



On The Wing

Volume 41, Number 2 Boulder County Audubon Society Newsletter

Mar-Apr 2011

BCAS 4th Tuesday Program Series

March 22, 7:15 p.m.

April 26, 7:15 p.m.

Bats: Species Declines and Why They Matter

Dr. Rick Adams

We will explore the natural history and ecology of bats in terms of global, regional, and local importance to ecosystem function and health. We will also discuss the major influences on the contemporary mass-extinctions of bat populations and species and what this means for the future of plant and animal food webs of which humans are an integral part.

Dr. Rick Adams is a Professor of Ecology and Evolution at the University of Northern Colorado. His research integrates development, ecology and evolution of bats by addressing a diverse array of research questions including seed dispersal by epauletted fruit bats in South Africa, the effects of natural disasters on Caribbean Island bat populations, climate-change and bats in western North America, alterations of forest structure by humans and bat foraging habits in Colorado, and the development and evolution of flight in bats.



e-On the Wing

Printing costs limit the paper edition of *On the Wing* to 8 pages. No such restriction exists for the electronic version which is 10 pages this month. Extras include:

- July-August inventory
- Ted Floyd description of huge Valmont turnout
- Cornell discussion of bird mortality events
- Description and link: free conservation biology text

Bears and More Bears

Perry Conway and Tim Henson

Perry Conway has worked as a bear photo guide for over 25 years in Yellowstone, Alaska, and Churchill. He will start with an overview of North American bears—their evolution, behavior, and population status. He will also give current information about bears in Colorado. Tim Henson will follow with his video of the bear photo trip Perry guided last August to Lake Clarke National Park in Alaska.

Boulder's Perry Conway has photographed nature locally and around the world for more than 30 years. As creator and producer of the Aerie Nature Series, Perry has entertained and enlightened millions of schoolchildren and adults with his educational programs. His photographs and articles have appeared in every major natural history magazine in North America. Tim Henson is a retired career educator who taught high school biology and other sciences for 32 years. Growing up in the mountains of Colorado, and 2 years in Ghana in the Peace Corps were key elements to his life-long addiction to travel and spending time in wild places.



photo by Tim Henson

Socializing: 7 p.m., Program: 7:15
 Unitarian Universalist Church of Boulder, 5001
 Pennsylvania Ave. (west off 55th St. between
 Arapahoe and Baseline)

Saturday, March 12—Spring Welcoming Hike at Sawhill Ponds, 7:30 a.m. to 11 a.m.: Join leader Steve Jones for the annual spring welcoming breakfast hike. Bring something sweet, exotic, passionate, or healthy to pass around at a potluck breakfast back by the creek. Meet at Sawhill Ponds main parking area, west of 75th St between Valmont and Jay Roads

Saturday, April 9—Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch, 7 a.m. return around 1 p.m. Join leader Scott Severs, volunteer for the hawk watch, for a trip down to Dinosaur Ridge near Morrison to watch for migrant birds of prey. Expect up to 10 species streaming overhead on their way north. Strenuous hike followed by several hours of standing/sitting in one place. Limited to eight participants, contact Scott at scottesevers@gmail.com or at (303)684-6430 to sign up or for more details.

Saturday, May 7—Roll and Stroll, 8:30 a.m., South Boulder Creek Trail from Marshall Road. Leaders Mary Balzer and Topher Downham from OSMP. Knowledgeable Audubon birders team up with Mary and Topher to provide this fun birdwatching experience in a variety of habitats, for people who use walkers, wheelchairs, canes, or just regular legs. Bring binoculars and a field guide if you have them, and personal water. Snacks provided.

Saturday, May 14—International Migratory Bird Day, 8 a.m. – Noon. Walden Ponds. Details to be announced. **Go Wild, Go Birding!** is the IMBD 2011 theme, chosen on reaching out to involve new youth and adults in learning about birds, birdwatching, and bird conservation. Field trips, a big sit, and other activities will highlight the day. Co-sponsored by Boulder Bird Club and the Wild Bird Center.

Future announcements: check www.boulderaudubon.org and Nature Net.

Intro to Boulder County Birding Certificate Course

Instructors: Sue Cass, Steve Jones, and Scott Severs

This Boulder County Audubon Society certificate course covers the basics of birding from using binoculars and field guides to identifying birds by field marks and song. Observe hawks, ducks, woodpeckers, songbirds and other birds in their natural habitats while learning about their ecological roles and conservation needs. Students who complete the course will receive a Boulder County Audubon "Intro to Boulder County Birding" certificate. Please bring a field guide (such as Sibley's Guide to Birds) and binoculars to the first class. Dress for the weather and bring personal water. Breakfast snacks will be provided.

