

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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Butterflies Featured at Annual Meeting

Jan Chu and Mike Sportiello will share results of six years of butterfly research in Boulder County at the Boulder County Nature Association annual meeting, Saturday, February 7, at 6 p.m., at the Colorado Mountain Club office, 633 South Broadway (Table Mesa Shopping Center) in Boulder. Their presentation will include close-up photos of more than 40 species, including rarities found in Boulder's tallgrass prairies last summer.

A potluck dinner, followed by elections and announcements, will precede their talk. Bring a side dish or dessert to share along with your own table service and drinks. Bring a friend, as well. All are welcome, members and nonmembers alike!



Variable Checkerspot by Scott Severs

Help Wanted: Board Nominations

The BCNA Board/Nominating Committee is seeking nominations to its Board of Directors prior to elections which will take place at the annual meeting on Saturday, February 7, 2009. Nominations are being sought for President, Treasurer and two (2) at-large positions. Your active participation provides meaningful support and direction to our organization so won't you please join us! For information contact Sue Cass at 720-684-6922, suecass@comcast.net, Jim McKee at 303-651-2414, jimmckee3@comcast.net or Jan Carnes, 303-827-3024, jjcarnes@comcast.net.

Eco-Stewards Find Rare Wildlife, Thriving Natural Communities, and Solitude

by Steve Jones

During this third full year of BCNA's ecosystem stewardship initiative, more than 50 volunteers working in 30 wild places sighted mountain lion cubs, black bears, elk, wild turkeys, green herons, flammulated owls, and more than 75 butterfly species. All of us felt a deep connection to nature while standing quietly in the forests and grasslands watching the web unfold. If you'd like to adopt a wild area or join a stewardship group, just let me know. We will have several informal workshops for new volunteers beginning in April.

Bald Mountain Open Space. Marty Dick documented nesting mountain bluebirds and western bluebirds and observed a sandhill crane overflight on Bald Mountain. This county open space property was the site of an aggressive and controversial forestry project this past year, so it will be particularly interesting to see how mammals and breeding birds fare over the next several years.

Boulder Valley Ranch. Jo Clark is documenting a puzzling increase in numbers of nesting red-winged blackbirds and an apparent decrease in numbers of misbehaving canines. The northern harrier nest in the Little Dry Creek drainage, just downstream from Jo's adopted area, failed for the fourth year in a row, possibly due to predation. A new osprey nest in this drainage fledged three young.

Coal Creek Riparian Corridor (south of Boulder). Paul Hansley observed a singing hooded warbler in June, bringing our total of bird species observed in this protected valley to 161. Numbers of shrub-nesting and cavity-nesting birds have almost doubled since the area was fenced to exclude cattle in 1998. Bald eagles nested successfully in this area for the third consecutive year, and elk have been seen during every season.

Crescent Meadows (Eldorado Canyon near Walker

(Continued on page 2)

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Ranch). Karen Swigart found a broad-tailed hummingbird nest, along with families of mountain bluebirds, hermit thrushes, and MacGillivray's warblers. She also documented and categorized more than 500 recreational visits during more than 100 hours of observation. These data will be particularly useful for agencies looking to better manage visitation and trail use.

Long Canyon: We heard three calling flammulated owls in Long and upper Gregory canyons in June. There appears to have been an upswing in calling activity of these little owls in the Boulder Mountain Park during recent summers. We suspect that breeding numbers correspond with availability of nesting cavities and of moths and other insects. Our butterfly list for Long Canyon is up to 56 species.

Lost Gulch. Linda Andes-Georges found no evidence of northern goshawks among 29 potential nesting species she observed in this remote canyon in the Boulder Mountain Park. Goshawks were reported nesting here during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Disturbance by recreational users may not be the problem, as Linda encountered 0 recreationists during 11.5 hours of observation.

Lower Skunk Canyon (Boulder Mountain Park). Elaine Hill, Carol Kampert, and Maureen Lawry spent a recent weekend in fairly close proximity to a family of mountain lions camped out around a deer carcass just off the NIST-Skunk Canyon trail. After the carcass was removed by wildlife officials, the mom and two cubs eventually retreated back into the forest. During early summer, Elaine, Carol, and Maureen observed a broad-tailed hummingbird nest with young and a lazuli bunting nest with young.

Myers Gulch (Walker Ranch). Laura Osborn observed a total of 69 bird species while confirming nesting of dusky grouse, mountain bluebird, western bluebird, vesper sparrow, and several other species. During the three years of the stewardship initiative, Laura has observed a total of 64 potential nesting species in this diverse foothills valley. She's also seen black bears, elk, a coyote, and a bobcat.

