



On The Wing

Volume 42, Number 1 Boulder County Audubon Society Newsletter

Jan-Feb2012

BCAS 4th Tuesday Program Series

January 24, 7:15 p.m.

February 28, 7:15 p.m.

How Sexual Selection by Females has Caused Changes in Male Barn Swallows

Dr. Rebecca Safran, Asst Prof, and Dr. Maren Vitousek, post-doctoral fellow, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, CU

Our lab addresses questions related to the underlying basis of morphological traits, asks how these traits are shaped by selection and historical processes, and analyzes the role of individual-level processes for shaping population patterns. Barn swallows are widespread throughout northern countries with fascinating degree of divergence in appearance and behavior. We have examined the possibility that sexual selection has played an important role in shaping behavioral and morphological variation among closely related populations of Barn Swallows. Tail-feather length determines breeding success of Barn Swallow males in many parts of the world. However, we discovered that females in Colorado tended to choose mates with the darkest breast feathers. Those males bred a lot earlier, attracted the best mates and sired the greatest number of offspring. The only way to prove the impact of feather color on mate selection was to find a way to color male breast feathers in a way that looked natural.



Barn Swallow—Bill Schmoker



March 27 – David Buckner: *A Discussion of Some Unrecognized Ecological Relations of Grasses and Grasslands*

April 24 – Susan Craig: *Loggerhead Shrikes.*

Birds of Two Worlds: the Mexico-Colorado Connection

Arvind Panjabi, Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory.

Twenty-nine of 34 grassland-dependent species that breed in the western Great Plains overwinter in the limited grasslands of the Chihuahuan Desert. This globally important region, two-thirds of which lies in Mexico, is less than 15% grassland, and only a fraction of that is suitable for most grassland specialists. Many Chihuahuan Desert grasslands have been radically altered through grazing and cropland agriculture. Since 2005, more than 150,000 acres of desert grassland were converted to irrigated agriculture in central Chihuahua alone, much of it illegally. Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory is cooperating with Mexican and U.S. NGOs, universities, government agencies, and joint ventures to develop and implement plans for protecting these beleaguered grasslands and their unique community of birds. Their actions offer hope for conserving this critical habitat while also increasing sustainability of farming and other economic activities.

Arvind Panjabi is the International Program Director for Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory. His research focuses on distribution and conservation of breeding and migratory birds throughout the Rocky Mountain West and Northern Mexico.



Chihuahuan Desert grassland—Jose Hugo Martinez

Program Meetings at:
Unitarian Universalist Church of Boulder, 5001
Pennsylvania Ave. (west off 55th St. between
Arapahoe and Baseline)

Field Trips—January-April

January 2012—Winter Waterbirds Join us for a unique opportunity to tour Valmont Reservoir. Many species of waterfowl, gulls, and grebes find the cooling ponds at the plant a balmy place to spend the winter. We'll also look for eagles, owls, and other birds of prey drawn in by the masses of birds. Leader: Mark Ponsor : Email m.ponsor@comcast.net for details or leave a message at 303-530-2229.

See <http://www.boulderaudubon.org/events.htm>, BCAS on Facebook (<http://tiny.cc/psjma>), or Nature-Net for updated info.

Saturday, February 18—Winter Raptors Tour in Weld County A driving tour of Weld County looking for raptors harder to see in Boulder County: ferruginous hawk, merlin, roughlegged hawk, prairie falcon, etc. Leader: Mark Ponsor: Email m.ponsor@comcast.net for details or leave a message at 303-530-2229.

Saturday, February 25—Mountain birding trip for Rosy-finches, Red Crossbills, etc. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Justice Center Parking lot (6th and Canyon); we will have lunch at some appropriate restaurant in the mountains and be home by mid-afternoon. Please contact me at kaempfer@colorado.edu or 303-954-8998. (Joint trip with Boulder Bird Club)

Saturday, March 10—Spring Welcoming Hike at Sawhill Ponds. 7:30 a.m. to 11 a.m. Join leader Steve Jones for this annual spring welcoming breakfast hike. Bring something sweet, exotic, passionate, or healthy (and portable!) to pass around at potluck breakfast back by the creek. We should see some waterfowl, herons, and perhaps an osprey or two. Meet at Sawhill Ponds main parking area, west of 75th St. between Valmont and Jay Roads.