Saturday, April 16, 7:30-12:00, Birding Basics and "Prairie birds" at Walden Ponds

Saturday, May 21, 7:30-12:00, "Foothills birds" at Walker Ranch Open Space (carpool from Ranger Cottage at Chautauqua)

Saturday, June 18, 7:00-1:00, "Mountain birds" at Arapaho Ranch in Nederland (carpool arrangements TBA)

Tuition: \$90 (\$80 for Audubon members) Limited to 12 participants

To register: contact Mary Balzer: marybalzer@qwest.net or go to www.boulderaudubon.org to print the registration form.

Boulder County Audubon Society

— Officers —

President

Petrea Mah (303)494-4121

Vice President

Steve Jones (303)494-2468

Secretary

Joan Dawson (303)494-8252

Treasurer

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— Other Board of Directors —

Linda Andes-Georges, Mary Balzer

Ray Bridge, Sharon Daugherty

Maddy Goldhawk, J.D. Birchmeier

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— Standing Committees —

Conservation/Legislation

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Programs

Steve Jones, Petrea Mah

Hospitality

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Field Trips

Andrew Cowell (303)543-7504

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Bob Turner (303)499-2669

Christmas Bird Count Coordinator

Bill Schmoker (303)702-9589

Wildlife Inventory

Alex and Gillian Brown (303)494-3042

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Deadline for May 2011 issue: Apr 15.

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

Nominations for Boulder County Audubon Board and Committees

The board nominating committee is currently putting together a slate of persons to be elected at the May 2011 meeting and to take office in July 2011. Responsibilities for at large members include attending an ½ day retreat in August, 5 bimonthly board meetings, September through May, and other projects or activities as the person may choose.

The committee is also accepting nominations for the finance, membership, education, scholarship and special events committees which will then, according to the by-laws will, be appointed by the president.

Suggestions from members as well as self-nominations are welcome.

The board and committees are great fun and a chance to get to know not only other BCAS members but people and organizations in the community.

Contact Petrea Mah petreamah@comcast.net or 303-494-4121 if you or someone you know is interested.

National and State Audubon Update

The National Audubon Society Board has decided to create regional governing areas throughout the United States. Colorado, Wyoming and New Mexico will be the Western Rocky Mountain Region with plans to add other states as staff and funds allow. One of the advantages of this plan is the ability to share staff among the states rather than duplicating these positions. The regional Rocky Mountain Office will be in Fort Collins and will be managed by Brian Rutledge, NAS Regional Vice-President. Office space will be shared by Rocky Mountain Regional staff, Colorado Audubon staff and Wyoming Audubon staff.

Audubon Colorado will also maintain a small but convenient Field Office in downtown Denver. This satellite office in the Alliance Center which houses a host of conservation focused non-profits will provide space for staff, interns and our state lobbyist as well as easy access to the state legislature and various state agencies. Colorado Audubon will share space with Birdlife International and Trout Unlimited. Audubon Colorado staff will split their time between the 2 office locations but should be contacted at the mailing address and phone number at the Denver office.



Making It Possible.

Thanks to SCFD for helping to support Boulder Audubon.

Seeing the Big Picture: The Role of Audubon's State Office

Some of us wonder: what the heck is the "State Office," and what does it do? Current director Ken Strom gave us a terrific update at the end of 2010 which displays the scope of the office's accomplishments. Among its most effective ongoing programs, and one which our local chapter supports with significant financial help, is the legislative conservation lobbyist, a post held at present by Jen Bolton. Without her eagle eye view, her personal pressure on our statesmen, and her alerts when legislators are contemplating actions with big conservation repercussions (often bad, but sometimes good), we might not be able to participate--as a chapter or as individuals--in time to support or suppress those laws.

An example of Audubon's effective lobbying is the defense we have to mount against repeated annual raids on the GOCO lottery funds, which our TABOR-impooverished state is often tempted to use for non-conservation purposes. As Ken likes to say, Audubon Colorado is "more than willing to get down in the trenches and fight the tough fights for our wildlife heritage." Our chapter is proud to have these effective allies.

In other arenas, Audubon Colorado has provided outdoor learning to elementary students on the Jicarilla Apache reservation; has initiated an ongoing Together Green environmental learning program for Denver schools; has worked with Audubon WY to secure more stringent restrictions on energy development in core sage-grouse habitat; has developed assessment protocols for the Important Bird Area sites, and much more.

At present, a new Audubon sanctuary is being established in the Black Forest area northeast of Colorado Springs, a huge block of protected habitat in a unique ecosystem, used by migrating birds, elk and other wildlife. Take a moment to feel good about how you are helping our state by working with State Audubon: www.auduboncolorado.org/. We make a great team.