Old Mesa Trail. Sean Burns submitted excellent photographs of a female harrier hunting over tallgrass meadows and a giant wolf spider poised by the trail.

South Boulder Creek East (Marshall Road to US 36). Ron Butler has been tracking the movements of a herd of at least seven white-tailed deer. This species

became established in Boulder County 40 to 50 years ago, and some individuals may have mixed in with herds of mule deer. Ron also has been keeping track of a territorial American bittern (Boulder County rare in declining) and a winter-hunting family of northern harriers.

South Boulder Creek West (SH 93 to Mesa Trail). Janet McLachlan confirmed nesting of downy woodpeckers, blue-gray gnatcatchers, western bluebirds, and vesper sparrows in this tallgrass/riparian area south of Boulder. She observed a total of 39 potential breeding species.

Spring Brook (Eldorado Mountain, Boulder OSMP). Nancy Neupert and Bay Roberts confirmed nesting wild turkeys, common ravens, and lazuli buntings, and found a stray evening grosbeak. Boulder OSMP wildlife technician Christian Nunes found an eastern bluebird nest with young and a family of long-eared owls just south of Spring Brook.

Walden and Sawhill Ponds. A.D. Chesley, Marlene Bruning, and Wendy Stuart confirmed nesting of more than 30 species, including wood duck, great blue heron, American avocet, spotted sandpiper, bank swallow, and yellow-breasted chat. Species of concern volunteers Joyce Takamine and Petrea Mah completed a 40-hour crepuscular heron survey. They observed territorial activity of green herons, identified two potential American bittern nesting territories, and documented the unfortunate destruction of nearly two dozen bank swallow (Boulder County rare) nests by a county bulldozing operation.

Those are some of the highlights. We're still waiting for many more reports to come in. Hope to see you all on one of our spring field trips.

Symposium to Address "Fractured Landscapes"

This year's Boulder County Ecosystem Symposium on Saturday, April 4, will look at impacts of habitat fragmentation on plants and wildlife. The symposium is free and open to all, and will be held from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the University of Colorado Ramaley Auditorium, in the Ecology Department building, just east of Norlin Library. The annual symposium is sponsored by Boulder County Nature Association, Boulder County Audubon Society, Boulder County Parks and Open Space, Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks, and the Colorado Native Plant Society. Visit www.bcna.org for a list of speakers and topics.

Christian Nunes to Teach Songbird Class

by Steve Jones



Christian Nunes wasn't quite born with a pair of binoculars in his hands, but he did get an early start, finding a yellow warbler nest in his backyard when he was still a toddler. By the age of 12 he was working part-time at a bird store in his hometown of South Kingston, Rhode Island. He bought his first pair of binoculars with his first paycheck. That same year, he helped extend the known

breeding range of red-bellied woodpecker when he discovered a pair nesting in his neighborhood.

Christian received a bachelor of environmental science degree from Northern Arizona University, where he worked at the Avian Cognition Laboratory studying behavior and genetics of pinyon jays and Clark's nutcrackers. After a summer with the US Forest Service studying brown-headed cowbirds, he went to work for Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks as a wildlife technician. That hiring paid immediate dividends for the department. During his first year on the job, Christian documented four burrowing owl nests, nearly a dozen flammulated owl nesting territories, two new long-eared owl nests, and the first eastern bluebird nest ever reported on Boulder OSMP lands.

Christian's uncanny ability to identify birds by songs, calls, silhouettes, or fleeting glimpses is matched by his understanding of bird ecology and behavior.

"I'm fascinated by the diversity and variation exhibited by birds," he said. "Even common species like red-tailed hawk and dark-eyed junco can teach us volumes about speciation, hybridization, distribution, and ecology. I never get tired of looking at and pondering the variation in a flock of wintering juncos."

In his spring bird class for BCNA, Christian hopes to help students master identification of common birds by voice and sight while incorporating discussions on bird behavior and ecology.

"Here in the Front Range, eastern and western avifaunas meet and create an area with very high diversity," he said. "We will take an in-depth look at

this phenomenon as we observe birds like indigo and lazuli bunting and their hybrid descendents."

Christian's class is offered during the tail end of the spring migration, so he hopes to find a rare gem or two, such as an eastern warbler or flycatcher. Having gone out birding with Christian myself, I can guarantee that if you take his class, you will see and hear birds you've never encountered before and learn facts about their behavior that will bring the natural world into sharper focus.



Great Horned Owl by George Oetzel

Thank you, BCNA Board of Directors!

