

# 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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## HOW DID WILDLIFE FARE IN THE 2013 FLOOD?

Steve Jones and Ruth Carol Cushman

*Note: An earlier version of this article appeared in the Boulder Daily Camera newspaper in early November 2013.*

During the height of the September rainstorms, an Eldorado Springs resident found a mink holed up in her kitchen, and neighbors saw rattlesnakes swimming in the town's sewage treatment pond.

Dozens of drowned prairie dogs turned up on City of Boulder and Boulder County open space properties, and a few prairie dog colonies located in floodplains appear to have been entirely depopulated. Some prairie dog burrows remained flooded for several weeks after the storms. Preliminary reports suggest that burrowing animals, including rodents and snakes, may have suffered the greatest losses during the September rains. Many animals probably drowned in their burrows, while others were swept away by the raging waters or killed by predators.

Federally threatened Preble's meadow jumping mice were about to enter hibernation as the deluge struck. Their burrows lie in floodplains that were saturated by the rains, so open space ecologists fear that many may have drowned. One hiker did find several dead mice of undetermined species near the high water mark along Bobolink Trail. Several people found tiger salamanders and toads in their window wells. One observer reported dozens of small dead snakes littering Highway 93 during the height of the downpours.

Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center east of Lyons admitted baby squirrels that may have been washed away from their nests, along with several emaciated rock pigeons. Wild Bird Center employees found shivering birds at their feeders, and had to bring them inside for warming. Several observers found dead birds on the ground, including a mourning dove, a crow, magpies, a Bullock's oriole, and quite a few house finches. Weeks after the storm, Howard Witkin found a half-dozen dead house finches in the wet leaves in the gutters on his roof.

Many birds may have died of hypothermia after their feathers became soaked, and some may have died of starvation. Quite a few observers reported a noticeable absence of songbirds at their feeders during October and November, though it's hard to know whether this was related to the trauma of the downpour or simply the normal tendency for birds to gravitate to wherever food supplies are most abundant.

Some birds probably benefited from the proliferation of mosquitoes and other insects after the deluge. A couple of weeks after the storms, we saw flocks of black-capped chickadees and Audubon's warblers feasting on swarms of mosquitoes at Sawhill Ponds Wildlife Area. And let's not forget that there were an estimated 10,000 common grackles at Somberero Marsh throughout October.

On Shanahan Ridge in South Boulder, we marveled at the sight of butterflies and moths flitting across the grasslands within hours after the rains subsided. Moths commonly shelter under tree bark and building eaves during rainstorms, but many of the butterflies must have stayed dry by clinging to the undersides of hanging leaves and tree branches.

Within days after the storms, we found more than a dozen recently-emerged common buckeye butterflies on Shanahan Ridge. The chrysalids of these locally uncommon beauties may have come through the deluge in such good shape because buckeyes evolved in the southeastern United States, where autumn downpours frequently occur.

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**Coming this April!**  
**2014 ECOSYSTEM SYMPOSIUM**  
**Endangered Species and Extinctions**

Peter Kleinman

I thought it would be worth saying a few words about next spring's Ecosystem Symposium scheduled for early April, 2014. The topic will be endangered species and extinctions with an emphasis on local research. We would welcome ideas from our membership about topics of general interest, and would also welcome participation in the planning and execution of events like this – so let us know of your interest.

This summer, I had the opportunity to spend a week at Hog Island, the site of the Audubon Camp off the Coast of Maine. The longstanding Project Puffin--started fifty or sixty years ago by Cornell Ornithology researchers (see their website)--has been a fascinating and successful story of restoration of an endangered and locally extinct species. In the late 1800s, puffin feathers became the fad for women's hats and the Atlantic Puffin was extirpated from coastal Maine in the process. More recently, a plan was developed to bring 25 or 50 pairs of puffins from Newfoundland, blindfolded, and to introduce them to their new environment on Eastern Egg Rock Island, a tiny rocky spot seven miles off the coast. Since puffins spend 90 percent of their time far out at sea, they weren't seen until years later when they returned to Eastern Egg Rock Island and began producing viable offspring. Audubon supports researchers who count and observe the puffins, as well as terns and eiders, all summer long. Now, the problem of global warming may be intruding. Water temperatures near the coast have been rising, so the tiny round fish the puffins depend on for their diet are growing a month earlier, and may be growing enough that the puffins can't swallow them. What will this mean for the future?