Main Office for the National Audubon Society, Rocky Mountain Regional Office

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BOULDER COUNTY WILDLIFE INVENTORY, SEPT. AND OCT. 2010

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

The **Pacific Loon** continued to be seen on Macintosh Reservoir throughout September but had moved during the first few days of October; possibly the bird seen at Boulder Reservoir on the 5th October was the same one. Another **Pacific Loon** was reported mid-October at Union Reservoir. The middle of October is when we would expect to begin seeing migrating loons so these sightings are not particularly surprising. Shorebird migration was less obvious in September than in August but there were a few good reports. An **American Golden Plover** was reported at Boulder Reservoir; this was the second report of the year for this unusual species. **Red-necked Phalarope** was reported for the first time this year. Both Boulder Reservoir and Union Reservoir in Weld County were good places to observe terns. Four tern species were reported in September: **Caspian Tern**, **Black Tern**, **Common Tern** and **Forster's Tern**. **Sabine's Gull**, another first sighting of the year, was reported at various reservoirs in September. These birds tend to be obvious in flight with the white edge to the back of their wings highly visible.

A variety of other unusual and interesting birds were reported in September. A **Sprague's Pipit** was found in the grasslands of Davidson Mesa south of Boulder; this is only the third report of this species in the county since the wildlife inventory began in 1979. The past two reports were both during spring migration. Both **McCown's Longspur** and **Chestnut-collared Longspur** were reported near Boulder Reservoir. An additional **Chestnut-collared Longspur** was seen south of Boulder. These are only the fourth reports of **Chestnut-collared Longspur** for the wildlife inventory; this species was last seen in 2006. Three unusual flycatcher species were reported: **Gray Flycatcher**, **Ash-throated Flycatcher** and **Cassin's Kingbird** have all been reported several times this year. Both **Lewis's Woodpecker** and **Red-headed Woodpecker** have become increasingly unusual in the county, and have gone from being known breeders to only possible marginal breeders. A **Lewis's Woodpecker** seen on the Indian Peaks Fall Bird Count was a first sighting in the county for the year. A **Prothonotary Warbler** was the rarest warbler sighting of the month, this bird was last reported in 2007. Other unusual warblers were two **Palm Warblers** and a **Magnolia Warbler**. **Cassin's Vireo** is a bird that is typically seen more often during fall migration than in the spring, so it is not surprising to have a first sighting for the year in September. This was one of three species (Plumbeous, Cassin's and Blue-headed Vireo) that were split several years ago from what used to be known as **Solitary Vireo**. **Plumbeous Vireo** is of course one of our common breeding vireos, and **Blue-headed Vireo** is the least usual of the three species.

By October ducks were back in the county with all our reservoirs appearing to contain large numbers. Both **Black Scoter** and **Surf Scoter** were reported on Boulder Reservoir; these were new sightings for the year. **Short-eared Owl** is a bird that has become increasingly rare with housing development on the eastern plains taking much of their habitat. Thus it is always pleasing when one is reported. The sighting of a **Short-eared Owl** in car headlights at dusk is typical for this elusive species. Three hummingbird species were reported this month; while an October sighting of **Broad-tailed Hummingbird** is not that unusual, both **Rufous Hummingbird** and **Black-chinned Hummingbird** are unexpected. It seems that **Black-chinned Hummingbird** might be one of our hardier hummingbird species. This year it was the first to arrive at our feeders in south Boulder and the last to depart. **Rufous Hummingbird** is rarely reported in October.

Altogether 156 bird species were seen in September and 112 bird species in October. For the full listing of observed species go to www.boulderaudubon.org/inventory.htm

CONTRIBUTORS TO THE SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER 2010 INVENTORY

David Alcock, Linda Andes-Georges, J.D. Birchmeier, Rob Bolton, Maggie Boswell, Boulder Bird Club, Kitty Brigham, Alex Brown, Marlene Bruning, Diane Carter, Carol Cushman, Todd Deininger, Ted Floyd, Lonny Frye, Steve Frye, Marcel Gahbauer, Peter Gent, Bryan Guarente, Paula Hansley, Rolf Hertenstein, Steve Jones, Bill Kaempfer, Elena Klaver, Chishun Kwong, Chuck Lowrie, Marcia Marvin, Mark Miller, Gene and Lynn Monroe, Rudi Nuissi, Christian Nunes, Laura Osborn, Beth Partin, Peter Plage, Suzi Plooster, Ira Sanders, Bill Schmoker, Scott Severs, Cara Stiles, Oakleigh Thorne, David J. Waltman, Tom Wilberding, Cole Wild, Wild Bird Center, Bob Zilly.

