



# On The Wing

Volume 43, Number 2 *Boulder County Audubon Society Newsletter*

Mar-Apr 2013

## ***BCAS 4th Tuesday Program Series***

**March 26, 7:15 p.m.**

### **“Goshawks Revealed!”**

**Richard Reynolds**

Rick Reynolds has been doing cutting edge research on the Northern Goshawk for over 21 years. His focal areas are the beautiful Kaibab Plateau and the north rim of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado River. You will learn new and fascinating information on the population demography, diet and prey populations, and habitat of this iconic bird. He will help us understand key elements that distinguish among high source and low quality or sink habitats. His breathtaking photos and exciting presentation make this program a must-see.

Dr. Reynolds received his BS, MS and PhD in Wildlife Biology at Oregon State University. He is currently a Research Scientist at Rocky Mountain Research Station of the USDA Forest Service and an adjunct professor at Colorado State University at Fort Collins.



*Female Goshawk*  
© 2005 Christie VanCleve



*Chicks in Nest*  
© 2005 Christie VanCleve

**April 23, 7:15 p.m.**

### **“Polar Animals and Changing Climate: A Visual and Educational Tour of Earth’s Iciest Regions”**

**Glen Delman and Ursula Quillmann**

Delman’s unforgettable images of molting Emperor Penguins and polar bears preparing for the hunt as the sea ice forms, combined with Quillmann’s narration of the increasing threat to our delicate ecosystems will give you an appreciation and understanding of what is happening to the wildlife and environments of some of our iciest regions.

After Glen Delman graduated Ohio State University in 1989 he immediately moved to Boulder for the fantastic outdoor opportunities where he was able to pursue his interest in travel, the outdoors and photography, and mixed them all into a career. He has traveled to 72 countries, focusing on animals and native peoples. In the last few years he has traveled to Antarctica and Churchill, Manitoba to provide photographs for the Natural Habitat Adventures catalog.

Ursula Quillmann is a PhD candidate at the Institute of Arctic and Alpine Research (INSTAAR) and Department of Geology the University of Colorado at Boulder where her research is in natural climate change.



*Fur Seal, Petrel, and Elephant Seals—South Georgia*  
Glen Delman—2009

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

## Field Trips—Spring 2013

**Sunday, March 3: Ski and Snowshoe Tour of Hessie Area.** Steve Jones (curlwsj@comcast.net; 303-494-2468) will lead a three-hour ski or snowshoe tour of the Hessie area where the Eldora ski area is proposing a significant expansion. We'll look for seed-eating birds, including crossbills, along the way. Meet at 8 at the Settlers Park parking area, 3rd and Canyon. Lunch at Kathmandu afterwards, with return to Boulder around 2.

**Sunday, March 10—Dippers!** Did you know the American dipper is North America's only aquatic songbird? And that they have an extra eyelid, commonly referred to as a "nictitating membrane," that allows them to see under water? Join Sharon Daugherty and Donna Nespoli for a meandering stroll along the St. Vrain river in Lyons to search for early spring nesting American Dippers. We will also search for scrub jays, American goldfinch/lesser goldfinch, owls, and other common late winter/early spring residents. And we will point out where the beavers live in the area! Geared to beginning birders. 8 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Bring binocs and warm clothing and lots of water for our stroll! Meet at the Bohn Park 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue parking lot (just south of Park St.) Contact: sharona\_974@yahoo.com, 720-236-5683

**Saturday, March 23: Spring Welcoming Breakfast Hike at Sawhill Ponds.** Meet at 7:30 am at the Sawhill Ponds parking area (west of 75th St. between Valmont and Jay roads). Bring something warm and nutritious to share in a potluck picnic beside Boulder Creek. Expect to see ducks, raptors, and early-singing passerines. Return around 11:00 am. Contact Steve at curlwsj@comcast.net or 303-494-2468.

### Approximate dates, March 28 – April 1: Sandhill Cranes/Greater Prairie Chicken extravaganza

If you have never done it, you really need to see and hear the Sandhill Cranes as they take flight at sunrise off the Platte River in Kearney, Nebraska. The blinds along the Platte at Rowe Sanctuary provide outstanding viewing and photo opportunities. We'll "rental van" to Kearney for evening and morning crane viewing. Then onto Great Bend, Kansas for the Lesser and Greater Prairie Chicken leks. Another amazing sight to see! Last year, we watched as a coyote waltzed right through the lek totally unaware of our presence in a blind only a few feet away. Of course, we'll also spend time at Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife area and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge for shorebirds and waterfowl (we hope they'll receive some rain!). We might even see a Whooping Crane or two as they migrate back to Wood Buffalo National Park. Space limited to twelve passengers. Email Mark Ponsor, m.ponsor@comcast.net

**Sunday, April 21, 7:30-11 a.m:** Join eco-stewards Elaine Hill, Maureen Lawry, Dale Ball, and Carol Kampert for a bird, mammal, and butterfly survey in lower Skunk Canyon. This area is rich in all three. Meet at the western terminus of Deer Valley Road (Take Kohler Dr. west to Deer Valley, then turn right). Bring binoculars and munchies. This trip will also serve as an introductory session for volunteers who would like to adopt their own areas.