Saturday, April 28, 2012—Walking Tour of Carolyn Holmberg Preserve and a visit to the Birds of Prey Center at Rock Creek Farm, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Beginning at Stearns Lake parking area we will explore Stearns Lake and look for migrating and returning birds. We will follow the Mary Miller (the mother of Lafayette) Trail to Rock Creek Farm for a guided tour of the Birds of Prey Center. As we return to Stearns for a picnic lunch we will keep our eyes open for raptors, aquatic fowl and other interesting birds and animals. For those who have time we can take the Cradleboard Trail to the northern boundary of a wetland preserve to notice if wetland and short grass prairie ecosystems can coexist with development.

Trip limited to 15 participants. Be sure to bring water, sunscreen, hats and footwear for walking a little over 2 miles. To reserve a space, contact Petrea Mah at petreamah@comcast.net or 303-494-4121.

This trip should be especially interesting to families as we get to see the birds at the Birds of Prey Center up close and personal.

Saturday May 5, Pella Crossing & Marlett Trails. 7:00 a.m. until about 11:00. Easy trails around six ponds. Meet at the Pella Crossing parking lot on 75th just south of Hygiene. Leader: Neal Thielen, contact gnthielen@comcast.net.



[BCAS on Facebook](#)

Boulder County Audubon Society

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Alex & Gillian Brown (303 494 3042)

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Next issue deadline: (Mar 2012 issue) Feb 13.

Contact editor via link at: www.boulderaudubon.org/newsletter.htm

Owl Survey Seeks Volunteers

Boulder County Nature Association is recruiting new volunteers for this year's Boulder County Parks and Open Space burrowing owl survey. No previous experience monitoring burrowing owls is necessary, but volunteers need to commit at least 3 hours per month, April-July, and attend a volunteer training on Sunday, January 22, 3-4:30 p.m., at the Boulder Reynolds branch library, Table Mesa Drive opposite King Soopers. Volunteers will have the opportunity to go on a field trip in June to see nesting burrowing owls in Weld County.

These little owls are in serious jeopardy in Boulder County, probably due to nesting habitat fragmentation and predation by urban-adapted carnivores. Last year we found only three nests on Boulder County open space properties. Volunteers will adopt a single prairie dog colony and visit it at least four times between 15 April and 31 July.

For more information or to volunteer, contact Sue Cass: suecass@comcast.net

Boulder County Audubon Teen Naturalists—Winter Raptors

Blog by Marcel Such (<http://tiny.cc/qxwii>)

Dec 10 was the Boulder County Audubon Teen Naturalists' inaugural event, a wintering raptor survey in Boulder County. With three participants—myself, Joel Such, and Skye Lewis—and our able guides Steve Jones and Sarah Bexell, it was a great beginning of what looks to be an excellent group.

We surveyed Boulder County Nature Associations' South Rabbit Mountain route north of Boulder, and had a good number of hawks, kestrels, and eagles, marking the locations of the birds on a topographical map for a county-wide database of such sightings. And though raptors were our main focus, we also enjoyed the other wintering bird species that we happened across. As we gathered back at our meeting point, Joel spotted an adult Bald Eagle flying over, a fit end to a wonderful morning. Too bad it wasn't countable for the survey!

For information about future teen naturalist events, contact Steve Jones: curlwsj@comcast.net.



Teen Naturalists' survey group

Doggone rules

What are they good for?

Linda Andes-Georges

In the case of enforcing dog regulations on County land, we expect that meadowlarks and juncos, turkeys and vesper sparrows, deer, cougar, bear, Abert's squirrels and many others are rejoicing already. Their ability to make nests and dens, to hunt or train their young, to take a tranquil nap, indeed to lead a normal wild life is now vastly enhanced by the County's decision to enforce the rules on canine behavior on public lands, beginning with a focus on Walker Ranch.

For years the County has had our support for its well-considered rules on recreational activities, including domestic pet behavior. But there is always a varying lag or gap between rules on paper and what actually happens on our open space lands. This fall, "eco-stewards" (see the BCNA and BCAS websites for a description of this concept-or to become an eco-steward) repeatedly requested stricter enforcement of the rules governing what dog guardians can allow their animals to do.