Bluebird Monitoring 2011

Checking the nest boxes offers enjoyable spring-summer outings. Most of our monitors return for several seasons. However, it's possible that we'll need one or two new ones this season.

What's involved is visiting the boxes on a "trail" approximately weekly from late April until early August and recording data on species, eggs, chicks, fledging, and any problems that may occur. It's also a chance to see the changing wildflowers and other wildlife. To learn more, see www.boulderaudubon.org/bb_volunteer.htm

BOULDER COUNTY WILDLIFE INVENTORY, JULY AND AUGUST 2010

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

July and August 2010 were poorly reported months with few birders submitting observations and many common birds missed. As a result only 129 bird species were seen in July and 136 bird species in August. However, birding could be rewarding for those who did go out in the field. The bird that seemed to generate the most excitement was an immature **Pacific Loon** seen on MacIntosh Reservoir. It was first spotted on the 10th July and continued there through the rest of the month and August. Most birders had little trouble spotting such an obvious anomaly. Loons are usually seen in winter with November being the peak time. Any loon seen in the summer in Boulder County is unusual as they should have migrated north towards Canada. **Pacific Loon** is our second most common loon species, but is considerably rarer than **Common Loon**.

By August shorebird migration was going strong. One of the rarest birds of the year was a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** at Macintosh Reservoir. This is the first time that this bird has been reported to the wildlife inventory. Other unusual shorebirds were **White-rumped Sandpiper**, **Pectoral Sandpiper** and **Upland Sandpiper**. **Upland Sandpiper** is a bird with a highly identifiable flight call. In the last few years some birders have been listening to the flight calls of birds migrating overhead at night. They have found that **Upland Sandpiper** is migrating overhead in small numbers. This is a bird that has only been observed on the ground in the county two times.

Two **Black-throated Blue Warblers** were seen at Rabbit Mountain in July, the first report since 2008. These unusual eastern warblers are normally only seen during migration, so two birds in July are of particular note. There have been no records of this species breeding in Colorado. **Rufous Hummingbird** is often not seen until as late in the year as July, and **Calliope Hummingbird** is much commoner as a fall migrant than in the spring, so neither of these could be called unusual first sightings for July. **Black-chinned Hummingbirds** have continued to be reported throughout the summer. Much more unusual was a **Northern Cardinal** seen in July in the mountains. This is only the third report of **Northern Cardinal** for the wildlife inventory. The previous two reports were both on the plains, one in February and March 1985 and one in October 2002. The **Philadelphia Vireo** first seen at the end of June stayed around long enough to also be seen in July.

This seems to have been a good year for **Ash-throated Flycatcher** with separate sightings in May, June and July. **Black Swift** was reported in both July and August as well as in June. Any birds reported throughout the summer have to be considered as potential breeders in the county. **Cassin's Sparrow** and **Dickcissel** were other unusual birds that were reported July. **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** is a bird that has become much less common than in the past, and it is pleasing that one was spotted in August. Other first sightings of the year for August included **Northern Bobwhite** and some typical fall migrants: **Common Tern**, **Townsend's Warbler** and **Lark Bunting**. All three of these species are reported far more routinely at this time of year than in the spring.

For the full listing of observed species go to www.boulderaudubon.org/inventory.htm

CONTRIBUTORS TO THE JULY AND AUGUST 2010 INVENTORY

Linda Andes-Georges, J.D. Birchmeier, Bill Blackburn, Mike and Mary Blatchley, Alex Brown, Brent Daniel, Raymond E. Davis, Todd Deininger, Hannah Espy, Ted Floyd, Steve Frye, Anne Geraghty, Larry Griffin, Bryan Guarente, Paula Hansley, Steve Jones, Elena Klaver, Carol Kearns, Nick Komar, James Lamoureux, Marcia Marvin, Mark Miller, Gene and Lynn Monroe, Laura Osborn, Donna Nespoli, George Oetzel, Nathan Pieplow, Sue Riffe, Jeff Romain, Bill Schmoker, Debra Sparn, Bob Spencer, Cara Stiles, Joyce Takamine, David J. Waltman, Tom Wilberding, Cole Wild, Wild Bird Center, Bob Zilly.

Become a Supporting Member of Boulder Audubon

We get very little return from National Audubon dues and have to rely primarily on local funding to support Boulder County Audubon society activities. Supporting memberships are just \$20 annually. You can join online or download a printable form to send with your check. Visit <http://www.boulderaudubon.org/about.htm#membership>.

