

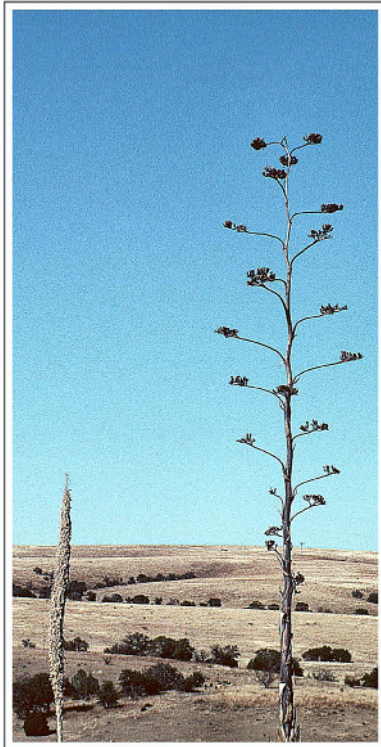


# On The Wing

Volume 36, Number 1

Boulder County Audubon Society Newsletter

Jan-Feb 2006



**Agave Stalk, Arizona**  
- Carl Bock

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

**Tuesday, January 24, 7:30 PM**

Carl Bock

### *Cows Versus Condos: Effects of Exurban Development on the Biological Diversity of a Southwestern Savanna*

Ranches are being converted to low-density exurban housing developments across the American West, with potentially significant but little studied impacts on biological diversity. Between 2003 and 2005 Drs. Carl and Jane Bock and their students compared populations of wildlife and flowering plants in grasslands and mesquite/oak savannas of the Sonoita Valley in southeastern Arizona, at sampling points equally divided among landscapes that were grazed by livestock, or embedded in housing developments, or both, or neither. Carl Bock will describe the results of the study, which suggest that replacement of large cattle ranches with low-density housing developments need not result in a loss of biological diversity, if individual 'exurbanites' manage their lands carefully and thoughtfully, and if sufficient open spaces are left on the landscape.

Carl and Jane Bock are retired Professors in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Colorado in Boulder, where they have been members of the faculty since 1968. Their particular interests are in the ecology and conservation of grasslands. They have authored nearly 200 papers in scientific journals, and written two books summarizing their work in the grasslands of southern Arizona: "The View from Bald Hill," published in 2000 by the University of California Press, and "Sonoita Plain," published in 2005 by the University of Arizona Press. Carl will autograph copies of both books after the program.

**Tuesday, February 28, 7:30 PM**

Richard Holmes and Special Guests

### *Birding in Arizona*

In advance of the annual early-spring migration of Boulder birdwatchers to Arizona, Boulder photographer Richard Holmes and other Boulder County Audubon members will offer their tips on where to go, what to see, and where to stay. Richard will present his superb images of Arizona birds and birdwatching venues; then our "panel of experts" will share secrets and answer questions.

Richard Holmes has been photographing wildlife, primarily in Colorado and the Southwest, for more than 10 years. His images have appeared in several national magazines and in the recently published *Peterson Field Guide to the North American Prairie*.

Coming in March: *Cranes of the World*, with Ken Strom.

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#### **Refreshments and Socializing before the meetings at 7 PM Program at 7:30**

Meetings are held at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Boulder, 5001 Pennsylvania Ave. (off 55th St. between Arapahoe and Baseline)

## BCAS Field Trips for Jan.—Mar. 2006

**Saturday, January 21:** Join Joyce Gellhorn (303-442-8123) on a snowshoe trip to Lefthand Reservoir to look for white-tailed ptarmigan in their winter habitat. The birds roost in the snow, are pure white except for their black beak and black eyes, and blend into their environment. Seeing these birds in winter is a rare treat. Be prepared for cold, windy conditions. Adequate clothing including layers, warm boots, jacket with a hood, bealaclava or face mask, mittens and over-mitts, and sunglasses and sunscreen is required. Also bring a lunch and a thermos with a hot drink. Meet at the parking area on the Brainard Lake Road at 8 AM.