One of the messages is that one can't think of survival of a species without taking into account the context or ecosystem it is a part of. For instance, some scientists believe we may soon have the genetic knowledge and technology to recreate the Passenger Pigeon. But, when millions of those birds were flooding the skies, they depended on the American Chestnut for their food supply. That tree can't be reestablished in its former habitat until we figure out how to breed a viable chestnut tree that can survive the fungus imported to this country in the early 1900s, causing the death of billions of these native trees.

On the other hand, I've just read an article in the current issue of *Scientific American* by George Church, a professor of genetics at the Harvard Medical School, who talks about the possibilities of reanimation, using the woolly mammoth as an example. He raises the intriguing possibility that there may be reservoirs of genes better adapted to a warming environment, genes that might benefit or insulate the environment from the consequences of warming. Other scientists counter that reanimation projects are a diversion from the real extinction crisis facing living species today.

All of which leads back to our conference this spring that will deal with aspects of these kinds of issues. I hope you will keep it in mind, and stay active in BCNA with your ideas and participation.

Look for additional information about the April Ecosystem Conference in future issues of *The BCNA Buzz*.



Atlantic Puffins, drawing by Joel Such

**2013 BANDING PROJECT REPORT  
ALLEGRA COLLISTER NATURE PRESERVE**

**Maggie Boswell, Lead Bander**

The spring season was abbreviated with banding happening on only four days. The overall capture rate was low, but still in the normal range. This fall the flood caused a two-week hiatus in banding and caused Marcel and Joel Such to focus on flood recovery, school and running rather than banding. Virginia Dionigi's husband had a hip replaced, which took her out of the picture for several weeks. The flood and lack of volunteers during prime fall migration may have affected results. The fall capture rate was an all-time low. The number of species banded was normal, but numbers of individuals of American Robins, Orange-crowned Warblers, Wilson's Warblers and Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow were quite low compared to years prior to 2012. 2012 showed a similar pattern to 2013. Black-capped Chickadee numbers were below normal also.

That said, we did band a single individual White-breasted Nuthatch and Townsend's Warbler bringing the total to 6 for each species since 1991. The highlight of the year was finally capturing a Carolina Wren which had been singing in the gulch since we started clearing net lanes in August. We could follow its movements by noting where it was singing, but rarely saw it.

We had no foreign captures (capturing a bird that had been banded somewhere else), nor have any of our birds been reported from elsewhere this season.

290 volunteer/hours have been logged to date. Dave Such helped with mowing and Renee Haip helped closing. Marcel and Joel helped prior to the flood and helped close. As always, Virginia was there whenever possible.



White-breasted Nuthatch, Boulder County  
By Bill Schmoker

**BCNA'S ANNUAL MEETING**

**2013 Flood Damage to City and County Parks  
Saturday, February 8<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 PM**

BCNA's Annual Meeting will be held at 6:00 PM on Saturday, February 8th at the Arapahoe Ridge HOA Clubhouse, 1750 Powell Street in Erie, the same place we have gathered in recent years. Dave Sutherland, Education and Outreach Coordinator for City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP), will share information about flood damage to OSMP infrastructure and efforts to restore access to trails and other open space amenities. And BCNA Board Member Howard Witkin will give a brief presentation on damage sustained by Boulder County Parks and Open Space properties.

A potluck supper will be followed by announcements and elections to the Board of Directors. Please bring your own drinks and a main dish, side dish, salad or dessert to share and your own table service and serving utensils.

To reach the Arapahoe Ridge HOA Clubhouse drive east on Arapahoe Avenue to North 111th Street (the first light east of US HWY 287), turn left (north) on North 111th Street to your first right at Morris Court, then immediately left on Hughs Drive to Powell Street (second stop sign). Turn left on Powell (you will see a large park, pool and clubhouse on the left), a short distance to a circular drive and entrance to the clubhouse on the left. Drop offs may be made at the entrance, but no parking is allowed in the circular drive. All are welcome!