Paper copies of the Nov-Dec and Mar-Apr issues of *On the Wing* are mailed only to BCAS Supporting Members who request them. The electronic edition, available online, usually includes extra articles.

Burrowing Owl Seekers Needed for Boulder County Open Space Study

The BAD news: This diminutive denizen of the prairie is threatened in Colorado and considered a "Species of Special Concern" in Boulder County. Early in the 1900's the Burrowing Owl was observed locally as a common breeding bird. Declines for the last 100 years have been precipitous, usually attributed to the eradication of prairie dog colonies and predation on fledglings. As of the late 1990's, very few nests were recorded in the county, with low productivity and little site fidelity.

The GOOD news: Starting in 2009, Boulder County Audubon partnered with Boulder County Open Space to launch a thorough and scientific search for Burrowing Owls on open space properties. With systematic point counts and the dedication of many volunteers and staff, SIX!! nesting sites were found on County open space lands and an additional half dozen on City of Boulder Open Space. Boulder County Parks and Open Space is dedicated to the conservation of this rare species, but needs the scientific documentation of their presence and habitat preferences to assure that they get the protection that they need.

BETTER news: You can be an integral part of their conservation. We are looking for dedicated volunteers who will make a commitment to resolutely do the following:

First, attend a two hour indoor orientation session on Sunday, March 13, and then a three-hour field orientation session in early April. You will adopt 4 -8 points and visit them four times between April 15 and July 31, after which, you must immediately fill out a one-page monitoring form. You will need some good quality optics, at least clear binoculars. A scope would be optimal, but if you are without, there are loaner ones available. Note that all mileage accrued while working as a volunteer is tax deductible.

There will be an optional field trip for volunteers to Weld County, where it is possible to see 40-50 Burrowing Owls in a day, and an end-of-study/wrap-up picnic in August.

Conservation science needs you and your tenacity! To find out more or to sign up, contact Steve Jones: curlewsj@comcast.net; 303-494-2468.

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

Special Program Wed, March 9, 6:30 p.m.

REI Community Meeting Room,
28th St. between Canyon and Walnut.

Lynn Wickersham, "Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas II Results"

Several dozen Boulder County birders have participated in this ambitious project, which is a 20-year follow-up of the first statewide breeding bird atlas completed west of the Mississippi River. Lynn will update us on trends revealed so far, including new species breeding in Colorado and birds of special concern.

Lynn Wickersham has 15 years of experience as an avian ecologist and is the statewide coordinator for the Second Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas. Prior to taking on the Atlas, Lynn worked for 5 years as an environmental consultant at Ecosphere Environmental Services (Durango, CO) and one year as the Songbird Monitoring Coordinator for Hawks Aloft, Inc. (Albuquerque, NM).

Ecosystem Symposium to Focus on Fire

This year's Boulder County Ecosystem Symposium, Saturday, April 9, at the University of Colorado Ramaley Auditorium, will focus on the role of fire in Front Range forests. Speakers will include geographers and ecologists from the University of Colorado, along with residents and firefighters who experienced last fall's Four-mile Fire. The symposium is free and open to all, and on-site registration will begin around 8:30 a.m. For more information, visit www.bcna.org.

Birding Tours with Bill Turner

Brazil (Amazon, Pantanal) July 31- August 15, 2011 land cost - \$4995 pp. dbl. occup.

Australia (Queensland, Kakadu) Oct. 21- Nov. 7, 2011 \$5495 pp. dbl. occup.

- In Brazil, see hyacinth macaws, greater rheas, hoatzins, sunbitterns, toucans, trogons, capybaras and giant otters.
- In Australia, view cassowaries, emus, cockatoos, kingfishers, bowerbirds, riflebirds, Gouldian finches, crocodiles, and platypus.
- Small groups, excellent local guides. For itineraries, call Bill Turner (303) 795-5128.

80,000 Sandhill Cranes Can't Be Wrong: The Braided Platte is Returning at Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary

– Steve Jones

Each spring thousands of nature-lovers flock to Audubon's Lillian Annette Rowe Sanctuary near Gibbon, Nebraska, to witness what Roger Tory Peterson described as one of the top 10 wildlife spectacles in North America. From the Sanctuary's riverside viewing blinds, visitors watch tens of thousands of Sandhill Cranes lift off from their island roosts at dawn or descend to the river at sunset.

More than a half million cranes gather along the Platte in March and early April, but the highest concentrations occur along this short stretch of river, where Audubon Society biologists are working to return the Platte to its natural state. Each year brush and trees are cleared from sandbars in the river, creating places where cranes can roost overnight without fear of predator ambush. Last fall five new nesting islands were created for endangered least terns and piping plovers. Acquisition of easements along the river has enabled biologists to expand habitat for cranes, shorebirds, and river otters.