More Ecosystem field trips will be on Sunday, June 16 and Sunday, July 7. Details will be in the May OTW.

**May 18 (tentative) International Migratory Bird Day, Walden Ponds.** Details to be announced.

### Boulder County Audubon Society

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Alex and Gillian Brown (303-494-3042)

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**Next issue deadline:**

**(May 2013 issue) Apr 12.**

Contact editor via link at:

[www.boulderaudubon.org/newsletter.htm](http://www.boulderaudubon.org/newsletter.htm)

## The Beast in the Garden

George Oetzel

The Web is full of adorable images and videos of cats; perhaps you have one. However, scientists have rather recently discovered a shocking new truth: cats are far deadlier to wildlife than anyone realized. The estimated kill rates are two to four times higher than suggested in previous mortality figures, and position the domestic cat as one of the single greatest human-linked threats to wildlife in the nation. More birds and mammals die at the mouths of cats, the report said, than from automobile strikes, pesticides and poisons, collisions with skyscrapers and windmills and other so-called anthropogenic causes.

In recent projects like Kitty Cams at the University of Georgia, in which cameras are attached to the collars of indoor-outdoor pet cats to track their activities, not only have cats been filmed preying on cardinals, frogs and field mice, they have also been shown lapping up anti-freeze and sewer sludge, dodging under moving cars and sparring violently with much bigger dogs.

Many humane groups support the use of increasingly popular trap-neuter-return (TNR) programs, in which feral domestic cats are caught, vaccinated, spayed and, if no home can be found for them, returned to the outdoor colony from which they came. Proponents see this approach as a humane alternative to large-scale euthanasia, and they insist that a colony of neutered cats can't reproduce and thus will eventually disappear. Conservationists say that, far from diminishing the population of feral domestic cats, trap-neuter-release programs may be making it worse, by encouraging people to abandon their pets to outdoor colonies that volunteers often keep lovingly fed.

According to the Wildlife Society:

- The number of free-roaming cats is increasing, currently between 117 million and 157 million in the United States alone. The domestic cat, *Felis Catus*—a nonnative species—is now the most abundant carnivore in North America.
- While cat numbers are rising, nearly one-third of more than 800 U.S. bird species are endangered, threatened or in significant decline.
- By some estimates, outdoor cats in the United States kill more than 1 million birds every day on average. Other studies suggest the death toll is as high as 1 billion per year.
- Outdoor cats transmit rabies, toxoplasmosis, typhus, plague and other viral and parasitic diseases to both wildlife and humans.

According to the Wildlife Society's executive director, Michael Hutchins: "Allowing free-ranging pet and feral

cats to roam outside, breed unchecked, kill native wildlife and spread disease is a crime against nature."

\*\* See page 10 for a further discussion of TNR programs.



The Oetzels' indoor cat spends a lot of time looking through windows at birds and other wildlife.

\*\* References \*\*

National Wildlife Federation: <http://tinyurl.com/8el4but>

Fourth Partners in Flight International Conference: <http://tinyurl.com/dxak9zy>

NY Times: <http://tinyurl.com/b66qclp>

## Recent Patterns of Crop Yield Growth and Stagnation

Deepak K. Ray, Navin Ramankutty, Nathaniel D. Mueller, Paul C. West & Jonathan A. Foley

In the coming decades, continued population growth, rising meat and dairy consumption and expanding biofuel use will dramatically increase the pressure on global agriculture. Even as we face these future burdens, there have been scattered reports of yield stagnation in the world's major cereal crops, including maize, rice and wheat. Here we study data from ~2.5 million census observations across the globe extending over the period 1961–2008. We examined the trends in crop yields for four key global crops: maize, rice, wheat and soybeans. Although yields continue to increase in many areas, we find that across 24–39% of maize-, rice-, wheat- and soybean-growing areas, yields either never improve, stagnate or collapse. This result underscores the challenge of meeting increasing global agricultural demands. New investments in underperforming regions, as well as strategies to continue increasing yields in the high-performing areas, are required.