As I prepare to step down from my first six year stint on BCNA's Board of Directors, I can't help but reflect on this period which seems more like six months than six years. It was at the urging of a man who has become a treasured friend and mentor, Jim McKee, that this "wet behind the ears" volunteer naturalist for Boulder County Parks and Open Space joined the BCNA Board. The time I have invested has returned huge dividends in the form of new and lasting friendships, knowledge and expertise gained and something I thought not possible, an even greater love and appreciation for our natural world. To my fellow board members, dedicated and resolute all, I thank you from the bottom of my heart and am counting the days until I can rejoin you!

With love and appreciation,

Sue Cass

BCNA Winter Calendar

Saturday, February 7, 2009, 6 p.m. *BCNA Annual Meeting* at the Colorado Mountain Club office, 633 South Broadway (Table Mesa Shopping Center) in Boulder. Guest speakers Jan Chu and Mike Sportiello will share their important research on the butterflies of Boulder County. Bring a side dish or dessert to share along with your own table service and drinks. All are welcome!

Saturday, February 15, 9am – noon. *Raptor Search*; meet at Lagerman Reservoir Leader: Sue Sponsor (s.ponsor@comcast.net) This trip will explore northern Boulder County and potentially nearby areas to search for winter raptors, including Bald Eagle, Rough-legged Hawk, Ferruginous Hawk, and different sub-species and varieties of Red-tailed Hawk. This trip will be primarily a driving trip, with stops at various locations. Spotting scopes will be useful.

Saturday, February 21, 8:30-11 a.m. *Annual Boulder County Audubon Visit to the Valmont Reservoir Important Bird Area* to observe wintering waterbirds and raptors. Meet leaders Dave Madonna, Andy Cowell, and Steve Jones (303-494-2468; stephen.jones@earthlink.net) at the Xcel Energy plant visitors entrance, off N. 66th St just north of Arapahoe, at 8:30. Dress warmly, and bring scopes and binoculars.

Sunday, March 1, 7:30am - noon. *Spring Bluebird Search at Rabbit Mountain Open Space*. Leader: Scott Severs (303-684-6430 or rostrhamus@aol.com) Join Scott for a hike at Rabbit Mountain Open Space near Lyons for the possibility of early returning bluebirds. We'll also look for other hawks, finches, jays as well as elk and deer. To reach Rabbit Mountain take 53rd St off Hwy 66 about a mile to the park entrance on the right. Cosponsored by Boulder County Audubon.

Friday, March 13 thru Monday, March 16, 2009: *Spring Spectacle on the Platte*: experience the wonder of the Sandhill Crane migration through the Rainwater Basin of south central Nebraska. We will explore the biology and ecology of these magnificent birds and share the emotional and spiritual impact this phenomenon of nature imparts. An added bonus should include thousands of migrating waterfowl. This field trip is limited to 16 participants. For details and to sign up contact Sue Cass (720-684-6922, suecass@comcasst.net) or Carol Kampert (303-499-3049, kampert@comcast.net)

Saturday, March 14, 7-10:30 a.m. *Annual Spring Welcoming Breakfast Hike at Sawhill Ponds*. Bring portable finger food (something warm, exotic, sweet, or passionate) to share, and meet at the Sawhill Ponds parking area, west of 75th St between Valmont and Jay roads. We'll walk about 2 miles, enjoying the ducks, raptors, and other spring wildlife. Steve Jones (303-494-2468; stephen.jones@earthlink.net).

Saturday, March 22, 2:30-4:30 p.m. *Volunteer Orientation Meeting for Boulder County Burrowing Owl Survey*. Boulder Library – Meadows branch. The Meadows library is located behind the Safeway at Foothills Parkway and Baseline Road. If you are interested in helping with this project please contact Chris Abrahamson at cabrahamson@hotmail.com or at 303-565-9742.

Saturday, April 4, 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. *Boulder County Ecosystem Symposium: "Fractured Landscapes."* Local scientists and naturalists will address the effects of habitat fragmentation on plants and wildlife. Free and open to all. University of Colorado Ramaley Auditorium, in the Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Department building opposite the east entrance to Norlin Library. For a schedule of speakers and topics, visit the Boulder County Nature Association website.

**Precise flying by Golden Eagle**

photo by Gary Stevens

A few weeks ago while we were returning from a raptor watch for BCNA, Gary spotted this golden eagle sitting on a pole. We were amazed that when it took off, it went between the wires ... thankfully it knew just how much clearance it had!