In October Rowe Sanctuary staff and volunteers created a new wetland complex, which will be used as a hands-on learning environment for schoolchildren and other visitors. Children from a grade school in Kearney are seeding the area by hand this winter, and a wooden deck will provide barrier-free access to the marsh.

Though hardly "an inch deep and a mile wide," as described by early nineteenth century explorers, the Platte River at Rowe Sanctuary is beginning to look more like the sandy, meandering, mostly treeless waterway so vital to prairie wildlife. Standing in the blinds around sunset, you can see flocks of white-fronted geese winging overhead, herds of white-tailed deer tiptoeing across braided channels, bald eagles and herons flapping lazily upstream. And at dusk when clouds of cranes float down toward the water and their trumpeting calls ripple out across neighboring wetlands and fields, you begin to feel part of something timeless and sacred.

For many people a spring trip to the Platte to view the cranes has become an annual rite of celebration and renewal. Rowe Sanctuary director Bill Taddicken tells of meeting Jamalee Fenimore in 2003. A Scottsbluff native, she'd left Nebraska to pursue a career as a veterinarian, but had been lured back during recent springs by the cranes. Someone had asked if Bill could help Jamalee get to the north blind, right beside the river, because she would not be able to hike that far. He drove her most of the way down and then helped her walk the rest of the way.

Bill recalls her sitting near a window with her eyes closed, listening to the sounds of the birds waking up on



Cranes at sunrise — Steve Jones

the river. "Later she had tears in her eyes as she thanked me for helping her get to the blind to see the cranes. I had no idea at that time who she was or that she was not long for this world. All I saw was a person who was very much entranced by the spectacle that was playing out before her."

He learned later that Jamalee Fenimore was dying of cancer, and that one of her final wishes had been to return to the Platte to see and hear the cranes. She died a few months later, leaving her estate to Rowe Sanctuary to further programs to protect the birds and the river she had grown to love. Her gift continues to help the cranes, and the big viewing blind west of the Visitor Center now bears her name.

Recently, Rowe Sanctuary created the "The Braided River Society," recognizing donors whose annual support of \$500 or more "sustains the Sanctuary's mission to preserve Platte River ecosystems for cranes and other wildlife." As of January 2011, the list included more than 50 donors. With luck, the spell of nine-million-year-old crane song over the Platte will enchant new generations of visitors, facilitating continued restoration of this wondrous place.



- G. Oetzel

Experiencing the Spring Crane Spectacle at Rowe Sanctuary

Where: Lillian Annette Rowe Audubon Sanctuary, 10 miles east of Kearney, Nebraska:
<http://www.rowsanctuary.org/>

When: early March-early April. Whooping cranes are sometimes seen along the river during early to mid-April.

Blind reservations: \$25 per person and highly recommended, 5:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. until March 13, then 6:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. through April 10.

Lodging: Many motels in Kearney. Camping is available at Fort Kearny State Recreation Area, on the river a few miles west of the sanctuary.

Hiking: A 1.5-mile hike-bike trail crosses the river on an old railway bridge at Fort Kearny State Recreation Area. From the bridge, thousands of cranes can be seen leaving their roosts at dawn or flying into them at sunset.

Preparation: Dress for cold, humid, and often windy conditions. Bring your camera, but remember that the cranes usually leave their roosts before sunrise and return after sunset, so getting good photos is a challenge.

Outstanding CBC 2010

Bill Schmoker

Count-day species seen: 118(!!!) We added a Rough-legged Hawk seen along the Diagonal the afternoon of the count and a Red Fox Sparrow seen and wonderfully photographed that evening on private property across the creek from Walden Ponds. One of these will get the "EX" code for exotic- Mandarin Duck. This is the first year we've exceeded the 110 species mark (109 being the best previous, I think?) and we crushed that by a mile.

Count-week species seen: 4 (White-winged Scoter, California Gull, and Orange-crowned Warbler)

So **122 species for the total count this year.**
 AWESOME!!!!

Our participant numbers are also very impressive- barring accidental double-counting or missing someone, it looks like we fielded 127 counters. We also had 9 feeder-watchers, so that will bump us to **136 folks for the day.** Pretty strong!

Thanks again for your leadership & great bird-finding & counting abilities!!! Hope you all can come out for a repeat performance next year, recruit your experienced team members again, & maybe add another helper or two on each territory.

