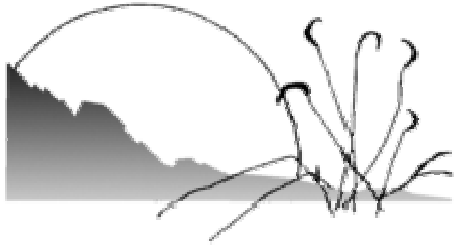


BOULDER COUNTY NATURE ASSOCIATION



Volume 22, Number 1
Winter 2005

Come to the Annual Meeting!

John Weller will show slides from his spectacular new book, *Great Sand Dunes National Park, between Light and Shadow*, at the February 6 annual meeting. Over a three-year period, John backpacked deep into the dunes for several days each month to photograph and observe life in this stark wilderness. Expect intimate views of wolf spiders, hummingbirds, mammal tracks, and wildflowers, along with surreal images of swirling snowstorms, magenta-tinted streams, and blue-frosted sand.

In keeping with the sandy theme and our subtropical proclivities, the unprogrammed potluck will feature desert and North African cuisine. So dust off your favorite Moroccan, Algerian, Tunisian, Libyan, Egyptian, Ethiopian, or Mojave recipes (dozens are available on-line) and join us around 5 p.m. A short business meeting, including election of new officers and board members, will precede John's presentation. See the BCNA calendar on page 2 for directions.

Proposal to Raise Membership Dues

Due to the rising cost of insurance (now more than \$5 per member per year) and increased costs of producing and mailing the quarterly newsletter, the BCNA board will submit a proposed dues increase for vote by the general membership at January's annual meeting. The proposal would raise student and senior memberships from \$10 to \$15, individual memberships from \$15 to \$20, and family memberships from \$20 to \$30. It would take effect in October 2005. If approved, this will be our first dues increase in more than 10 years.

Photos Needed for BCNA Calendar

We are still soliciting photos for the 2006 BCNA Nature Calendar. Please send up to two of your best photos (digital or slides) of Boulder County during any season to Joyce Gellhorn, 112 Deer Trail, Boulder Colorado 80302; 303-442-8123.

Ecosystem Stewardship Launch

See the quarterly BCNA calendar (page 2) for information about upcoming meetings for the new ecosystem stewardship initiative. If you would like to adopt an area or you have questions about the initiative, please contact Steve Jones (stephen.jones@earthlink.net; 303-494-2468).

Whither the Visitor Plan?

Unless you spent the last six months in Antarctica, you've probably heard more than you ever wanted to about the Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) Visitor Plan. You probably know that some representatives from recreation groups feel betrayed by OSMP's rejection of key recommendations proposed by last summer's Visitor Plan Community Forum. You no doubt also have noted that some environmentalists are upset over compromises recommended by the Forum and apparently approved by representatives from BCNA and Boulder County Audubon.

It's been a long and torturous road. About seven years ago, OSMP began drafting the Visitor Plan, which would be the first comprehensive management plan for the system. Previous efforts to draft a wildlife management plan, an ecosystem management plan, and specific area management plans had been torpedoed by politics and the city bureaucracy. BCNA had our doubts about actively participating in deliberations concerning the Visitor Plan. Many of us felt that this process was putting the cart before the horse; it makes much more sense to map and catalog ecosystems and wildlife before discussing trails and recreational uses. However, the Visitor Plan was the "only game in town," so we agreed to help out by providing information and our experience with land management planning.

(Continued on page 4)

BCNA Winter Calendar

December-February: Indian Peaks winter bird count period. Contact Bill Kaempfer for information or to volunteer. (Kaempfer@Colorado.edu 303-443-3175)

Sunday, January 16, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Buttonrock birding hike with Scott Severs (303-684-6430). This will be a moderate hike in the St. Vrain Canyon with Boulder Audubon. Probable sightings include dip-pers, jays, nuthatches, crossbills, finches, and chickadees. Meet at Niwot Park-and-Ride for car-pooling. Bring lunch, snacks, and warm clothes.