The County staff heard them; noted, for example, the specific and numerous observations (made by Laura Osborn and others) of wildlife and hiker harassment by out-of-control dogs, and responded. According to the Parks and Open Space announcement of "intent to enforce," while rangers prefer to give warnings first, off-leash dogs have become a serious issue and are affecting wildlife as well as visitor experience."

Hikers (including small children, the elderly, people who have had surgery and many others) who prefer not to be jumped on by dogs—whether the jumper is aggressive or simply exuberant—can now expect to have better chances of a peaceful walk on County lands. As for the City, two weeks before Christmas the Open Space Board of Trustees was to consider yet again the results of the monitoring study of the voice-and-sight tag program. As of press time, the results of this discussion are unknown, but the memo on the subject will be posted at the OSMP webpage under "memos archive" from public meetings. Other interesting reading is located at this site, in particular the study of guardian and dog compliance on trails newly opened to dogs in the south part of the system: <http://tiny.cc/8upzi>

Grocery Certificates

Certificates are available at the monthly meetings. BCAS receives a 5% donation from the sale of King Soopers certificates and 10% from sale of Liquormart certificates. Bring your checkbook to the meeting.

Denominations:

King Soopers, \$100; Liquormart, \$25

BOULDER COUNTY WILDLIFE INVENTORY, MAY AND JUNE 2011

Gillian and Alex Brown, 4560 Darley Avenue, Boulder, CO 80305.

May is always the most exciting month of the year with a high chance of seeing migrating rarities. The number of species seen does not always reflect the number of rarities as it is influenced by other factors such as a late shorebird migration, a strong warbler migration, the lingering of some winter species and the reporting and observation of all the standard common species. The 218 bird species seen in May 2011 was a respectable total but was still a long way off the record of 243 bird species seen in 2002. **Alder Flycatcher**, a new sighting for the wildlife inventory, was reported at the end of May and continued to be seen through the 1st of June. This is one of the notoriously difficult to identify Empidonax flycatchers; the safest way to separate it from our more common **Willow Flycatcher** is by voice. Other unusual flycatchers included **Ash-throated Flycatcher**, **Eastern Phoebe** and **Cassin's Kingbird**. Both **Least Flycatcher** and **Gray Flycatcher** were seen in small numbers.

Shorebird migration was definitely trailing off although **Whimbrel**, **Semipalmated Sandpiper** and **Baird's Sandpiper**, all seen in the first week of May, were new additions for the year. Two **Red-necked Phalarope** were seen at Walden Ponds later in the month. Two **Caspian Terns** at Walden ponds delighted many observers. Three **Red-headed Woodpeckers** observed in different locations was a significant showing for this increasingly rare species. **Mississippi Kite** was reported for the third time since the wildlife inventory began— this is a species that is spreading from southern Colorado and we can probably expect to see further reports. A **Cassin's Sparrow** was reported at the end of May, and several were reported in June. Fortunately these rather drab sparrows have a very distinctive song which aids identification considerably. Another **Black-throated Sparrow** was seen in addition to the one sighted in April. A **Carolina Wren** continued to linger in south Boulder. **White-eyed Vireo**, **McCown's Longspur**, **Summer Tanager** and **Baltimore Oriole** were all less usual species.

Warbler migration was strong continuing the trend started at the end of April. Less usual species seen in May included four **Tennessee Warblers**, a **Northern Parula**, a **Chestnut-sided Warbler**, three **Black-throated Gray Warblers**, a **Blackburnian Warbler**, two **Palm Warblers**, five **Blackpoll Warblers**, a **Black-and-White Warbler**, three **American Redstarts**, an **Ovenbird**, three **Northern Waterthrushes** and two **Hooded Warblers**. Perhaps the most notable feature was how many unusual individuals were seen in all regions of the county. **American Redstart**, **Ovenbird** and **Hooded Warbler** continued to be seen in June and are all birds that have occasionally bred in the county. Two **Orange-crowned Warblers** were seen in June in the mountains and could be breeding.