Dodd Reservoir Restoration: A Chance to Join in Maintaining Our Property

When BCAS was gifted the 10 acre Dodd Reservoir plot from the Andrews family in 1978, there was excitement and enthusiasm for restoration and maintenance of the area. You can still see remnants of BCAS work today when you look at the old nest boxes. Through the years we have gotten busy with other important projects and Dodd has fallen into disrepair. The site is not an ideal nature location as it is situated near several busy commuter roads, houses and IBM. Its small size and limits due to the water rights of others, makes this plot a challenge. However, the Dodd Restoration Committee is enthusiastic and has begun a plan to provide as much useable habitat as possible for native species.

The first steps have already been taken with the year-long assessment of birds and mammals and a comprehensive vegetation inventory. The result of these surveys is a little grim – we have a lot of Canada Geese, Red-winged Blackbirds and weeds.

The committee next met with the Boulder County Noxious Weed Coordinator and the Boulder County Extension Small Plots Advisor to develop a plan and has decided to focus on weed control and assessment of any native seed bank as the first step.

And here is where you come in! We will need 6 to 8 volunteers to "top" small areas of the most noxious of the weeds in preparation for extermination by the county in the fall. You will need to visit the reservoir from 2 to 6 times throughout this coming spring and summer to cut the tops off the weeds in your patch to keep them from blossoming and seeding. If you are interested in this project let Petrea Mah petreamah@comcast.net or Nancy Neupert nancyn@earthlink.net. We will have an initial meeting later in the spring at the site to orient you and to assign plots.



Nest box and Tree Swallow at Dodd Reservoir.

Valmont - 01/19/2011

By Ted Floyd (edited to fit OTW page)

Imagine, if you will, a typical local bird club outing. Picture it in the second weekend of January. How many folks would attend such an outing? Maybe 5–10 on a day with so-so weather? If the weather's really nice, maybe 15–20 or maybe even 25 attendees?

Not all that long ago, that's how it was with the Boulder Bird Club's annual outing to the Valmont Reservoir complex in Boulder County, Colorado. I remember a Valmont outing six or seven years ago with lovely weather: bright blue skies and a forecast high in the low 50s. Nearly 20 birders showed up for that outing. And I remember another Valmont outing when it was overcast and not even 20 degrees. As I recall, we had seven or eight folks that year.

Fast forward to the year 2011. To be precise, Saturday, January 8th, 2011. That was the date of a recent outing to Valmont Reservoir. Care to guess how many folks entered their names on the sign-in sheet?

Two hundred twenty-seven.

That's right, 227 sign-ins, plus a bunch more who declined—for whatever reason—to register. I'd say we had 250 birders, maybe more, at the 2011 outing to Valmont.

How on earth did that happen? How did we go from a typical local bird club outing with somewhere in the neighborhood of 10–20 participants to a major regional natural history *event*?

Here are two thoughts of my own. One is rather particular. The other is more general. Here goes:

1. Five years ago, we changed the outing's start time from 8:00 a.m. to noon. If you're a non-birder, that may not seem all that surprising. Indeed, it may seem entirely reasonable. But if you're a birder, you know that's a huge change. Why, it's messing with tradition. It's ornithological sacrilege. *Noon*? That's outlandish. That's so late, so decadently late. It's etched in stone somewhere—isn't it?—that all bird club outings shall commence no later than one hour after sunrise.

2. Question: Why did we change the start time from 8:00 a.m. to noon?

One reason is because, contrary to all received wisdom, the birding at Valmont is better—*much better*—in the afternoon. First off, because it's the middle of winter, there is no "dawn chorus" to speak of. That happens in spring and summer. In winter, though, birds are active throughout the day. That's especially so with the avian clientele at Valmont—ducks, geese, grebes, cormorants, herons, coots, and so forth. Those aquatic species are active round the clock, and they're just as easy to see at midday as at sunrise. We see lots of raptors at Valmont, too, and they're actually *easier* to observe after mid-

morning. Raptors tend to be most active after it's warmed up a bit. And now for the real kicker: gulls. Thousands upon thousands of gulls. We see so many gulls at Valmont. But only in the afternoon. The birds fly in from mid-afternoon till sunset. In the morning, you might see fewer than ten gulls at Valmont; come back a half hour before sunset, and you might see close to ten *thousand*.

