

Boulder County Nature Association



"The Boulder County Nature Association is a private, non-profit membership organization committed to preserving the natural history of our region through research, documentation, and public education."

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BCNA Ecosystem Plan – Hawkin Gulch/Walker Ranch/Upper Eldorado Canyon ECA and Boulder Mountain Parks/South Boulder ECA

(This is the fifth in a series of articles that explores the evolution of the Ecosystem Plan and the current status of the core preserves and habitat connectors.)

These two Environmental Conservation Areas (ECAs) are side-by-side and work together to protect critical resources in the south-central part of the County. Each contains a multitude of significant plants, plant communities, and wildlife. Together they total 38,000 acres, providing an important mountain to prairie link.

The protection of the Boulder Mountain Parks/South Boulder ECA began with the creation of the Boulder Mountain Parks. The canyons and peaks of the Mountain Parks are very diverse floristically, harboring a number of rare plants, including dwarf wild indigo, paper birch, Rocky Mountain sedge, broad-leafed twayblade, white adder's-mouth, pictureleaf wintergreen, and Weatherby's spike-moss. Through the work of the City of Boulder and Boulder County's open space programs, this ECA has expanded east all the way to McCaslin Blvd. The ecosystem is now more complete: not only are the nesting sites of Golden Eagles, Prairie Falcons, and Peregrine Falcons protected in the Flatirons and canyons, but also their feeding grounds on the grasslands to the east. These grasslands periodically contain one of the largest prairie dog colonies in Boulder County. Ute ladies' tresses orchid and Preble's meadow jumping mouse are some of the significant biological elements present. Marshall Mesa, Eldorado Springs Canyon, and Tallgrass Prairie are designated Natural Areas. This ECA is now adjacent to the 4,000-acre Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge to the south. And the City of Boulder has been working to protect lands across the border in Jefferson County, such as the recent purchase of a conservation easement on the 464-acre Hogan Ranch.

Walker Ranch is the heart of the Hawkin Gulch/Walker Ranch/Upper Eldorado Canyon ECA. It was

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"Splendors in the Grass" Featured at Annual Meeting

Join us for an evening of food, conversation, and intimate views of some of Boulder County's most colorful and fearsome creatures. After an unprogrammed potluck (bring anything!) and a short business meeting, participants in last summer's microphotography class will show close-ups of spiders, beetles, dragonflies, butterflies, dewdrops, and other natural wonders. Saturday, February 9, 6 p.m., at the Colorado Mountain Clubroom. The Clubroom is around the corner to the west of Neptune Mountaineering and on the same level, in Boulder's Table Mesa Shopping Center, 633 S Broadway, Unit N. Members and nonmembers are welcome. For information, call Sue Cass (303-494-5345).



"The Beetles Are Coming": 15th Boulder County Ecosystem Symposium

Boulder and regional scientists will discuss natural and human-induced disturbances in Front Range forests at this year's ecosystem symposium. Invited speakers include Tom Veblen, University of Colorado Geography, Yan Linhart, University of Colorado Ecology, and Dave Leatherman, Colorado State University.

As always, the symposium will be free and open to all. The symposium will take place Saturday, April 5, at Ramaley Auditorium on the CU Campus. Please visit the BCNA website soon for starting time and schedule. The annual symposium is cosponsored by BCNA, Boulder County Audubon, Colorado Native Plant Society, City of Boulder Open Space and Parks, Boulder County Parks and Open Space, and the University of Colorado.

Special Program: Saving Piñon Canyon, with Lon Robertson

Sunday, February 24, 4 p.m.
REI Boulder Store, 1789 28th Street

Citizens from southeastern Colorado have been working valiantly to resist an increase to the size of Connecticut of the Piñon Canyon army maneuver site. This expansion could eliminate much of the Comanche National Grasslands, along with hundreds of thousands of acres of private ranchland. The presentation will provide a brief history of the Piñon Canyon issue — from the original taking of 238,000 acres in 1983 to the current plans of at least 418,000 additional acres. It will also include an update of the past and current legislation being considered in the state and nationally. There will be many opportunities to ask questions or to volunteer or offer support.

Lon Robertson is director of the Piñon Canyon Expansion Opposition Coalition and a generational rancher from the Kim and Branson Colorado area. He and his wife Anita work and live on the family ranch in the area that was homesteaded in 1916 by Lon's grandfather and grandmother.

Please join us in this important discussion about saving an ecological and cultural treasure.