Sunday, February 6, 5-8 p.m: BCNA annual meeting and potluck, at Orah Elron's house, 4335 Caddo Parkway (from Baseline just west of the Foothills Parkway, turn south on Mohawk, go about four blocks and turn right on Caddo Parkway). Bring a dessert or North African dish to share, along with your own plate, utensils, and cup. The potluck will be followed by a short business meeting and elections at 6:30, and John Weller's riveting slides of the Great Sand Dunes at 7. For information call Steve at 303-494-2468.

Saturday, February 12, 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m: Rap-tor driving tour of northern Boulder County. Join leaders Sue Cass, Jim Eide, and Jim McKee(303-494-3393) at the Cottonwood Marsh parking lot at Walden Ponds. We will carpool from there searching for raptors and working on our identification skills. Bring water, lunch or a snack, binoculars, a field guide, and spotting scopes and FRS radios if you have them. We will provide spare binoculars, radios, and scopes. This should be a great time for raptor viewing (weather permitting), so come and enjoy it with us.

Sunday, February 13, 7-8:30 p.m: "Siberia," with Cyndra Dietz. Cyndra will present slides of her two-month trip to Siberia in summer 2003. Invited there to help establish environmental education programs, she visited schools, villages, and summer camps rarely seen by outsiders. Her slides highlight scenery, temples, festivals, and shrines in this multicultural area near the Mongolian border, as well as a nine-day mountain trek to a sacred valley of hot springs. Carol and Dave Kampert's house, 3060 Ash Street (in South Boulder off Broadway between Dartmouth and 27th Way). 303-499-3049.

Sunday, March 6, 3-4:30 p.m: Organizational meet-ing for ecosystem stewardship project. We will go over area assignments and suggested protocol for long-term studies. George Reynolds Branch Library, 3595 Table Mesa Drive (across from King Soopers). Contact Steve Jones (303-494-2468;stephen.jones@earthlink.net) for information.

Saturday, March 12, 7-10 a.m. Spring welcoming hike at Sawhill Ponds. Join Steve Jones (303-494-2468) for a leisurely walk among the thawing ponds. We often see bald eagles, herons, cinnamon teal, wood ducks, and chorus frogs. Bring something sunny, sweet, or passionate to share at a potluck breakfast by Boulder Creek. Meet at the Sawhill Ponds main parking area, west off 75th Street be-tween Valmont and Jay roads, at 7 a.m.

Thorne Ecological Institute 50th Anniversary Event: Jayni Chase To Be Honored

The Thorne Ecological Institute will celebrate its 50th Anniversary with a major awards and fundrais-ing luncheon in Denver on January 27. Jayni Chase, wife of actor Chevy Chase, will receive Thorne's Environmental Award. In 1989, she and her husband founded the Center for Environmental Education in California. It later moved to Antioch New England Graduate School in New Hampshire.

The Thorne event will also feature a well-known keynote speaker from the Rocky Mountain Region, recognize the Thorne Teacher of the Year, and kick off a major Endowment Campaign to raise ten mil-lion dollars over the next five years. This will en-sure the continuation of Thorne Ecological Institute as an important national environmental education leader for the next 50 years.

The luncheon is by invitation only and there is no required donation to attend. Those wishing to at-tend may contact Jessica Feld, Executive Director of Thorne Ecological Institute, at 303-499-3647 or Jessica@thorne-eco.org and request an invita-tion. The event will be held at the City Center Mar-riott in downtown Denver from noon to 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, January 27, 2005. www.thorne-eco.org

Winter Natural Events Calendar

Early January: On average, January 1 is the coldest day of the year. Boulder's record low temperature of -36° C occurred on January 17, 1930. The mornings begin to get longer around January 6. Look for early Easter daisies (*Townsendia* spp.) blooming on foothills shales. Female black bears give birth to their young while snuggled up in a den under a rock or log. Listen for eastern screech-owls giving their wailing territorial calls in cottonwood groves on the plains.

January 25: Full moon rises at 5:28 p.m.