Nan Wilson and Gary Stevens

BCNA Board of Directors

President.....Sue Cass 303-494-5345
 Vice President.....Kim Graber 303-494-7971
 Treasurer.....Michael Delaney 303-494-8583
 Secretary.....Natalie Shrewsbury 303-494-6102

Carol Kampert 303-499-3049
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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 Kampert (303-499-3049)

- *Indian Peaks Bird Counts:*
 Dave Hallock (303-258-3672) and
 Bill Kaempfer (303-954-8998)

- *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 (303-651-2414)

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

- *Wintering Raptor Survey:*
 Sue Cass (303-494-5345)
 and Jim McKee (303-651-2414)

Burrowing Owl Monitoring Project

Over the past 30 years, volunteers have informally monitored the status of burrowing owls across Boulder County. According to the Monthly Wildlife Inventories maintained by BCAS, sightings were fairly consistent throughout the 1980's but over the past 20 years sighting have declined quite dramatically. It was starting to appear the burrowing owl had all but disappeared from Boulder County. Then last summer seven different burrowing owl nest sites were found through the efforts of staff from Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks and Boulder County Parks and Open Space.

Have we been overlooking this unique small owl? Is it more prevalent than we have been assuming over the past several years? Is its breeding success rate sufficient to sustain its long term survival in the county?

To answer these questions, this spring we will be initiating a county-wide project to locate burrowing owls and also determine their breeding success. The project will involve monitoring prairie dog colonies on Boulder County Parks and Open Space lands. We are hoping to recruit 40-50 volunteers to help with this project. Each volunteer will monitor 3-4 prairie dog colonies at least 5 times over the period from April 15 to July 31. The majority of the project will consist of roadside surveys but some of the sites will require minimal hiking to survey points.

A project orientation meeting will be held on March 22 to acquaint volunteers with the project scope and protocol. The meeting will be held at the Boulder Library – Meadows branch from 2:30 pm to 4:30 pm. The Meadows library is located behind the Safeway at Foothills Parkway and Baseline Road. If you are interested in helping with this project please contact Chris Abrahamson at cabrahamson@hotmail.com or at 303-565-9742.



Thanksgiving Raptors by George and Marti Oetzel

Marti and I decided that Thanksgiving morning would be great for a BCNA raptor survey. It was cool (38), cloudy, and calm, and there was hardly any traffic. We were rewarded with a couple of unusual sightings. Near the junction of 75th and Nelson, Marti spotted a Great-horned Owl (photo, page 1), our first owl in 6 years of these surveys. Only about 100 yards away, in another tree, there was a Cooper's Hawk (photo left), only once previously seen during our raptor surveys. That was a couple of years ago, possibly in the same tree.

Our usual survey excursion includes the South Rabbit Mountain, Lykins Gulch, and Boulder Reservoir routes. We also saw 14 American Kestrels, 7 Red-tailed Hawks, and one Bald Eagle.

BCNA Annual Financial Report

by Michael Delaney, Treasurer

This is written on December 15, before 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 2008 of \$17,135.00. We realized income from all sources of \$17,386.80, but only incurred expenses of \$14,445.71, for an excess of revenue over expense of \$2,941.09.

Our wonderful education classes brought in \$7,369.00 in tuition, our largest single source of revenue. Dues accounted for \$5,865.00. A special thank you to those individuals who contributed a total of \$1,182.00 in addition to their membership dues. The remaining income came from earned interest, co-sponsorships from other organizations, and the sales of publications including the Dawn Chorus CD.

The board of directors awarded \$3,476 to four individuals to support research. One of them didn't spend her \$1000 grant. We spent \$1,679.34 to produce and mail the quarterly newsletter, \$556.63 on the annual Ecosystemposium, \$999.00 on insurance, and \$500 towards the publication of a brochure on ptarmigan. The education committee spent \$6,436.46, plus granting \$489 in scholarships, to offer 13 classes for more than 125 students in 2008. The remaining expenditures were on publishing, membership, donations to other organizations, taxes and

administrative expenses.

We have balances in all accounts of \$43,250.45. Of this amount, \$26,352.60 is encumbered. Therefore, our net assets on December 15 are \$16,879.85, and we are in good shape for 2009.

Please note that because of the nature of BCNA's activities, we are classified by the IRS as an educational and scientific 501(c)3 organization. While we cannot give tax advice, it is probable that for most members ALL DUES are tax deductible as a charitable contribution.

Natural History 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 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.

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 2009 and share results with BCNA.

Applications should be submitted by Monday, March 9, 2009 either to the BCNA post office box, or electronically to michael.delaney@colorado.edu

Boulder County Nature Association
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