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one of the earliest Boulder County Open Space acquisitions. It provides important winter range for elk. The west portion of this ECA, centered on Twin Sisters, is a critical migration corridor for elk and other large mammals; this site became an important habitat connector due to the creation of Gross Reservoir in the 1950s, which is an effective block to east-west movement of animals in this part of the county. The canyons and gulches between Flagstaff Drive, Boulder Canyon and Magnolia Road, including Hawkin, Keystone, and Calhoun Gulches, are wild and rugged areas. Upper Eldorado Canyon is another wild and rugged gem. Ownership is mixed between Eldorado Canyon State Park and Boulder County Open Space. Running through this area is South Boulder Creek. It is one of the few roadless foothill creeks in the county, the others being Fourmile Canyon Creek and the North St. Vrain Creek. All of the others, including Boulder Creek, Fourmile Creek (the Fourmile Creek that heads to Sunset), Lefthand Creek, James Creek, and South St. Vrain Creek, are impacted by adjacent roads.

-Dave Hallock

Notes From the Banding Crew—Fall 2007

I always find it interesting to compare the current season to past falls. We added two new species with the Northern Saw-Whet Owl and the Pacific-Slope Flycatcher. I'll be submitting a rare bird report to the Colorado Bird Records Committee, and, technically, we should be calling this bird a Western Flycatcher until accepted by the CBRC. Star Nicely, the Barr Lake bander, caught a Pac-slope in fall 2006 and her record has yet to be voted on. Tony Leukering says to call it a Pac-slope, so I did. The determination depends on running measurements through a formula.

Western Wood-Pewees, Dusky Flycatchers, and Yellow-rumped Warblers were more scarce than past falls. However, Lincoln's Sparrows and White-crowned Sparrows were more abundant than previous years.

Black-capped chickadees are holding their own. Mountain chickadees are up and at 210 we probably had a record number of Wilson's Warblers.

We put in 246 fewer net/hours than fall of '06, caught two fewer species, but banded 72 more individuals. I did not include recaptures. We banded 19 days from August 31 until November 7. I haven't calculated volunteer hours, but with weed cutting and data entry, there are quite a few.

-Maggie Boswell

(a complete summary can be found at BCNA.org)



Help Wanted: BCNA Volunteer Connection

Events Committee: Help plan field trips, picnics, meetings, and other events. Sue Cass (303-494-5345).

Publications Committee: Help plan and produce publications. Contact Steve Jones (303-494-2468).

Ecosystem Stewardship Initiative: Adopt a wild area and keep track of birds, mammals, and recreational use. Contact Steve Jones (303-494-2468).

Data Entry and Mapping: Help us make some sense of all the data that flow in from BCNA field studies. This is a bottleneck that is keeping us from publishing some of our field work. We especially need help with digital mapping and statistical analysis. Sue Cass (303-494-5345).

RESEARCH GRANTS AVAILABLE

Again this year, BCNA will offer grants for research on nearly any topic to do with the natural history of Boulder County. Grants are available in two categories.

The Ken Evenson Memorial Grant, up to \$1,000, is available specifically for research on our native cats. The general BCNA grants, also up to \$1,000, fund projects that will add to our understanding of the natural history of Boulder County or will assist in documenting the county's ecosystems. Past projects include a scientific survey of butterflies, a study of bat species and their ecological requirements, and a comparison of flora and fauna adjacent to trails that allow dogs and don't allow dogs, among many others.

Proposals should include a detailed methodology and a complete budget, and be limited to five pages. Note that no institutional overhead is allowed. Successful applicants sign a contract specifying that they will complete the project in 2008 and share results with BCNA.

Applications should be submitted by Monday, March 3, either to the BCNA post office box, or electronically to michael.delaney@colorado.edu

Editor's note: 25 folks came on this year's Winter Solstice sunrise hike, held on a relatively mild (8°F), sparkling morning. Here's a poem from Chris Hoffman. For more of Chris's poems, look for his recent book, Cairns (Windstorm Creative, Seattle, 2005).

Winter Solstice 2007

Dirty sun-clawed snow,
wind bitten,
beside the icy trail.
Looming cottonwoods expose
their intricate neurons of twigs.
One, two, three coyotes
dash across the frozen pond.
A downy woodpecker dissects
his chosen patch of bark.
A small group of humans
gathers at the far side
of the footbridge,
here at the hinge of the year,
as the sun rises,
amazingly,
again—a gold coin
pulled, like the rest of us,
from the primary pocket.