June is the height of the breeding season for many birds, but there is still the possibility of seeing some late migrants. However, although this is an exciting month to bird, there were noticeably fewer reports than in May. Both **Mountain Plover** and **Purple Martin** were seen for only the second time in Boulder County since the wildlife inventory began in 1979. Unfortunately, neither bird stayed around long enough to be seen by more than one observer. Two birds that used to be much more common in the county but were seen in June this year were **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** and **Red-headed Woodpecker**. Other unusual June birds included **Boreal Owl**, **Ash-throated Flycatcher**, **Eastern Phoebe** and a **Baltimore Oriole**. Birds that were formerly considered unusual but are now making regular appearances include **Northern Bobwhite**, **Caspian Tern**, **Least flycatcher** and **Orchard Oriole**. Surprisingly, a record 185 bird species were seen in June surpassing the 178 species seen in June 2000.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THE MAY AND JUNE 2011 INVENTORIES

David Alcock, Keith Alderman, Linda Andes-Georges, Bob Andrews, Alan Bell, J. D. Birchmeier, Maureen Blackford, Julia Bond, Maggie Boswell, Kitty Brigham, Alex & Gillian Brown, Burrowing Owl Study, Sue Cass, Charlie Chase, Mark Chavez, Alex Crux, Raymond E Davis, Todd Deininger, Ted Floyd, Steve Frye, Peter Gent, Bryan Guarente, Paula Hansley, Jack Harlan, Thomas Heinrich, Indian Peaks Spring and Breeding Bird Counts, Steve Jones, Edward Jurkouich, Bill Kaempfer, Carol Kampert, Michael Kiessig, Elena Klaver, James Lamoureux, Sandra Laursen, Janet McLachlan, Mick McNaghten, Mark Miller, Steve Miodinow, Gene and Lynn Monroe, Nick Moore, Christian Nunes, Laura Osborn, Beth Partin, Chris Petrizzo, Nathan Pieplow, Pam Piombino, Suzi Plooster, Ryan Prioreshi, Rob Raker, Joe Roller, Jeff Romain, Ira Sanders, Bill Schmoker, Eric Schuette, Scott Severs, Margaret Smith, Bob Spencer, Cara Stiles, Joel Such, Marcel Such, Joyce Takamine, Oakleigh Thorne, John Tumasonis, David J Waltman, Tom Wilberding, Wild Bird Center, Howard Witkin, Bob Zilly, Dan Zmolek.



The Great Backyard Bird Count

Feb 17-20, 2012

Visit <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/>

BOULDER COUNTY WILDLIFE INVENTORY, JULY AND AUGUST 2011

Gillian and Alex Brown, 4560 Darley Avenue, Boulder, CO 80305.

Both July and August were exceptionally poorly reported months with only 118 bird species recorded in July and 122 in August. Many common species were either marginally reported or totally missed. However, birding during these months is not as unrewarding as it might first seem. Many birds are out of the nest and can be seen as fledglings giving easy confirmation of breeding status. Such was the case in July with **Cassin's Sparrow** – a first breeding record for the county – and **Orchard Oriole**. Breeding **Cassin's Sparrows** are a good indicator of the health of the short grass prairie which these birds require. A **Canyon Towhee** seen in July was a new species for the wildlife inventory. **Calliope Hummingbirds** are typically seen later in the summer as are **Dickcissels**; both these species were new sightings for the year. We do not usually associate July with fall migration but flight calls of the first Chipping Sparrows migrating southwards were heard by the 18th and continued for the rest of the month.

By August fall migration was well under way with the return of many shorebirds being the most easily visible sign. The most exciting sightings for August were a **Yellow-crowned Night Heron**, an **Upland Sandpiper** and a **Pacific Wren**. This is only the fourth report of **Yellow-crowned Night Heron** since the wildlife inventory started in 1979. **Upland Sandpipers** were considered equally unusual until their flight calls began to be used as a means of identification three years ago. We now know that there is a steady trickle of these birds flying overhead at night that was previously unknown. **Pacific Wren** was recently split from **Winter Wren**, and we are still learning about the occurrence of these two species in the county.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THE JULY AND AUGUST 2011 INVENTORIES

Linda Andes-Georges, Maggie Boswell, Kat Bradley-Bennett, Kitty Brigham, Alex & Gillian Brown, Burrowing Owl Study, Todd Deininger, Ted Floyd, Steve Frye, Paula Hansley, Jack Harlan, Adam Jack, Steve Jones, Bill Kaempfer, Janet McLachlan, David Mendosa, Steve Miodinow, Gene and Lynn Monroe, Sharon Norfleet, Christian Nunes, Laura Osborn, Chris Petrizzo, Peter Plage, Ryan Pioreschi, Margaret Smith, Debra Sparn, Cara Stiles, David J Waltman, Wild Bird Center.