When the Snow Blows like Spirits in the Sun (Arapaho)
Hunger (Lakota)
Strong Cold (Cheyenne)

February 2: Candlemass (Imbolc). People celebrate the growth of passion and the stirrings of new life as the sun's light strengthens. This time was sacred to the Celtic Goddess Brigid, and it was a festival for young children. It also was a time for initiations. Every candle in the house is lit to celebrate the re-birth of the sun. "Imbolc" literally means "in the belly" (of the Earth Mother).

Mid-February: Great horned owls lay their eggs in a recycled red-tailed hawk or magpie nest or in a broken-off tree stump. Golden eagles gather sticks to reconstruct nests on cliffs in the foothills.

February 24: Full moon rises at 6:28 p.m.

Frost Sparkling in the Sun (Arapaho)
Raccoons (Lakota)
When the Geese Come Home (Omaha)

Early March: Migrating bluebirds flit across the prairie, perching on dead mullein stalks. Snow geese and bald eagles head north. A half-million sandhill cranes gather along the Platte River. Spring beauties bloom in foothills canyons. On warm, sunny days, hibernating mourning cloak butterflies emerge from under the bark of aspens in Gregory Canyon and take flight. Listen for chorus frogs at Sawhill Ponds and Teller Farms.

March 21: Vernal Equinox. Traditionally, this was a time for blessing the fields and animals. Eggs, powerful symbols of fertility, were painted and used in rituals. Flowers were worn, placed on the altars, and mixed into cooked dishes full of seeds, nuts, and leafy vegetables. The Roman Venus Feast and

the Greek festival of Aphrodite were held around April 1. Easter is the Saxon fertility goddess.

March 25: Full moon rises at 6:24 p.m.

Buffaloes Dropping Their Calves (Arapaho)
Sore Eyes (Lakota)
Water Stands in Ponds (Ponca)

Spring Symposium to Address Imperiled Species

"Species in Peril" will be the theme of this year's Boulder County Ecosystem Symposium, sponsored by BCNA, Boulder County Audubon Society, Colorado Native Plant Society, Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks, and Boulder County Parks and Open Space. The symposium is tentatively scheduled for April 15 or April 22.

We anticipate presentations on mountain lion populations, threatened orchids, rare and declining birds, status of the Preble's jumping mouse, adaptation of raptors to fragmented grasslands, and potential effects of global warming on local wildlife. Look for details in the April newsletter or on the Nature-Net.



Trumpeter Swans on Barker Reservoir
Dorothy Emmerling

January in Glacier Gorge

A winter sun flirts with
Cloud tatters on mountain ridges.
Spindrift smokes from Keyboard of the Winds.
Crepuscular rays illuminate Stoneman Pass,
Valhalla's mighty vaulted columns.
Shadows and brilliance dance,
Etching a perfect s-shaped telemark turn.

by Joyce Gellhorn

Owl Class Tracks Great Horned Owl Nesting Success

What makes great horned owls so successful in human-disturbed environments? What specific conditions contribute to their nesting success? Last year's BCNA owl class initiated a study of great horned owl nesting success on the plains of Boulder County. We located 10 nests and monitored them to determine how many young fledged and when. After several years of this nest monitoring, we hope to be able to look at the data and determine which types of nests (cavity, stick nest, other) are most productive and which locations (noting proximity to subdivisions, highways, undeveloped areas, water, and natural habitats) seem to favor nesting success.

Of the ten nests we observed, one fledged 4 young, four fledged 3 young, four fledged 2 young, and one failed.

The nest that fledged four young was located in the broken top of a large cottonwood on the north bank

Nest Type	Number	Total Fledged	Fledged/ Nest
Tree cavity	4	12	3.0
Red-tailed hawk	3	5	1.6
Magpie	3	7	2.3
Total	10	24	2.4

of Boulder Creek about 100 m east of the Foothills Hwy. This nest was best observed from the south bank of the creek, but it was difficult to find from any angle because the young stayed deep in the cavity until late spring. Another interesting site was a magpie nest in a 4 m-high juniper west of Boulder Reservoir. This nest fledged three young in mid-April.

