; and interpretive programming and resources.

The application deadline is Friday, January 18th. For more information about and an application for this exciting volunteer opportunity, contact Larry Colbenson at 303-441-3899 or ljcpa@co.boulder.co.us.

Colorado Natural Areas in Boulder County

In 1977 the Colorado Legislature created our state Natural Areas Program, whose mandate is to identify and protect sites of statewide significance that contain rare plants or animals, exemplary native plant communities, or outstanding geology or fossil resources. Since that time, over 100 sites have been so identified, and Boulder County is home to six of these - three "designated" sites and 3 "registered" sites (the latter being a first step in the process).

The county's designated state natural areas are Colorado Tallgrass Prairie and South Boulder Creek, on City of Boulder lands, and the White Rocks site on private land along Boulder Creek. Registered sites are Green Mountain, again on City lands, Copeland Willow Carr on City of Longmont land near Wild Basin, and a great blue heron rookery on private land. More on the county's designated sites, as well as all designated sites statewide, can be found at "<http://parks.state.co.us/cnap/>".

The Program is quite fortunate to have a cadre of 65 volunteer stewards - most with advanced degrees -- who visit the far-flung areas and report on changes in conditions and management needs. In addition, a Friends of Natural Areas group has also been organized and is open to all those interested in this work (see website). The Program works with every type of landowner/manager including private parties, NGO's, and federal, state, county and municipal governments.

Benefits of designation include public acknowledgment of the owner's outstanding stewardship through a certificate from the governor, the site's uniqueness and its statewide significance is documented and a paper trail established, can provide for educational and research use, access to Program staff and expertise, can improve success in the owner's grant proposals, and can link or expand site protection to like-minded adjacent landowners.

For further information, please contact program manager Ron West at ron.west@state.co.us, 303-866-3203 X326, or 1313 Sherman St., Rm. 618, Denver 80203.



2001 BCNA Board of Directors

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Treasurer Vicki Flower 303-684-9030
Secretary Bev Gholson 303-440-5225

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Steve Jones 303-494-2468
Naseem Munshi 303-673-0933
Joan Ray 303-444-5011
Jacob Smith 303-247-0998

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For the calendar, class offering, research results, publications and other BCNA related information
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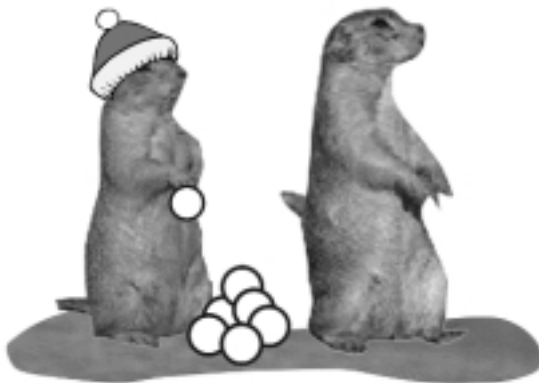
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For the latest news and in-depth discussions on issues of interest to BCNA members

For more information, go to:
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nature-net>

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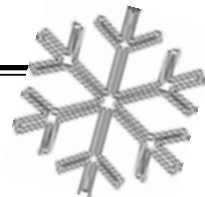


Committees & Contacts

Allegra Collister Nature Preserve and Birdbanding Site	Joe Harrison	303-772-3481
Cliff Nesting Raptors	Nan Lederer	303-447-1899
Conservation Committee	Bruce Bland	303-499-8612
	Joan Ray	303-444-5011
Education Committee	Carol McLaren	303-530-9108
Indian Peaks Bird Counts	Dave Hallock	303-258-3672
	Bill Kaempfer	303-939-8005
National Forest Management	Tim Hogan	303-444-5577
Newsletter, Website, Marketing Literature	Susan Winter	303-581-0783
Parties, Special Events	Naseem Munshi	303-673-0933
Publications Committee	Steve Jones	303-494-2468
State and Regional Wildlife Issues	Jim McKee	303-494-3393
Winter Raptor Survey	Steve Jones	303-494-2468

Artwork Credits, Acknowledgements, Etc.

Banding photo: Ann Cooper; Bird heads: www.biologicaldiversity.org, www.wbu.com/chipperwoods, www.ronausting.com, donb.furfly.net;
Prairie Dogs: Steve Jones



Support the Boulder County Nature Association

Name _____

Address _____

Phone, Fax or Email (optional) _____

Type of Membership:

- ___ Student/Senior (65 and over) \$10
- ___ General Member \$15
- ___ Family or Household \$20
- ___ Supporter \$30
- ___ Subscriber \$50
- ___ Founder \$100
- ___ Life Member \$300

The membership year is January 1 to December 31.
(Members who join after October 1 are considered paid through the following year.)

All members receive this quarterly newsletter.

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

Thanks for your support!



Boulder County Nature Association
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