But there's another reason, and this one is the biggie. We changed the start time so as to accommodate all the folks who are *not* plugged into the quaint birding tradition of rising at (or often well before) the crack of dawn. Now, speaking for myself, I consider it the most "normal" thing in the world to rise well before sunup. But the rest of the world doesn't see it that way. Our goal was to make the outing work for *them*. Starting at noon was the biggie, but there was more to it than that. For example, we've made the outing accessible to folks with limited mobility: If you're a dad pushing a baby jogger or a senior on a motorized scooter or just not as fast as you used to be, this outing is for you. You can easily get around on the concrete dikes at Valmont. We've made it quite clear that we welcome everybody: teens, parents with young children, beginners, curiosity seekers, anyone. And we carry through with that. I myself had to bite my tongue when a first-cycle Thayer's Gull flew by during the outing. That's because, honestly, most folks would much rather be shown a drake Hooded Merganser through a top-of-the-line spotting scope. I let the gull go. Instead, I showed a young birder the Hoodie. Note to self: "Good call, Ted. You did the right thing." Finally, we've been reaching out via the "new media" venues that so many "normal" people are plugged into: We promoted the heck out of this outing with Twitter, Facebook, and so forth.



Valmont gathering Jan 19. Photo by Bill Schmoker

Is There Really an "Aflockalypse?" It's Not the One in the News.

*Adapted from the Cornell Ornithology Lab
eNewsletter, 24 January 2011*

Ever since blackbirds fell from the sky in Arkansas on New Year's Eve, the Cornell Lab has continued to receive numerous inquiries from the media and the concerned public about the significance of that event and other reports of dead birds at locations around the world. These isolated events, although dramatic, are not highly unusual in frequency or scale. Within the United States, for example, the USGS has recorded 188 events during the past 10 years involving more than 1,000 birds per incident—about 18 events per year on average, or more than one per month, attributed to disease and other causes.

The USGS has a [web page](#) on this topic and also gives links to a site devoted to public reporting of wildlife mortality events.

Should we be worried about an "aflockalypse?" Yes, but not about the media coverage focusing on isolated events that affect only a few hundred or thousand birds at a time. It's the constant, chronic losses from habitat destruction and other causes that should truly concern us. Consider that 100 million birds are estimated to die from window collisions in the United States alone each year. That's more than 270,000 per day on average. Cats are estimated to kill another 100 million per year. And that's just the tip of the iceberg; habitat loss and degradation are the largest causes of massive declines in the numbers of birds.

Although we cannot witness these declines on a given day, citizen-science participants have contributed decades of data that point to truly alarming declines. Data from the Breeding Bird Survey show that Rusty Blackbirds, for example, have declined by 95% since the 1960s, indicating a loss of tens of millions of birds. Data from Project FeederWatch show that Evening Grosbeaks have also declined rangewide since the 1980s.

Don't underestimate the power of bird watchers to "witness" and document the large-scale declines that might otherwise go undetected until it's too late. With your help, the Cornell Lab and other organizations are working hard to monitor bird species and address the root causes of decline.

Cornell runs several [citizen science projects](#): eBird, Project Feederwatch, Nestwatch (to which Boulder Audubon contributes nest box monitoring data), the Great Backyard Bird count. There are also some for more urban areas: Celebrate Urban Birds and Pigeon Watch, for example.

Conservation Biology for All

Navjot Sodhi and Paul Ehrlich, editors

Oxford University Press makes this conservation biology textbook by some of the world's most prominent ecologists and conservation biologists available as free download.

The download is almost 7 MB; the book is 344 pages. The remainder of this column is taken from the website that offers the free download:

www.mongabay.com/conservation-biology-for-all.html

Conservation Biology for All provides cutting-edge but basic conservation science to a global readership. A series of authoritative chapters have been written by the top names in conservation biology with the principal aim of disseminating cutting-edge conservation knowledge as widely as possible. Important topics such as balancing conservation and human needs, climate change, conservation planning, designing and analyzing conservation research, ecosystem services, endangered species management, extinctions, fire, habitat loss, and invasive species are covered. Numerous text boxes describing additional relevant material or case studies are also included.

The global biodiversity crisis is now unstoppable; what can be saved in the developing world will require an educated constituency in both the developing and developed world. Habitat loss is particularly acute in developing countries, which is of special concern because it tends to be these locations where the greatest species diversity and richest centers of endemism are to be found. Sadly, developing world conservation scientists have found it difficult to access an authoritative textbook, which is particularly ironic since it is these countries where the potential benefits of knowledge application are greatest. There is now an urgent need to educate the next generation of scientists in developing countries, so that they are in a better position to protect their natural resources.

Features:

- Provides an invaluable toolkit for a large and under-resourced audience of students in developing nations.
- Includes contributions from the top names in conservation biology who have contributed specific "hot topics" including tropical deforestation, invasive species, climate change, and ecosystem functioning.
- Addresses the key issues in conservation biology, clearly stating the challenges but also offering solutions.

[Thanks to Joy Master for the heads-up via NatureNet.]