Victory for Endangered Species Act

Our win to defend the Endangered Species Act against weakening amendments was a strong bright spot in this past year's legislative calendar. A true David and Goliath fight, the House vote that swung our way signaled a hopeful sign that we could muster bipartisan support for some of our most cherished conservation values.

The attack came in the form of language buried in the Interior Appropriations bill that would have prevented the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from spending money to provide safety net protections of the Act to 260 critically imperiled species. The so-called Extinction Rider was removed through an amendment offered by long-time environmental champion Norm Dicks (D-WA), which passed by a bipartisan vote of 222-202. It was a good victory but it won't be the last fight we see to protect the ESA from attacks. Already the House is looking for other ways to weaken this cornerstone law to protect our most vulnerable birds, wildlife and plants.

— Emailed announcement by the
National Audubon Society

Going postal about poachers

Next time you need stamps, consider a roar of support for endangered Amur tigers: you can buy 20 limited edition stamps for \$11 until 2013. Proceeds from this USPS special program will go toward the Multinational Species Conservation Funds, which support anti-poaching initiatives, education, and community conservation worldwide. Besides the tiger (of which only about 400 remain), other animals like elephants, rhinos, marine turtles and great apes will reap benefits.

(See <http://tiny.cc/4no9z> for more information.)

- Linda Andes Georges



Coffee and Climate Change

If you're one of those people who needs a cup of coffee to get going in the morning, your world may be changing. In fact, it already is.

Climate change is threatening coffee crops in virtually every major coffee producing region of the world.

Higher temperatures, intense rainfall coupled with long droughts, and more pests and disease — all associated with climate change — have reduced coffee supplies dramatically in recent years.

It ought to be a wake-up call for all of us. Who wants to be around people who can't get their morning coffee fix?

More info: www.ucsusa.org/CoffeeAndClimate



MULTI-DAY FIELD TRIP TO CHEYENNE BOTTOMS AND QUIVIRA, KS Oct. 28 to Oct 31, 2011

Leaders Mark and Sue Ponsor; 9 participants; article by Linda Andes-Georges
Traveling time to area in rented van: about 7 hours. Lodging center: Great Bend KS.

Great migrations are not just for geese and wildebeest—they are for people who enjoy feeling a part of one of the biggest rhythmic wildlife events that Mother Earth has to offer.

On Halloween weekend a group of 9 hardy souls, shepherded by experienced leaders Sue and Mark Ponsor, reversed the classic wagon train direction and went east to visit Kansas's huge central wetlands to view the multitudes of traveling waterfowl, as well as any other wildlife that came within scoping distance.

The roughly seven-hour trip took us to Great Bend, KS, which is a reasonable driving distance from both Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira: wetlands of such huge acreage and importance to migrating birds that it feels much like the Serengeti. It has been a dry year there, very dry; nevertheless, the birds have little choice and must accommodate as best they can as they funnel south through the Midwest to their wintering grounds in Texas or Central America.

Our occasional escorts or staff helpers from the Kansas Wetlands Center and the staffs of both Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira amplified what we thought we knew about the familiar birds as well as the rare ones (Whooping Cranes). One surprising discovery was the mnemonic term for the songs of Eastern and Western Meadowlarks. In the spring, the cheerful Easterns sing, "Ooo - spring is here!" But the cynical Western ones sing a verse that cannot be printed in a family newsletter.

Furthermore, we learned information of interest that was not even pertinent to our own continental wildlife (such as, "What do you call a baby kangaroo? A pouch potato, of course!"). We learned localisms that seemed foreign to the benign nature of our hunt (sandhill cranes are apparently delicious, and locally known as "ribeye in the sky.") We held lively discussions of the invasive plant species in the wetlands, and investigated the shelter belts for passerines (Cardinals! And many Harris's sparrows) and for interesting trees like the Osage orange (or, as one participant called it, the "Oh, Say George" tree).

The rhythm of our day was first to survive the motel night (it was hunting season; the motel was full, and the hunters partied and went to bed late, and got up even earlier than birders, if such a thing is imaginable). Then we set out before sunrise to experience the glowing red dawn and the impressive chorus of millions of migrating birds of many species. At daylight, many of the "grazers" (geese and cranes) left the pools to forage in nearby fields. Consequently we had the choice of following them to the fields to see who was in town, or of traveling around the pools and canals to hone our skills at duck and shorebird identification. Sometimes we took a "walkabit" (Mark's term for a walkabout) to get some exercise and satisfy our own occasional desire for solitude and exercise.