**EDUCATION COMMITTEE CHANGES  
Thanks to Carol Kampert  
for 15 Years and Counting!**

Carol Kampert has been at the helm of BCNA's Education Committee as chair or co-chair for over ten years, after serving as a member of the committee for five years. As chair, she has been responsible for overseeing the development of the seasonal class schedules and shepherding our class instructors through the paperwork required, a larger task than you might imagine. She hosted the committee meetings with good cheer and warm hospitality, and we thank her for her years of dedication to this task. Carol says "It's been an incredibly rewarding experience to work with so many wonderful, dedicated folks during these years." Carol will remain as a member of the Education Committee, and Steve Jones will take over as chair person.

## BOULDER COUNTY NATURE ASSOCIATION 2014 WINTER-SPRING CLASSES

For those of you who have taken BCNA classes previously, please note that there is a new process for registering for our classes. Students will now contact Pam Piombino (piombino.pam@gmail.com) to register for classes. For questions or more information about a specific class, students are encouraged to contact the individual instructor. Additional information about BCNA classes is also available at [www.bcna.org](http://www.bcna.org).

### Demystifying Gulls: Beginning/Intermediate Gull Identification Bill Schmoker, Instructor

Despite being completely landlocked and about as far from a coast as one can be in the United States, Colorado offers fantastic gull-watching opportunities and identification challenges. A total of 22 species have been observed within the state. Gulls offer wonderful birding targets in the slow, cold winter months and can be found about anywhere you find yourself in your travels. This course aims to arm you with the skills to identify gulls, better understand their life history and habits, and maybe even make larophiles out of a few larophobes!!

**Bill Schmoker** loves to scrutinize and photograph wild birds, with his photography appearing in many nature publications, interpretive signs, web pages, advertisements, corporate logos, and as references for art works. Bill wrote a chapter for *Good Birders Don't Wear White* and is proud to be a Nikon Birding ProStaffer. Bill compiles the Boulder Christmas Bird Count, is a Colorado eBird reviewer, and is especially fond of his involvement with the American Birding Association's Young Birder programs.

Indoor class: Friday, February 7, 6 to 8:30 pm.  
Located at 3543 Smuggler Way in South Boulder.

Field class: Saturday, February 8, 9 am to 3 pm.  
Locations to be determined. State Parks pass may be needed depending on locations visited.

\$70 (\$60 BCNA members). Limited to 12 participants. For more information, contact Bill (bill.schmoker@gmail.com). To register, contact Pam Piombino (piombino.pam@gmail.com).



Ring-billed Gull Yawning by Steve Jones

### Ducks Steve Jones, Instructor

Do ducks really sleep with their eyes half open? How do they keep their feet warm while floating in icy ponds? What is their future in North America as wetlands disappear and the climate warms? We'll observe and photograph waterfowl at Wheat Ridge Greenbelt and other regional hotspots. An evening session will focus on identification, behavior, and conservation.

**Steve Jones** is author of *The Last Prairie* and co-author of *Peterson Field Guide to the North American Prairie*, *Wild Boulder County*, *Colorado Nature Almanac*, and *Butterflies of the Colorado Front Range*. He taught in the Boulder Valley Public Schools for 33 years and has taught BCNA field classes for 20 years. His consulting work includes more than 25 breeding bird surveys for local agencies and private companies.

(continued on page 5)



*Duck Class (continued from page 4)*



Bufflehead Pair Cruising  
by Steve Jones

Indoor class: Thursday, February 20, 7 to 9 pm. Located at 3543 Smuggler Way in South Boulder.

Field class: Saturday, February 22, 8 am to noon. Wheat Ridge Greenbelt.

Field class: Sunday, April 13, 8 am to noon. Eastern Boulder County lakes and reservoirs.

\$85 (\$75 BCNA members). Limited to 12 participants. For more information, contact Steve (303-494-2468; [curlewsj@comcast.net](mailto:curlewsj@comcast.net)). To register, contact Pam Piombino ([piombino.pam@gmail.com](mailto:piombino.pam@gmail.com)).

### **Breeding Warblers of the Boulder-Denver Area** **Paula Hansley, Instructor**

Warblers are often described as “the butterflies of the bird world.” The Boulder-Denver area hosts eight breeding species of warbler, and up to 20 species of warbler may be seen during migration. Although we will focus on identification, song, behavior, and habitat preference of our breeding warblers, the evolution, biology, migration, and conservation of all North American warblers will be discussed.