The most unusual site was at the Valmont Power Plant, where the owls eschewed the famous "owl cam" nest box high on one of the smokestacks and chose, instead, a magpie nest embedded in a massive power substation. One false move, and the incubating female would have been fried; but she somehow managed to hatch and rear two young. This year's owl class will continue the study, if we can find any nests! We welcome additional observations.

- Steve Jones, with thanks to volunteers Chris Arden, George Coffee, Alyson Duffey, Helen Eisner, Carol and Dave Kampert, Joan Kyros, Dave Madonna, Mary Ellen McCarry, Carron Meaney, David Newman, Phil Robertson, and Joyce Takemine.



Great Horned Owl on tree hollow nest
Steve Jones

(Visitor Plan Continued from page 1)

In 1999 OSMP formed a Visitor Plan Advisory Committee to outline goals and policies of the plan. In 2003 a second Visitor Plan Advisory Committee, comprised primarily of non-affiliated community members, was organized to help draft the plan. Several members of community recreation groups complained that they had not been represented on this committee. In response, during summer 2004, OSMP organized the Visitor Plan Community Forum, a committee made up of representatives from interested community groups.

The forum was comprised of approximately 8 representatives from groups that primarily advocate for recreation and 4 from groups that primarily advocate for environmental conservation. A single person was invited to represent both BCNA and Boulder County Audubon. No one, as far as we can tell, was invited to represent Colorado Native Plant Society or Center for Native Ecosystems. From the beginning, we were slightly suspicious of this apparently lopsided representation favoring recreational groups. However, we agreed to participate in the process so that we would have a voice.

As it turned out, the Community Forum meetings were very productive. Representatives from diverse groups reached consensus on many issues, including overall goals of the plan and designation of the four management categories: passive recreation areas, natural areas, habitat conservation areas, and agricultural areas. However, the forum was not given sufficient time to complete its work--dog management issues were addressed only during the final hour of the final meeting, and representatives

Continued on page 5

Visitor Plan Continued from page 4

did not have adequate time to consult fully with Co- their respective boards. In August, representatives from the Community Forum drafted a letter to the *Daily Camera* summarizing the broad areas of apparent consensus. Neither BCNA nor Boulder Audubon agreed to sign this letter, citing time limitations and disagreement with some of its assumptions.

In September, OSMP staff presented the revised Visitor Plan to the Open Space Board of Trustees. It was then amended and presented to City Council. Many representatives from the Community Forum were dismayed to discover that OSMP, while adopting "91%" (staff language) of their recommendations, had rejected Forum consensus language on several major issues, including management philosophy and on-trail restrictions in habitat conservation areas (the most environmentally sensitive areas of the system). They showed up in force at a City Council meeting to protest.

In October the BCNA board reviewed the recommendations of both the Community Forum and OSMP. As might be expected, our board agreed with the Community Forum language some of the time, with the OSMP language some of the time, and with neither some of the time. We also concluded that OSMP should not be bound by the Community Forum language (since the Forum was only one of three community groups that reviewed the plan), but that they should work diligently to try to reach consensus with the Forum on as many issues as possible. We conveyed these opinions to City Council.

Here is how the BCNA board came down on what we perceived as the most crucial issues:

1. Management philosophy (also known as the "precautionary principle"): We believe that the revised OSMP language, developed after the Community Forum completed its work, is preferable to the language proposed by the Forum. Here's the OSMP language: Protecting native biodiversity is essential to maintaining the quality of the visitor experience. Open Space and Mountain Parks shall take a precautionary approach to protect and preserve resources when there is uncertainty about the conservation status of resources, the impacts of visitor use, and the effects of management actions. When threats of serious or irreversible resource damage are suspected, even in the absence of complete information, OSMP will take actions that are intended to prevent resource degradation or allow restoration of native populations and ecologi-

cal systems.