At the end of the day also, we tried to be in the right place to see all the birds return to the water, bathed in sunset rose and eager to greet friends and (in the case of the Sandhill Cranes) to file into a safe haven in the water in an orderly and apparently endless line. There was no pushing and shoving, just the occasional hop of impatience. As we waited, the Red-winged Blackbirds returned to the marshes by millions, scaring themselves into the air in great oval swarms from time to time until all were settled for the night.

Other vignettes that we will hold in our memories: –dozens of avocets busily sweeping the water around placidly sleeping white pelicans –snow geese descending in the evening like sprinkles of silver confetti behind vast clouds of their gray brethren (White-fronted Geese). –skeins of geese crisscrossing the crescent moon as deep darkness came down around us. –a family of three Whooping Cranes—our last sight on the morning of our departure—with the adults framing the young "colt" and taking to the air in silence and grace. After we left we learned that sixteen had been seen before the next great storm hit Kansas.



White Pelicans and Blue-wing Teal from BCAS trip to Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira, April 2011
-G. Oetzel



Species Rediscovery Adventures

George Oetzel

A Jim Hightower column in the Dec 15 Boulder Weekly said that the Nine-spotted Ladybug [*Coccinella novemnotata* (C-9)], the New York State insect, had been rediscovered after not being seen in the state since 1992. That started me on a quest in which I discovered the Lost Ladybug Project. That project created in 2011, has led to the rediscovery of several other species of ladybugs.

Historically, the C-9 had a broad geographic range, but an extensive survey in 1993 found none in eleven north-eastern states. There is no clear explanation for the disappearance of this native ladybird beetle. One possibility is that introduced ladybirds have excluded it from habitats that it once favored. The timing of the extirpation of this native species overlaps with the arrival and establishment of its congener, *Coccinella septempunctata*.

The project has been collecting and cataloging ladybug photos from all over the country. Some of the results are described in their first annual newsletter¹. There have even been some discovered in Boulder.

"The *C. novemnotata* were combined with an equal number from Colorado that were sent to us by another super spotter named Sheena Beaverson. Sheena, a geologist from the Illinois State Geological Survey, was visiting Boulder last June and, in her spare time, started finding an abundance of rare ladybugs along the Chautauqua Park hiking trails. After sending in several photos, she graciously agreed to pack and overnight some live ladybugs to Cornell. Sheena made a presentation about her Lost Ladybug adventures!"

The project has been attempting to collect pictures from every state. Colorado (1517), Florida (922), New York (683) and California (565) lead the list with the most photos submitted. There are 32 states that have contributed fewer than 50.



9-spotted ladybug



Ladybugs on Green Mt, Aug. 2009

1. The Lost Ladybug Project

[<http://www.lostladybug.org/index.php>]

2. <http://courses.cit.cornell.edu/icb344/abstracts/c9-lady-beetle.htm>

Preliminary Report — 2011 CBC

*A very nice day for CBC this year. Imagine if it had been a few days later, when we got over a foot of snow! **Bill Schmoker's preliminary report:***

Folks- I'm pleased to report a successful 70th running of the Boulder Christmas Bird Count on Sunday, 18 December 2011. Over 100 observers tallied 112 species on count day, with another 2 count week species (Wild Turkey & Common Redpoll) on the board.

Notable birds, seen less than 10 times on previous Boulder CBCs, are Ross's Goose, Golden-crowned Sparrow and Williamson's Sapsucker (each seen on only 2 prior counts), Northern Saw-whet Owl (4 prior), Hermit Thrush (5 prior), Eastern Bluebird (8 prior), and Barn Owl, Marsh Wren, & Common Grackle (9 prior.) The adult Golden-crowned Sparrow was seen at the same location as last winter's long-staying immature bird at the Teller Lakes trailhead and is presumably the same returning individual. We also recorded Ring-necked Pheasant, Long-eared Owl, and Rough-legged Hawk, all which are now quite difficult to find in the count circle and are thus easily missed. Enjoying nearly wind-free afternoon temperatures in the mid-50s was also a major highlight for counters more accustomed to cold count days- for many this was the warmest Boulder count in recent memory.