**Paula Hansley** has been interested in birds since the age of six, when she began listening to and watching birds in her parents’ three acres of hardwood forest in southwestern Ohio and during summers in the coniferous forest of northern Minnesota. In these places, she became fascinated by warblers. Paula has participated in many bird studies, including environmental impact statements for the Denver Water Board, bird inventories on Louisville open space, and bird surveys on Boulder City and County open space.

Indoor class: Thursday, May 8, 6:30 to 8:30 pm. Foothills Nature Center.

Field class: Saturday, May 10, 6 am to 11 am. Chatfield State Park.

Field class: Saturday, May 24, 6 am to 11 am. Gregory Canyon.

Note: An optional field trip to Roxborough State Park to view Ovenbirds will be offered.

Tuition: \$90 (\$80 BCNA members). Limited to 11 participants. For more information, contact Paula (720-890-2628; [plhansley@gmail.com](mailto:plhansley@gmail.com)). To register, contact Pam Piombino ([piombino.pam@gmail.com](mailto:piombino.pam@gmail.com)).



Audubon's Warbler,  
from Cornell Lab of Ornithology

**BCNA Grants – Call for Proposals**

The Boulder County Nature Association (BCNA) is a private, non-profit membership organization committed to preserving the natural history of our region through research, documentation and public education. BCNA is pleased to offer research funding by giving small grants for projects consistent with our mission.

Grants are available in two categories:  
The Ken Evenson Memorial Grant provides up to \$400 specifically for research on our native cats. One grant is awarded each calendar year.

General BCNA grants award up to \$1000 to \$2000 to fund projects that will add to our understanding of the natural history of Boulder County or will augment the existing documentation of the County’s ecosystems. Past projects have included 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. There have been many others. BCNA is proud to support solid local research. We currently have up to \$4000 available for such grants.

Proposals should include a detailed methodology, a timeline, a complete budget (to include other funding sources), and should be limited to five pages. Note that no institutional overhead is allowed. Individuals at institutions requiring overhead can apply as independent scholars. Successful applicants sign a contract specifying they will complete the project in the current year, will share the results with BCNA, and will allow BCNA to share written reports of results on the web.

Applications should be submitted not later than March 1, 2014, either to peterk218@gmail.com or Boulder County Nature Association, c/o Peter Kleinman, Grants Committee, PO Box 493, Boulder, Colorado 80306.

**CALL FOR BOARD NOMINATIONS!**

There will be two vacancies on the BCNA Board of Directors that need to be filled at our Annual Meeting on February 8th. Your participation and support is vital to our organization, so please send nominations or questions regarding service to Peter Kleinman (peterk218@gmail.com) or Sue Cass (suecass@comcast.net). Thank you!

**BCNA Board of Directors**

President.....Peter Kleinman 303-554-5320  
Vice President.....Megan Bowes 303-561-4883  
Treasurer.....Howard Witkin 303-789-4950  
Secretary.....Sue Cass 720-684-6922  
Shirley Jin 303-499-1574  
Steve Jones 303-494-2468  
Cindy Maynard 720-203-8211  
Claudia Van Wie 303-494-2250

**Committees and Contacts**

- *Avian Species of Special Concern*  
Dave Hallock dheldora@rmi.net  
Steve Jones curlewsj@comcast.net

- *Conservation*  
Chair Position Open

- *Ecosystem Stewardship*  
Steve Jones 303-494-2468

- *Education*  
Steve Jones 303-494-2468

- *Indian Peaks Bird Counts*  
Dave Hallock 303-258-3672  
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- *Membership*  
Cindy Maynard 720-203-8211  
Terry Stuart 303-449-2232

- *Newsletter*  
Dianne Andrews, content editor 303-823-6779  
Carol McCasland, layout 303-635-6433  
George Oetzel, support 303-543-3712

- *Publications*  
Sue Cass 720-684-6922

*Research Grants*  
Peter Kleinman 303-554-5320

- *State and Regional Wildlife Issues*  
Peter Kleinman 303-554-5320

- *Website*  
George Oetzel 303-543-3712

- *Wintering Raptor Survey*  
Sue Cass 720-684-6922

**Natural Disasters**

*If our own senses fail to teach us, then disasters will, that the land is not merely a backdrop for the human play, not merely a source of raw materials, but is the living skin of the Earth. Through this skin we apprehend a being that is alien, a life unfathomable and uncontrollable, and at the same time a being that is kindred, flesh of our flesh.*