Abstract copied from: <http://tinyurl.com/cbc758g>

## Volunteers Needed for Bird and Butterfly Surveys

We need volunteers to help out with this summer's Boulder Reservoir water camp bird and butterfly surveys. We'll be taking three groups of ten, 10-13-year-olds out from 9:30-noon each Tuesday morning from the first week of June through the first week of August. We will do a bird survey the first week, a butterfly survey the second week, and alternate throughout the summer. The tentative plan is to kayak and canoe our way across the reservoir to one of three or four designated areas, spend at least an hour surveying for birds and butterflies in small groups, and then return to the boat dock for compilation and wrapup.

We're asking each volunteer to commit to at least three sessions. We will be assigning one volunteer and hopefully one teen naturalist, along with a Boulder reservoir staff person, to each group of 10 kids. If you're interested, let us know, and we will start to develop a weekly calendar. No special skills except basic bird and butterfly identification; we hope to let the campers sort it out from their field guides, and remember what great field people we have in our youth naturalists!

Contact either Steve Jones [curlwsj@comcast.net](mailto:curlwsj@comcast.net) or Petrea Mah [petreamah@comcast.net](mailto:petreamah@comcast.net) if you have time for this exciting joint project.

## Second Sunday at Dodd Project

It is the time when we are all impatiently awaiting the outcome of our work at Dodd Reservoir last year. How many of the 100 shrubs will come back? Which experimental plot will have the most native grasses? Did we make a dent in the weed populations by pulling hundreds of thistles and teasel?

Join us on Sunday, April 14 at noon for the answers to these and other questions. Will we have scones, brownies or croissants for a treat? Will the eagles be in the cottonwoods? Plan on joining us for as many of the second Sundays as you can. Times will be announced depending upon the weather and treats will vary. The Youth Naturalists will be joining us at least one Sunday to run the bird and butterfly transects and do their annual damage to the Hoary Cress.

Contact Petrea [petreamah@comcast.net](mailto:petreamah@comcast.net) for more information or just show up on April 14<sup>th</sup>.



*Dodd  
Workers  
Petrea Mah*

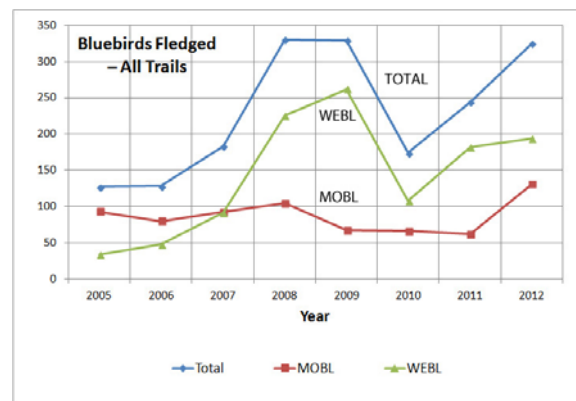
## Report Red Fox Sightings

Carrie Merson of Texas A&M is a graduate student that is investigating native and non-native red fox populations throughout central Colorado. The preliminary data from field work last year show that both native and non-native populations are in Colorado, but it remains unclear if the two are hybridizing or if the non-native individuals remain in towns and lower elevations. Visit [www.ifoundafox.org](http://www.ifoundafox.org) for more details and to report sightings!

## Bluebirds 2012

With the very warm and dry spring in 2012, we expected that food might be scarce and that there might be fewer bluebird chicks than has been typical for our Boulder County nestbox trails. However, the warm weather got nesting off to an early start, and many boxes had two clutches. The end result was more chicks than usual, rather than less.

The figure shows the number of chicks fledged on all trails over the eight years that Marti and George Oetzel ran the program. The early years are a bit misleading, because new trails were added in 2007 and again in 2009, increasing the total number of boxes offering nesting opportunities. One trail was dropped in 2012.



## Birds and Beans Coffee

BCAS is currently featured on the Birds and Beans® website Homepage! Check it out: <http://www.birdsandbeans.com/index.html>

Our partnership with Birds and Beans not only helps the birds, small family organic coffee farms, and the environment; it also provides a donation of \$1.00 to BCAS per order. Every time you order coffee from Birds and Beans, any Boulder County zip code used in the billing address automatically gets counted as an order to help benefit BCAS. Twice a year Birds and Beans sends BCAS a check for the amount of orders placed. If you are a returning customer ... thank you! The coffee is good for you, the birds, and us!

## BOULDER COUNTY WILDLIFE INVENTORY, JUNE - AUGUST 2012

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

The bird of the month for both June and July was surely the **Dickcissel**, with an influx all over the plains. At least 35 individuals were reported throughout the plains in June. This influx continued into July with an increase to 84 individuals. Prior to this year the total number of individuals reported to the inventory was sixty eight, spread over the last thirty years. The only previous large influx was twenty five individuals in June 2006. **Bobolinks** were reported alongside the **Dickcissels** as these two species enjoy similar habitat.