2. On-trail restrictions in habitat conservation areas: OSMP wants to require on trail use and levy stiff fines on off-trail users; the Forum advocated voluntary compliance. We tried to strike a middle ground here. Since these most sensitive areas comprise almost half of the OSMP lands, and closing them entirely to off-trail access has been a major point of contention with recreational groups, we proposed a cooperative, rather than punitive, approach. Here is the language proposed by the BCNA board: " Post strongly and clearly worded on-trail advisories in all agricultural areas and HCA's. Monitor and evaluate annually to determine levels of on-trail compliance and the need for additional enforcement or signage. Fragile areas within HCA's supporting documented species of concern or habitats of concern may be posted as closed to public access."

3. Night closures of habitat conservation areas: We believe that the current parking closures from 11 PM to 5 AM should be sufficient to limit night use of these areas. OSMP advocates a curfew from one hour after sunset to one hour before sunrise.

4. Dog management: BCNA has traditionally advocated that dogs be on leash in natural areas. In the interest of compromise, we accepted the Visitor Plan Advisory Group recommendations: essentially that dogs be allowed off leash on most trails in passive recreation areas; be leashed on selective trails in natural areas, and be excluded from habitat conservation areas. The current OSMP language, worked out through negotiations with FIDO'S (a dog advocacy group), allows dogs to be off leash throughout most of the system, including some trails in habitat conservation areas.

City Council will continue to discuss the plan and make recommendations during January and February. All of you are invited to attend these meetings and express your views: council@ci.boulder.co.us. Check the Nature-Net or City of Boulder web site for dates and times).

We also welcome any input from BCNA members either by e-mail or by attending the BCNA board meeting in February. To review the plan, visit the Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks Visitor Plan web site. Finally, we thank all of you who have written letters, testified at public hearings, or served on Visitor Plan committees.

- Steve Jones and Scott Severs



Sharp-tailed Grouse
Steve Jones

A Private Sharp-Tailed Grouse Lek in Nebraska

One of the most memorable wildlife experiences of my life took place in the Sandhills near Mullen, Nebraska in early May a few years ago. Before dawn, we went out with Mitch Glidden to a greater prairie chicken/sharp-tailed grouse lek on private land. When we reached our destination, Mitch led us in the dark to an old yellow school bus with no glass in the windows where we set up our cameras.

As dawn came, we soon realized that the bus was parked in the middle of the lek! Prairie chickens were soon booming and strutting all around us. For the next 3 ½ hours we took video (with sound) of the booming. The sharp-tailed grouse were so close to the bus that we could hear their feet scraping and stomping as they displayed!

Mitch also owns the Sandhills Motel in Mullen, a comfortable and convenient place to stay before one of his chicken/grouse trips.

Paula Hansley

Editor's Note: Other grouse leks can be reserved, free of charge, at Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge and Valentine National Wildlife Refuge. You can reserve there or at the Sandhills Motel through their web sites. The height of the dancing season is usually mid-April through early May.

Sightings

Loons, swans, and kittiwake: Like clockwork, migrating loons showed up at Boulder Reservoir again this year in early November. Several observers reported a pacific loon and two common loons. Scott Roeder found a black-legged kittiwake at Lagerman Reservoir and David Waltman spied three tundra swans at Lake Valley Pond in late November. A pair of turkey vultures seen by George and Marty Oetzel on December 8 were the first ever reported after Thanksgiving on the BCNA winter raptor survey.

Boulder Christmas bird count: Thanks in part to a mild, mostly calm day, participants reported a near-record 107 species this year. Noticeably absent in preliminary compilations were rough-legged hawk, eastern screech-owl, and yellow-rumped warbler.

Elk: A small herd of elk moved down the Coal Creek drainage in November and set up winter quarters on Marshall Mesa. We now have two elk herds in Boulder County that are able to follow their historic migration routes from the tundra all the way down to the plains. Protecting elk migration corridors was a major goal of BCNA and the County Comprehensive Plan from the beginning, and it appears to be paying off.