Our most striking misses were Killdeer (seen on 59 prior counts), Cassin's Finch (45 prior), and Clark's Nutcracker (44 prior.) Gulls were a bit disappointing with only Ring-billed, Herring, & California Gull recorded. Thanks to everyone who helped out today as a territory leader, count participant, or feeder watcher. We hope you will join us next year, whether a seasoned veteran or first-timer!

Thanks again, & best- Bill Schmoker,
Boulder CBC Compiler, Longmont

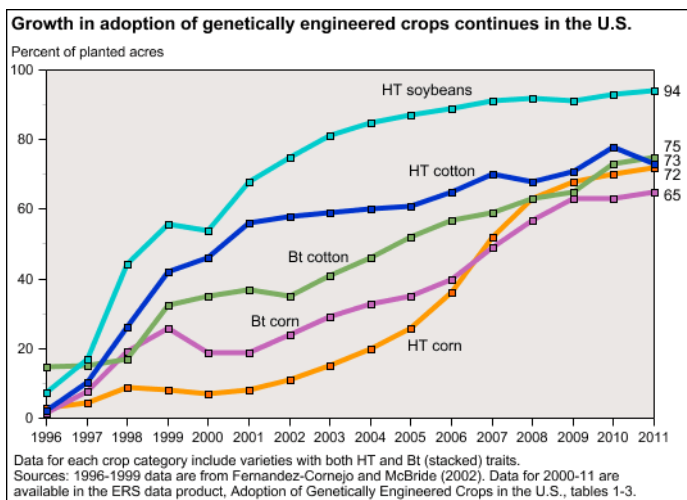


Photo from a Dec 23 Facebook post by Bill Schmoker, titled "Launch"

Resistance of Pests to Genetically Engineered Crops

The issue of planting genetically engineered (GE) crops on Boulder County Open Space lands has generated a lot of discussion and controversy recently. Here is a little perspective on the bigger picture.

GE crops now dominate the major commodity crops in the U.S. as the graph below shows.



<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Data/BiotechCrops/>

HT: herbicide tolerant; Bt: *Bacillus thuringiensis* for insects

The particular issue in Boulder County is with herbicide-tolerant (HT) sugar beets. Commercial cultivation of the HT sugar beets began in the USA in 2008. "According to (KWS Saat AG, a German seed company), 250,000 hectares of H7-1 sugar beets were cultivated in the first year, half the total sugar beet area in the USA. In 2009, it is expected that cultivation of GM sugar beets will rise to cover 90 per cent of the total area." [1]

Using glyphosate for weed control is advantageous to farmers. Compared with other herbicides glyphosate has a favorable ecotoxicological profile. After just 30 to 40 days, it is completely broken down in the soil and there are few side effects to birds, fish and other organisms in soil or water. The combination of an herbicide-tolerant sugar beet with a compatible herbicide does not mean that just one spraying now will be necessary for weed control. However, experiences in the USA have shown that when this herbicide-tolerant system is employed in

sugar-beet cultivation, fuel is saved because fewer sprayings are needed.

However, overuse of the GE crops fosters development of resistant weeds and insects. Studies have shown that resistance can develop if the same GE crop is planted for about three years. Farmers tend to resist giving up planting a crop that provides great yield at reduced cost, so overuse is widespread, and problems with resistant pests are growing. The situation is somewhat similar to the overuse of antibiotics for people and animals, which has led to "superbugs" and hard-to-cure diseases.

There are currently 4 different types (known as 'biotypes') of herbicide resistant weeds in Colorado. Local weed scientists estimate that there are 2,260 sites and more than 66,300 acres infested with herbicide resistant weeds in Colorado and they infest barley, corn, roadsides, and wheat. The most widespread resistant weed of Colorado is Kochia (*Kochia scoparia*), which infests over 10,000 acres and is found primarily in roadsides, and wheat. The number of resistant weed species in Kansas is larger. [2]

[1] http://www.gmo-compass.org/eng/grocery_shopping/crops/20.sugar_beet.html

[2] <http://www.weedscience.org/usa/state.asp?StateID=6>



Kochia (*Kochia scoparia*) is the most widespread resistant weed of Colorado. [2]



Cranes & Snow Geese, Bosque del Apache, Nov 2007

Become a Supporting Member of Boulder Audubon

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