After a very poor May, there were more first sightings for the year in June than is usual. **Orchard Orioles** were seen in two different locations. Two **Cassin's Sparrows** were reported in the short grass prairie, east of Boulder. Seven **Sage Thrashers** were reported on the Indian Peaks Breeding Bird Count; this is a bird more normally associated with the plains. Three **Eastern Bluebirds** were reported in the foothills. Two separate sightings of **Great-crested Flycatcher** occurred near Longmont, and **Eastern Phoebes** were seen in three different locations. Two **Yellow-billed Cuckoos** were seen in the foothills; this is a species that has become increasingly rare, even though it is a potential breeder. The first **Flammulated Owls** and **Black Swifts** of the year were reported; these are both species known to have bred in the county. **Rufous Hummingbirds** are often not seen until later in the year, so a first sighting in June is not that unusual. **Williamson's Sapsucker** was one of the birds that should have been reported in May, giving a very late first sighting date in mid-June for this year. **American Redstart** and **Ovenbird** were both new warbler species for the year.

Ducks were present in low numbers for both June and July, with some species, such as **Ring-necked Duck**, **Lesser Scaup** and **Common Merganser**, having moved to the high country to breed. **White-faced Ibis** were still around for the first half of June; these are a species that do not breed here and usually move out of the county after spring migration. **White-rumped Sandpipers** were seen in two locations. **Black-chinned Humminbirds** continued to be seen on the plains. A **Winter Wren** seen on the plains was an unusual June sighting. **Hooded Warblers** were reported both on the plains and in the foothills. **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** continued to be reported in much higher numbers than normal, altogether 25 individuals were reported in June in the foothills and mountains. Altogether 181 bird species were reported in June, a very respectable total.

July is often a poorly reported month with the heat of the day discouraging both birds and birders. **White-eyed Vireo** was probably the most unusual new species. There were signs of fall shorebird migration with two **Black-necked Stilt** seen at the end of July and a small number of "peeps" in the middle of the month. **Western Sandpiper** was a new sighting for the year as it was not reported (presumably missed) during the spring. Two **Calliope Hummingbirds** were first sightings for the year; this is a bird that is far more common in the late summer and early fall than in spring. **Northern Mockingbird** was also new for the year. A **Great-crested Flycatcher** continued to be seen near Longmont, and a **Carolina Wren** was seen in the south of the county. Altogether 147 bird species were reported in July. This is a great improvement on last July's paltry 118 species, but still falls a long way short of the record 173 species seen in 2002.

August 2012 was another poorly reported summer month. Fall shorebird migration was going strong with the only new birds for the year being **Semipalmated Sandpiper** and **Stilt Sandpiper**. Another unusual shorebird was **Short-billed Dowitcher**, although one had previously been seen in May. An **Orange-crowned Warbler** in the foothills, a **Northern Waterthrush** at Walden Ponds and **Wilson's Warblers** out on the plains were all signs that fall warbler migration was underway. **Orange-crowned Warblers** do not breed in the county, although they do breed on the western side of the Continental Divide, and are commonly seen during both spring and fall migration. Four hummingbird species were reported with **Calliope** and **Black-chinned Hummingbirds** being seen in the plains, **Broad-tailed Hummingbirds** seen throughout the county and a single **Rufous Hummingbird** in the mountains at the beginning of the month. This is fairly typical for hummingbird migration in August.

Only 132 bird species were reported in August.

### CONTRIBUTORS TO THE JUNE - AUGUST 2012 INVENTORIES

Linda Andes-Georges, Audubon Board Retreat, J.D. Birchmeier, Mike Blatchley, Kat Bradley-Bennett, Kitty Brigham, Alex & Gillian Brown, Matt Bruce, Ted Floyd, Lonny Frye, Steve Frye, Peter Gent, Bryan Guarente, Paula Hansley, Jack Harlan, Peter Hartlove, Thomas Heinrich, Pat Hoadley, Indian Peaks Breeding Bird Count, Adam Jack, Steve Jones, Bill Kaempfer, Elena Klaver, Vince Kloster, Chishun Kwong, Petrea Mah, Luis Matheus, Steve Miodinow, Gene and Lynn Monroe, Christian Nunes, Laura Osborn, Tracy Pheneger, Pam Piombino, Holly Reinard, Scott Severs, Cara Stiles, Marcel Such, John Tumasonis, David J Waltman, Tom Wilberding, Wild Bird Center, Larry Wilson, Bob Zilly.