Scott Russell Sanders

**GRACKLES AND SHOVELERS  
AT SOMBRERO MARSH**

Dr. Oakleigh Thorne, II, Thorne Nature Experience

This autumn there have been a couple of unusual nature activities at Sombrero Marsh. The Marsh is located just south of the intersection of Arapahoe and 63<sup>rd</sup> Street in Boulder. For the first time that I have ever seen this phenomenon, we had about 10,000 Common Grackles using the Marsh bulrushes as an evening roosting place. This lasted for several weeks until the end of October. They would fly in at dusk, arriving from the northeast and east, and fly out at dawn, presumably heading for the cornfields and feedlots. They finally must have left to migrate south. We have a bird banding station at our Thorne Nature Experience office. In the past we have had two of our banded Common Grackles recovered in the Ft. Worth, Texas area, where they apparently migrate.

Because of the record rainfall in September, before which the Marsh had almost dried up, it is now full of water and we have had one of the best waterfowl migration numbers that we have ever seen here. On November 11, there were about 70 Northern Shovelers circling on the water surface in a tight "raft," similar to the way White Pelicans herd fish. The raft was so tight that it was impossible to accurately count the number of individual ducks in it, so I had to make an estimate. I have not seen this behavior before. It was hard to tell just why they were doing this or what they might be "herding." I'm wondering if anyone else has seen this behavior.

*Flood (continued from page 1)*

In the long run, alteration of prairie streams and floodplains may benefit native wildlife populations. Along Coal Creek south of Boulder, the raging waters thinned out overcrowded groves of cottonwoods and willows, while dramatically widening the stream channel and depositing immense piles of sand and silt. This natural thinning of riparian woodlands will create more space for grassland-nesting songbirds, while reducing nesting opportunities for non-native eastern species. The piles of sand will provide nurseries for cottonwood seedlings, adding age and height diversity to streamside woodlands. Finally, the widened stream channel will enable the creek to meander more freely, creating deep pools for native fish and amphibians.

For years ecologists have been telling us that periodic scouring floods are essential to maintaining ecosystem health in prairie stream corridors. Only time will tell how local wildlife populations respond to this most recent flooding event.

**ELDORA MOUNTAIN RESORT  
EXPANSION UPDATE**

Dave Hallock, Middle Boulder Creek Coalition

As most of you know, Eldora Mountain Resort in western Boulder County formally applied to the Forest Service last fall to expand their operation outside their current Special Use Boundary, adding new runs and lifts on the backside down to Middle Boulder Creek towards Hessie, as well as on their front side down towards Jenny Creek. The Forest Service initiated the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) through the Scoping Process that solicited public comments about the proposal to help identify issues for evaluation in the EIS. Since last fall the Forest Service and the hired consultant have been evaluating the comments and developing a Draft EIS.

The Draft EIS is scheduled to come out in January of 2014. It will disclose the environmental impacts of the proposal, along with several alternatives, and generally presents a preferred alternative. There will then be another public comment period.

Many of us have had concerns about the proposed expansion, as the 1997 Forest Plan states "there will be no expansion of the area outside the boundaries currently specified in the Master Development Plan." There will be adverse impacts to wildlife (for example, Forest Service Sensitive Species—pine marten, boreal owl, and American three-toed woodpecker—reside in the area proposed for expansion and will be impacted by forest fragmentation caused by the creation of ski runs). The watershed of Middle Boulder Creek will be better protected by retaining the existing forest as a buffer between the creek and the existing ski runs rather than relying on "best management practices." The Hessie access to the Indian Peaks Wilderness will be adversely altered by the presence of downhill ski runs directly across the creek on the opposite hillside; the sights and sounds of a downhill ski area will be a part of the experience of snowshoers and cross-country skiers heading west from the Town of Eldora through Hessie.

So stay tuned as this issue should be heating up this winter. For more information and to sign up for alerts, go to the web site of the Middle Boulder Creek Coalition ([www.middleboulder creekcoalition.org](http://www.middleboulder creekcoalition.org)). BCNA is a member of MBCC and we thank you for your ongoing support.

**Connect with nature:  
[nature-net-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:nature-net-subscribe@yahoo.com)**

## 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  
Boulder, CO 80306