Avian Species of Special Concern Update: Good News and Bad News

Most of the field reports are in, and it looks like another mixed year for species categorized as "extirpated," "rare and declining," or "rare" on the Boulder County Avian Species of Special Concern list. Here's a brief summary of this year's observations.

I. Extirpated: Barrow's Goldeneye, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Long-billed Curlew, Mountain Plover

Only curlews were observed during the breeding season, and there were no indications of nesting. Potential habitat still exists in the county for all four of these birds, so we should keep looking, hoping, and striving to set aside large blocks of native prairie.

II. Rare and Declining: Northern Bobwhite, Eared Grebe, American Bittern, Northern Harrier, Long-eared Owl, Burrowing Owl, Lewis's Woodpecker, Red-headed Woodpecker, Loggerhead Shrike, Brown Thrasher, Lark Bunting

Volunteers located at least seven American Bittern nesting territories this year, making this species a good candidate for downlisting in the future. Two Long-eared Owl nests were found in shelterbelts on the plains. That's the good news.

A single Northern Harrier nest at Boulder Reservoir failed, the sixth consecutive nest failure for this

species in Boulder County. For the first time in recent memory, no Lewis's Woodpecker or Burrowing Owl nesting activity was reported. While there were breeding season sightings of Northern Bobwhites, Loggerhead Shrikes, and Lark Buntings, no nesting activity was observed. No breeding season sightings of Eared Grebes, Red-headed Woodpeckers or Brown Thrashers were reported.

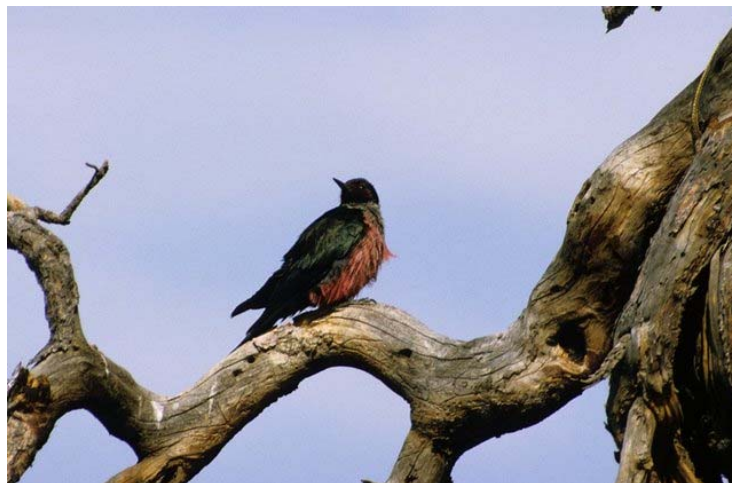
III. Rare, but not Declining: Least Bittern, Great Egret, Bald Eagle, Osprey, Peregrine Falcon, Barn Owl, Black Swift, Bank Swallow, Veery, Northern Mockingbird, Sage Thrasher, American Redstart, Ovenbird

Recent field work suggests there are several candidates for removal from this list. In 2007 Bald Eagles nested at five locations, fledging seven young. Osprey continued to nest successfully at four or more Boulder County locations. Barn Owl numbers have increased dramatically. Bank Swallows appear to be nesting in good numbers at Walden Ponds and Valmont Reservoir.

Least Bitterns, Veeries, Northern Mockingbirds, Sage Thrashers, and American Redstarts remain very rare (no recent nesting confirmations). Ovenbirds are hypothetical breeders in Boulder County (no historical documentation of nesting).

IV. New Breeding Species: Marsh Wren, Hooded Warbler, Brewer's Sparrow, Orchard Oriole

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Nesting activity for Lewis's Woodpeckers in Boulder County went unrecorded in 2007. Photo by Steve Jones

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Orchard Orioles, which were confirmed nesting near White Rocks again this year, appear to be established in Boulder County. Hooded Warblers nested in Baird Canyon for several consecutive years during the late 1990s and early 2000s, but have not been observed there recently. During recent summers, Dave Hallock has consistently found singing Brewer's Sparrows, including some mated pairs, in the krummholtz near Caribou. So far, no one has been able to confirm nesting.

As you can see from these lists, quite a few species of concern appear to be holding their own or increasing, while several are in serious trouble. Most of the species in danger of disappearing completely from Boulder County nest on the plains, where habitat destruction and fragmentation have virtually eliminated native ecosystems. Birds that nest in the mountains appear to be doing relatively well.