## Eco-steward: A Word for your Dictionary

– Linda Andes-Georges

In the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, Steve Jones and his merry band of BCNA nature-lovers conceived of another grand scheme to keep Boulder County residents alienated from their TV sets and venturing outside to see what has happened lately in various parts of the County. Their model for the concept was the loving attention and detailed notes made by Louise Hering about our foothills “Enchanted Mesa” over a period of nearly 40 years.

BCNA called the project the Ecosystem Stewardship Initiative. Many BCAS volunteers jumped into early participation. Currently about 30 volunteers operate as stewards in 20 or so adopted areas.

The basic notion is this: A steward chooses an area of public land that she or he likes to visit—frequently. She (let us say) visits it as often as she likes, taking notes about her observations over a period of years. Her goal is to do this forever—or until she dies or finds another steward to take her place. Her notes over this long (she hopes) time will be useful to land agencies or owners, and certainly to herself as she becomes increasingly educated about the area, its ecotones, plants, animals, birds, weeds, and human visitors. She quickly finds that becoming an eco-steward combines the joys of a treasure hunt, meditative appreciation of a special wild area, and advanced study in natural history. She has an enormous amount of fun detecting small changes that casual visitors never notice—especially those who are speeding past on a bike, trying to catch their dog, or panting uphill themselves in their 5-toed running shoes.

The eco-steward adoption areas are actively under observation around the year, and particularly in breeding season. When land management questions occur, the steward has a ready databank with helpful specifics to use in making suggestions and crafting public hearing testimony, shaping public lands management over time.

New participants or curious trail companions are very welcome. There will be several associated field trips this spring to explore various adopted areas and the concept of long-term observation. Steve Jones is the Major General Data-collector (and Summary-maker). Contact him here: [curlwsj@comcast.net](mailto:curlwsj@comcast.net)

\* Notes from the 2012 season are on pages 8 and 9.

## Superflight 2012

*Edited from Cornell Living Bird;*  
<http://www.allaboutbirds.org/page.aspx?id=2579>

The first clues started appearing in August across the northern tier of states. They were small but noisy: little slate-gray and cinnamon clues ambling upside down along the tree trunks. They arrived with the first hints of fall, and as those first Red-breasted Nuthatches continued southward more kept following, pouring out of the Canadian boreal forest all the way to central Florida.

By October 2012, it was “already the largest Red Crossbill movement ever recorded at Minnesota’s Hawk Ridge,” said Matt Young of Cornell. “And there will be grosbeaks, siskins, redpolls, Purple Finches, nuthatches. It’s a superflight like we haven’t seen since 1997–98.”

Every couple of years, food scarcities send one or a few irruptive species south of their normal ranges—redpolls in one year, for example, and siskins or Red-breasted Nuthatches in another. But that’s not a superflight. It’s only once a decade or so that climatological patterns and bird numbers combine for a superflight that sends six, seven, or eight northern species deep into the central and southern United States.

Superflights are the stuff of birding legends. In winter 2013, it’s Common Redpolls in Boulder County. It’s a great time to be a bird watcher.

Winter finches move south not so much out of choice but because the trees force them to. From a seed’s point of view, finches are deadly—every bit as predatory as a Sharp-shinned Hawk is to a finch. So the trees fight back by controlling the food supply. They save up to produce massive amounts of seeds in one year and very few the next. In years with lots of seeds, finches have more than they can eat, so some seeds survive to germinate; in years without seeds, finches must take to the skies to find better pickings.

Although local birds can fall back on backyard feeders, crossbills, grosbeaks, and other superflight species don’t have that option. They live where there are few people and very few feeders.



Common Redpoll – Bill Schmoker



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<http://tiny.cc/ez7v6>

## Arctic Foxes Suffer Competition

Arctic fox sightings in northern Canada are at an unprecedented low this winter, according to wildlife guides. And, unusually, the number of red foxes has simultaneously surged in the area, on Hudson Bay. The surprising pattern has prompted observers to question whether the elusive Arctic foxes are being driven out of their dens by invading red relatives.

"It stopped dead, turned and ran," says Tera Ryan, wildlife guide at polar expedition company Churchill Wild, describing the time she witnessed an Arctic fox's reaction to a red fox travelling away in the distance. "In the Arctic you conserve energy... This was running for fear. He did not want to be seen by that red fox."

Previous studies have indicated that larger and more aggressive red foxes moving northward may outcompete their Arctic cousins for food and even kill the smaller species when the two collide on the same territory. Arctic fox populations naturally fluctuate from year to year depending on the availability of their main food source, lemmings.