Drought relief: Boulder had received around 27" of precipitation (the annual norm is 19") as of November 30. Here are 365-day percentage of average precipitation amounts for cities in Colorado and adjacent states through November:

Colorado: Alamosa 77, Boulder 145, Grand Junction 135, Pueblo 108. Kansas: Dodge City 113, Goodland 119, Topeka 117, Wichita 133. Oklahoma: Oklahoma City 106. New Mexico: Albuquerque 128, Farmington 108, Roswell 110. Utah: Cedar City 126, Salt Lake City 128. Wyoming: Casper 84, Cheyenne 79, Lander 127. Nebraska: Lincoln 86, North Platte 103, Scottsbluff 77, Valentine 97.

Source: NOAA CPC global precipitation monitoring site.

***A Hawk in the Sun*, by Leon R. Powers,
Dimi Press, 2003, 181 pages with 6 color
photos, \$14.95.**

This small book is the story of Dr. Powers' field research on ferruginous hawks for his Ph.D. dissertation in the seventies, so the data are 30 years old. Nevertheless, for hawk lovers, the book is filled with fascinating information.

Before reading this small volume I had known little about the habits of ferruginous hawks and I found much to surprise me. For three years the author studied a large group of nesting ferugs in the juniper-strewn expanses of Black Pine Valley and Raft River Valley on the Idaho/Utah border. His research question was "How do the nestlings of this large desert hawk manage to survive the scorching heat of the sun while exposed to it day after day in their typically large, open, and unshaded nests?"

In the course of this research he learned a great deal in addition to this. Of particular interest to me was his discussion at the end of the book on the loss of habitat which may be endangering this magnificent bird. The author believes that "ferruginous hawks survive the best in healthy, jackrabbit-infested sagebrush-perennial grass ecosystems." This ecosystem, he notes, is threatened, not by development, but ultimately because of the ubiquitous presence of cheatgrass which is negatively affecting the sagebrush/grass ecosystems' ability to recover from fire.

Jan Carnes



Ferruginous Hawk
Steve Jones

BCNA Board of Directors

President.....Scott Severs (303-684-6430)
Vice President...Steve Jones (303-494-2468)
Treasurer.....Vickie Flower (303-684-9030)
Secretary.....Jan Carnes (303-827-3024)

Sue Cass (303-494-5345)
Joyce Gellhorn (303-442-8123)
Kim Graber (303-494-7971)
Barbara Hawke (303-527-1819)
Jim McKee (303-494-3393)

Committees and Contacts

- *Allegra Collister Birdbanding Site:*

Joe Harrison (303-772-3481).

- *Education:*

Carol McLaren (303-530-9108) and
Carol Kampert (303-499-3049).

- *Indian Peaks Bird Counts:*

Dave Hallock (303-258-3672) and
Bill Kaempfer (303-939-8005).

- *National Forest Management:*

Tim Hogan (303-444-5577).

- *Newsletter:*

Rebecca Hill (303-786-0553) and Steve
Jones (303-4942468)

- *Website:*

George Oetzel (303-543-3712).

- *Parties, Special Events:*

Naseem Munshi (303-673-0933).

- *Publications:*

Steve Jones (303-494-2468).

- *State and Regional Wildlife Issues:*

Jim McKee (303-494-3393).

- *Wintering Raptor Survey:*

Sue Cass (303-494-5345) and Jim McKee

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

For the calendar, class offerings, research results, publications, and other BCNA-related information: www.bcna.org

JOIN THE NATURE-NET LIST SERVICE

For the Latest news and in-depth discussions of Boulder County natural history issues, go to:
[Http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nature-net](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nature-net)

E-mail BCNA at mail@BCNA.org

Support the Boulder County Nature Association

Name _____

Address _____

Phone and/or E-mail (optional) _____

Type of Membership:

_____	Student/Senior (65 or over)	\$10
_____	General Member	\$15
_____	Family or Household	\$20
_____	Supporter	\$30
_____	Founder	\$100
_____	Life Member	\$300
_____	Corporate	\$500

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

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

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