One thing that we've learned during the past two decades is that simply protecting nesting sites for declining species is not sufficient to ward off local extinctions. For example, most of the known Northern Harrier nest sites and Burrowing Owl nest sites in the county lie in protected areas (predominantly City of Boulder Open Space and Boulder County Open Space). Despite this protection, these birds have virtually disappeared during the nesting season. We now understand more fully that protecting large areas of native habitat and buffering them from development is necessary to retain our native habitat specialists.

Keeping track of Boulder County's most vulnerable birds would not be possible without the work of dozens of volunteers. We deeply thank those who submitted nesting reports this year, including Chris Abrahamson, Audrey Anderson, Linda Andes-Georges, Karen Beeman, Deidre Butler, A.D. Chesley, Sharon Daugherty, Dave Fletcher, Peg Fletcher, Dave Hallock, Jessica Hoyt, Linda Hughes, Ken Hughes, Nan Lederer, Janet MacLachlan, Dave Madonna, Petrea Mah, Adam Massey, Ralph Musfeldt, Susan Osborn, Linda Palmer, Mark Ponsor, Sue Ponsor, Mike Reilly, Charley Rosicky, Susan Spalding, Dave Sutherland, Heather Swanson, Joyce Takamine, Janet Thumbule, and Oak Thorne,

-Steve Jones

Annual Financial Report

This is written on December 18, before the end of the year and the end of BCNA's fiscal year, in order to meet the newsletter publication deadline. Nevertheless, nearly all income and expenses for the year are already accounted for. Any member wishing to review the complete financial report may do so after January 15. Please contact the treasurer.

BCNA is financially healthy. The board of directors established a general fund budget for fiscal year 2007 of \$14,210. We realized income from all sources of \$16,129.27. We have incurred expenses of \$16,188.94, for an excess of expense over revenue of \$59.67.

Forty-eight per cent of our revenue came from the tuition paid for our educational offerings; this is substantially higher than we budgeted for. Membership dues accounted for 35% of the annual income; the remainder was from earned interest, the sales of publications, and contributions.

Insurance is our biggest single expenditure, accounting for 19% of the total. We gave \$2,500 in research grants. Expenditures allowed BCNA to put on the annual Eco-symposium, to produce the wonderful CD of local birdsong, to publish and send the quarterly newsletter, to purchase bird banding supplies and a new projector, to offer 13 classes through the education committee, to continue with the Ecosystem Stewardship project, to sponsor several field trips, and to do the wintering raptor survey, now in its 25th year. Nearly all of this activity is the result of dedicated volunteers. Members get a lot of bang for their dues bucks.

We have balances in all accounts of \$40,709.54. Of this amount, \$26,881.38 is encumbered. Therefore, our net assets on December 18 are \$13,828.16. At the first board of directors' meeting, we will construct the fiscal year 2008 budget and can plan on having about \$14,000 to spend.

-Michael Delaney, Treasurer

BCNA Winter Calendar

Saturday, January 19, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.: Sue Cass (303-494-5345), Jim Eide, and Jim McKee (303-652-2414) will lead a raptor tour on January 19th for BCNA, Boulder Bird Club, and Boulder County Audubon members. We will meet at Lagerman Reservoir at 9:00 a.m. Please bring binoculars, scopes, field guides, water and a lunch or snack as you prefer. Also radios if you have them. We will carpool to minimize the number of cars in the caravan.

Saturday, February 9, 6-9 p.m.: Annual Meeting and Potluck. "Splendors In the Grass." Participants in the BCNA microphotography class will show images of spiders, beetles, dragonflies, and butterflies. Colorado Mountain Clubhouse, Table Mesa Shopping Center, 633 S. Broadway, Unit N, in Boulder (See article on page 1 for directions). Bring anything edible to share.

Sunday, February 24, 4 p.m. "Saving Piñon Canyon." Special program also sponsored by Boulder County Audubon and Sierra Club Indian Peaks Group. REI Boulder Store, 1789 28th St. See article, page 2.

Saturday, March 2, 4-6 p.m.: A potluck supper and board meeting to welcome new board members and review the past year's projects and achievements. 1041 Champion Circle in Longmont. All BCNA members are welcome! For information, contact Sue Cass at 303-494-5345, suecass@comcast.net.

Saturday, March 8, 7-10 a.m.: Join Steve Jones (303-494-2468) for our annual spring welcoming breakfast hike at Sawhill Ponds. Bring something warm, tropical, sweet, or passionate (and portable) to share. We should see lots of ducks, a few raptors, and some early-singing songbirds. Meet at the Sawhill Ponds parking area, west of 75th St. between Valmont and Jay roads.