But the wildlife guides at Seal River lodge on Hudson Bay have reported the lowest number of Arctic fox sightings for years, despite what they say is a good year for lemmings. The team have reported an average of two Arctic foxes spotted near their observation lodge in the same day, whereas "it would not be unusual to see a dozen or more per day in an average year," says Churchill Wild's Mike Reimer.

Warmer conditions allow red foxes to travel further north as they are more likely to survive without the special adaptations of the Arctic species. People may also be an important factor. In the last 60 years many villages have been established in the Arctic and red fox benefit from scavenging at garbage dumps.



Arctic Fox. Figure and much of the text from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/20892310>

## Boulder Christmas Bird Count Nets 114 Species

A total of 145 volunteers participated in the 2012 Boulder Christmas Bird Count, held on December 16. They found a near-record 114 species, including one, Northern Cardinal, never previously reported on a Boulder Christmas Count. Other rarities included Lesser Black-backed Gull, Barn Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl (5 owl species in all), Chihuahuan Raven, Eastern Bluebird, Western Bluebird, Common Yellowthroat, Fox Sparrow, and Golden-crowned Sparrow.

From 1980-2000, we averaged 98-100 species on the Boulder count. In recent years, that number has jumped up to more than 110 species. An array of factors may have contributed to this change, including better coverage and participation, warmer winters, creation of new species (such as Cackling Goose), invasion of new species (such as Great-tailed Grackle and Eurasian Collared-Dove), and much improved communications (Co-Birds, E-Bird, cell phones and the Internet).

We are particularly indebted to Bill Schmoker's outstanding organization of the count, along with the dedication of our 145 volunteers. Thank you all!



Barn Owl—Bill Schmoker

## Grocery Certificates

Certificates are available at the monthly meetings. BCAS receives a 5% donation from the sale of King Soopers certificates at \$100 each. Bring your checkbook to the meeting.

We have discontinued selling Liquormart coupons due to low sales.

## Notes from the 2012 Eco-steward Season

(Following overview on page 6)

**Boulder Reservoir:** Multiple observers found a new great blue heron nest and two American Bittern territories in the Dry Creek wetland; calling soras and Virginia Rails in the Little Dry Creek wetland; and several singing Dickcissels north of Coot Lake. These observations have been submitted to Boulder Parks and Recreation and will help guide the ongoing Boulder Reservoir Master Plan implementation process.

**Boulder Valley Ranch:** Jo Clark observed a pair of American Bitterns in the Little Dry Creek cattail marsh just below the farm pond. Bitterns (isolated and restricted in Boulder County) had not been reported in this area previously, so the discovery is significant.

**Crescent Meadows:** Karen Swigart found an American Dipper pair, confirmed nesting for Western Bluebird, Mountain Bluebird, and Savannah Sparrow, and got to watch a Black-headed Grosbeak working on its nest. Her breeding bird observations for this important natural area in and south of Walker Ranch now exceed 60 species, including confirmed nesting of Dusky Grouse, wild Turkey, Golden Eagle, Hermit Thrush, and Savannah Sparrow.

**Gregory Canyon:** Classic finds were a Peregrine Falcon territory, confirmed nesting of both vireos and all three nuthatches. The canyon always contains an unusual surprise or two, such as a Rose-breasted Grosbeak, a species that appears to be increasing along the Front Range foothills and may soon nest here.

**Long Canyon:** Steve photographed his first Brown Elf and now has photographed four elfin species (western pine, hoary, Moss's, and brown) in his adopted area. He has observed a total of 65 butterfly species in Long and Upper Gregory Canyons since 2006.

**Picture Rock:** Rattlesnakes, and a rare White-tailed Jackrabbit, one of the few reported in the foothills of Boulder County in recent memory; the usual band of Wild Turkeys, Bushtits, Indigo and Lazuli Buntings, and here also: Rose-breasted Grosbeaks.

**Sawhill Ponds:** AD. Chesley documented a fledged Black-crowned Night Heron on a newly discovered nest. She also observed fledged Wood Ducks, Green Herons, and Ospreys. The tracking of Green Heron nesting suc-

cess at Sawhill and Walden ponds has contributed significantly to our understanding of the habits of this locally rare bird.

**Shanahan Canyon:** Sandra Laursen and Betty Naughton report that the male Ovenbird returned to upper Shanahan Canyon for the fourth consecutive year, but there were still no signs of nesting. In fact, no one has ever documented nesting of Ovenbirds in Boulder County, despite the fact that one or more singing males are observed here nearly every summer. Another mystery that begs further investigation!

**South Boulder Creek East:** Ron Butler's White-tailed Deer herd grew to at least 12 this fall. American Bitterns were heard calling in the cattail marshes again this spring. Ron also found several two-tailed swallowtail caterpillars feeding on chokecherry leaves near the trail.

**South Boulder Creek West:** Janet MacLachlan found Cedar Waxwings and nesting Blue Grosbeaks. This is another area where white-tailed deer are regularly observed. The Boulder County Audubon teen naturalists group found three monarch caterpillars feeding on common milkweed leaves in August.

**South Mesa Trail:** Bay Roberts and Nancy Neupert found a pair of Golden Eagles, a Prairie Falcon, and a Peregrine Falcon nest with eggs!

**Teller Lakes:** Ruth Carol Cushman found a Western Kingbird nest with young; also observed three teal species during the early breeding season. She reports that several common bird species did not fledge young this summer, possibly because of drought conditions and lack of food.

**Walden Ponds:** American Bitterns continue to nest in wetlands near the boardwalk, and one was calling from quite close this spring. A.D. also reported fledged Wood Ducks, Green Herons, and Spotted Sandpipers, along with a Marsh Wren. Sawhill/Walden is the only documented nesting site for Marsh Wren in Boulder County (2011), so the cattail marshes there bear close watching.

**Walker Ranch Meyers Gulch:** Laura Osborn found fledged Dusky Grouse, Red-naped Sapsuckers feeding their young, an Olive-sided Flycatcher territory, a Cordilleran Flycatcher nest with young, and fledged Red Crossbills. Her seven-year breeding bird list for Meyers

*Continued next page*

### 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, Jan-Feb, and Mar-Apr issues of *On the Wing* are mailed only to BCAS Supporting Members who request them. The electronic edition, available online, has color pictures and usually includes extra articles.



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Gulch is now up to 71 likely and 44 confirmed nesting species, both highs for any adopted area. These data are proving invaluable as we work to protect Meyers Gulch from a proposed multiuse through-trail that would fracture and threaten wildlife habitat. A bobcat was seen near the trailhead parking area in October.

## Bird Watchers Take the GBBC to New Heights

Email received from [gbbc@Cornell.edu](mailto:gbbc@Cornell.edu) Feb 21, 2013

The numbers tell the story. With its new global reach, the 16th annual Great Backyard Bird Count becomes the largest worldwide bird count ever!

4 Days, 103 Countries

120,000+ Checklists, 3,144 Species

25.6+ Million birds

That species total represents nearly one-third of the bird species in the entire world. Bird watchers in the U.S. and Canada set new national records for tallies submitted. Reports have come in from as far away as Antarctica and Afghanistan. So far, 30 states and 3 provinces have set new records for checklist entries. Here are the top ten countries by checklists submitted so far:

United States 107,538	United Kingdom 84
Canada 10,970	Peru 83
India 391	Puerto Rico 79
Mexico 263	Iceland 78
Australia 143	Portugal 72

### Other Preliminary Results:

- **Top 5 Most Reported Species** (reported on highest number of checklists): Northern Cardinal; Dark-eyed Junco; Mourning Dove; Downy Woodpecker; House Finch
- **Top 5 Most Common Birds** (most individuals reported): Snow Goose; Canada Goose; Red-winged Blackbird; European Starling; American Coot
- **Finch Invasion:** A massive number of northern finch species moved into the U.S. including the Common Redpoll, reported in a record 36 states. Scientists believe these periodic movements are related to natural fluctuations in crops of conifer cones and other seeds in Canada.
- **Hurricane Sandy:** The weather system that caused Sandy's landfall also blew some European birds to

North America and evidence of this is still showing up in GBBC results. The colorful, crested Northern Lapwing was reported in Georgia, New Jersey, and Massachusetts during the GBBC.

- **GBBC First:** A Red-flanked Bluetail has wintered at Queens Park, Vancouver, and was also reported for the GBBC's first record ever. This British Columbia bird has been drawing bird watchers from all over the U.S. and Canada hoping to see this rarity. This little thrush is one of the only birds in the world with a striking blue tail and is native to Asia; the other GBBC report of this species this year was from Japan.

A more extensive summary of the results will be published on the website (<http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/>) in March after scientists at Audubon, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and Bird Studies Canada have a chance to review the reports.

## Sage Grouse News

(American Bird Conservancy, Jan 15 news

<http://tinyurl.com/bhnhkhz>)

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has proposed to list the Gunnison Sage-Grouse as endangered under the Endangered Species Act and designate 1.7 million acres of critical habitat in an effort to halt the long term population decline of the iconic western bird.

FWS says that the principal threat to Gunnison Sage-Grouse is habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation due to residential, urban, and commercial development and associated infrastructure such as roads and power lines. Some estimates suggest that over 90 percent of the bird's historic habitat has been lost.