Saturday, April 5. Boulder County Ecosystem Symposium: "The Beetles Are Coming." Ramaley Auditorium, CU Campus. Visit the BCNA web site or check the Nature-Net soon for updated information. See related article on page 1.

BCNA Board of Directors

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 Vice President.....Kim Graber 303-494-7971
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 Secretary.....Natalie Shrewsbury 303-494-6102

Carol Kampert 303-499-3049
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 Jim McKee 303-494-3393

Committees and Contacts

-*Avian Species of Special Concern:*
 Dave Hallock (dheldora@rmi.net) and
 Steve Jones (stephen.jones@earthlink.net)

-*Ecosystem Stewardship:*
 Steve Jones (303-494-2468)

- *Education:*
 Carol Schott (303-530-9108) and
 Carol Kampert (303-499-3049)

- *Indian Peaks Bird Counts:*
 Dave Hallock (303-258-3672) and
 Bill Kaempfer (303-939-8005)

- *Membership*
 A.D. Chesley (303-938-8150)

- *Newsletter*
 Scott Severs (303-684-6430)
 Steve Jones (303-494-2468) and
 George Oetzel (303-543-3712)

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

- *State and Regional Wildlife Issues:*
 Jim McKee (303-494-3393)

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

- *Wintering Raptor Survey:*
 Sue Cass (303-494-5345)
 and Jim McKee (303-494-3393)

**Visit Our Website bcna.org for more nature:
 Sounds, photography, research, and courses!**

Photo Credits Page 1: Damsselfly, Scott Severs; Page 2: Kinnikinick, Margie Robinson; Page 3: Milkweed Seed, Eric Fontenot; Page 4: Lewis's Woodpecker, Steve Jones; Page 7: Golden Eagles, Steve Jones.

Watching the Raptors – A Winter’s Game

I love winter but not for skiing, snowshoeing, or other winter sports. No, I enjoy the cold months because of the great raptors that choose to spend it with us in our county. Our great history of land preservation has an added side effect, open country filled with abundant prey for which these masters of the skies arrive in the hundreds to take advantage of. Generally, a triangle of land in-between Lyons, Longmont and Boulder still harbors the best raptor watching, but here is a summary of my favorite places to raptor watch.

Teller Farms/White Rocks Trail – Valmont Road, just west of 95th Street. Upon arriving in the parking lot, it is not unusual to just look up and see a buteo soaring overhead spying on the nearby prairie-dog colony. A little feed lot just south of the parking lot harbors hundreds of blackbirds and pigeons, often drawing the attention of a passing Merlin or Prairie Falcon. Walking north from the lot along the White Rocks Trail leads down to Boulder Creek and Bald Eagles and Great Horned Owls often roost in the huge cottonwoods along the creek.

Rabbit Mountain Open Space – 53rd Street north of Highway 66 (just east of Lyons). Another great “parking lot” bird watching location, Golden Eagles often soar over the mountain just north of the lot. On a good sunny day, other raptors and ravens join the eagles, soaring in from lands to the north, arriving to look for places to spend the winter in the Saint Vrain Valley. Watch for more eagles, and maybe a rare Rough-legged Hawk perched along the road between the highway and the parking area.

Boulder Reservoir and Boulder Valley Ranch – 51st Street between Jay and Niwot Road. A drive along these roads any time of the year can be interesting. In winter look for Northern Harriers pacing over the marshes, Bald Eagles dotting the trees along the reservoir’s edge, and Red-tailed Hawks waiting patiently in the fields. Occasionally a Short-eared Owl can turn up along the western edge of the reservoir.

Raptor Watching Tips:

- Watch the birds from a distance, taking care not to disturb them. Using your car as a blind can help, as well as a spotting scope.
- Generally the hours from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. are the best times for viewing as the birds are active and soaring as the atmosphere heats up.
- Study and bring along your field guides, especially the Photographic Guide to North American Raptors.

-Scott Severs



Board Nominations

The BCNA Board/Nominating Committee is requesting nominations to its Board of Directors prior to elections, which will be held at our general meeting on Saturday, February 9, 2008. Nominations are being sought for Treasurer, Secretary, and two (2) at-large positions. Your active participation provides meaningful support and direction to our organization. Please join us! For information, contact Sue Cass at 303-494-5345, suecass@comcast.net or Jim McKee at 303-651-2414, jimmckee3@comcast.net.

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.

Boulder County Nature Association
P.O. Box 493
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