On September 15, 2010, FWS determined that listing the Gunnison Sage-Grouse as an endangered or threatened species was warranted but precluded by higher priority actions. FWS also reported that the species was added to the candidate species list and assigned a high listing priority based on the FWS determination that threats to the species were of high magnitude and immediacy, as well as the taxonomic classification of Gunnison Sage-Grouse as a full species.

The U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia approved a settlement agreement with WildEarth Guardians and Center for Biological Diversity laying out a multi-year listing work plan for addressing candidate species, including the Gunnison Sage-Grouse. As part of this agreement, the Service agreed to publish a proposed rule to list Gunnison Sage-Grouse and designate critical habitat.

## More About Cats and Birds

Knowing of Cathy's interest in the topic of cats and birds and her former position as a humane society board member, I sent her a pre-publication copy of OTW and offered her the chance to comment. The article below is her response, edited substantially to fit the page. Documentation of the toll on wildlife from free-roaming cats (both pets and feral) is in *Nature Communications 4*, published 29 January 2013 (<http://tinyurl.com/alvsc5w>). The authors say:

"We estimate that free-ranging domestic cats kill 1.4–3.7 billion birds and 6.9–20.7 billion mammals annually. Un-owned cats, as opposed to owned pets, cause the majority of this mortality. Our findings suggest that free-ranging cats cause substantially greater wildlife mortality than previously thought and are likely the single greatest source of anthropogenic mortality for US birds and mammals. Scientifically sound conservation and policy intervention is needed to reduce this impact. "

Cathy's experience and an article she lists suggest that Trap-Neuter-Release (TNR) is an effective means for controlling feral cats. It is, however, a controversial topic. See also <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trap-neuter-return>. However, there is widespread agreement that both cats and wildlife are better off if the cats are kept indoors.

– George Oetzel (editor)

### Protection for Birds, Compassion for Cats: The Two Truly Helpful Things We Can Do

Cathy Comstock

Those of us who love birds will naturally be shocked and saddened at recent reports that assert that cats kill more birds than causes such as roadkill, pesticides, and collisions with skyscrapers. But fortunately there are two ways to put our grief to use that can be a gift to all concerned.

The first is to take seriously the advice of humane societies across the country that we do our cats as well as surrounding wildlife the greatest favor by keeping our feline friends indoors. As one can read in a recent article from a HSUS veterinarian, "Peaceable Backyard Kingdom," contrary to fears that we are depriving our cats if we don't allow them to roam free, we are saving them a great deal of unnecessary suffering.

The good news is that humane experts across the nation agree that cats can be perfectly happy inside with sunny perches, posts to scratch and affectionate humans. And they will be much healthier and live much longer than their outdoor counterparts. So will the birds they can admire from inside, as the devoted bird watchers that they are.

Another important reason for keeping your cat inside--and urging all your friends to--is to insure that your cat does not end up getting lost, impregnated (or impregnating), and living the brutal existence of a stray or feral cat. Only 2–5% of stray cats taken to shelters are reunited with their owners. I feel these cats deserve our sympathy and support, and the best way we can do this is to be sure they are spayed or neutered. (For information, go to [www.alleycat.org](http://www.alleycat.org).) Doing so will help them avoid territorial fights, get vet care in the process if needed, and also make sure that their fate will not be visited on future offspring. Kittens younger than eight weeks are usually tamed and adopted.

This tried and long-proven process, started by a Stanford researcher in the 80's, is called TNR or Trap-Neuter-Release. It ends the cycle of reproduction while giving these hapless creatures the one life they have been able to carve out. It will allow any group of feral cats to shrink in size due to mortality, which is much higher for them than for indoor cats. The number in my colony went down by a third in the two years I cared for them, before having a sanctuary built for them. A colony in north Boulder has shrunk from 15 to 4 in the five years a caring friend has watched over it. For a scientific study of how TNR reduced the population a set of colonies by two-thirds in a few years, from 68 to 23 cats, see the *Journal of American Veterinary Studies* at <http://tinyurl.com/czlcype>.

The unintended consequences of eradication campaigns can mean not only suffering for the target animals, but also for other wildlife. Trapping and killing cats is way too costly an endeavor in staff hours and effort for municipalities, and the kind of people who trap for TNR will not do so in order to destroy those same creatures. The outcry at such actions would further insure that the only result of outlawing TNR would be geometrically increased reproduction of outdoor cats and many more of the deaths of birds and wildlife that we want so much to avoid.

"Short-term violence never does long-term good." Gandhi knew long ago that which just makes good common sense now. Please do your best for both the birds and cats: Make sure any cats of which you know, domestic or wild, are spayed and neutered, and keep your own cats right where they belong – on your lap and in your heart.