**Saturday Feb. 4, 9 AM—1 PM:** Wintering raptors with Alex and Gillian Brown (303-494-3042). Join Alex and Gillian for a great driving tour of winter raptors on the Colorado plains. We'll also keep our eyes peeled for other winter birds. Dress for the weather, and bring water and snacks. Everyone and all skill levels are welcome. Meet at Scott Carpenter Park, 30th just south of Arapahoe, at 9 AM.

**Sunday, February 5, 8:30 AM—Noon:** Winter is for Dippers and Kinglets. Buttonrock Reservoir. Join Scott Severs for a leisurely stroll at Buttonrock Reservoir west of Lyons to search for wintering flocks. To carpool meet at 8 a.m. at the Niwot Park & Ride, or meet at the reservoir at the end of County Rd 80 off of Hwy 36 west of Lyons.

**Saturday, February 18, 7:20 AM to 9:30 AM:** Great Backyard Bird Count Birdwalk Join members of the Audubon Society, BCNA and the Wild Bird Center for a count and tally of the birds for the Great Backyard Bird Count. Help us find and record local birds and we'll submit the results to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Meet promptly at the Wild Bird Center, 1641 28th St. Details: (303)442-1322.

**Saturday, March 4, 7-10 AM:** Spring welcoming hike and potluck breakfast at Sawhill Ponds Wildlife Area, off 75th St. between Valmont and Jay roads. Bring something sweet, warm, tropical, or passionate to pass around. We should see raptors, ducks, and early-singing songbirds. Steve Jones (303-494-2468; stephen.jones@earthlink.net)



### Great Backyard Bird Count February 17 - 20, 2006

Scientists and bird enthusiasts can learn a lot by knowing where the birds are. Now that winter has gripped much of the continent, what are our birds doing? Bird populations are dynamic, they are constantly in flux. Scientists want to take a snapshot of North American bird populations and YOU can help. Everyone's contribution is important. It doesn't matter whether you identify, count, and report the 5 species coming to your backyard feeder or the 45 species you see during a day's outing on Open Space.

Last year Boulder citizens submitted the greatest number of checklists for Colorado at 62, and recorded the second highest species total for the state at 72 (Pueblo recorded 96 species). Longmont and Louisville also showed well in participation, both in the top ten for the state. Help us to keep your community at the top of the lists! To participate log on to <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/>. Those without computer access may call the Wild Bird Center 303-442-1322 and order forms to participate.

### Boulder County Audubon Society

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Wildlife Inventory  
**Alex and Gillian Brown** (303)494-3042

*On the Wing* © 2005

Boulder County Audubon Society.

*On the Wing* is published five times annually: Sept, Nov, Jan, March, and May.

#### Next issue:

Deadline for materials for the Mar. 2006 issue is **Tue, Feb 28**.  
Email address for submissions:

**otw@boulderaudubon.org**

See notice on Page 6

## 27 Years of Boulder County Wildlife Inventories—Going Electronic

Steve Jones

This fall, with the help of Gillian and Alex. Brown, Boulder Audubon intern Laura Stephenson and I began entering 27 years of Boulder County Wildlife Inventory data onto Excel spreadsheets. We hope to have this data entry completed by the end of 2006. By providing a link to the data from the Boulder County Audubon web site, we should be able to make this treasure-trove of information available to researchers from around the world.

Frankly, we could use some help. It takes a little over an hour to enter each species, and there are more than 300 species to enter. So if you are familiar with Excel and would be willing to adopt a few species, it would make a great difference. Please give me a holler ([stephen.jones@earthlink.net](mailto:stephen.jones@earthlink.net)).

Meanwhile, our efforts are already bearing fruit. Over the years, some folks have questioned the usefulness of Boulder Audubon's monthly wildlife inventory data, citing the lack of controls over observer effort and the large size of the designated count areas. A system based on point-counts, transects, or a fixed amount of observer hours from month to month might provide a clearer view of bird population trends. However, the current system, which enables any observers to submit any of their sightings from any part of the county, certainly casts a broader net and enables more volunteers to participate.

A brief look at the owl numbers recently entered onto spreadsheets shows just how much Boulder County Wildlife Inventory data reveal about local bird populations. Table 1 (below) shows numbers of owls of various species reported per month throughout the 27-year duration of the inventory.

**Table 1. Boulder County Wildlife Inventory Owl Observations by Month, 1979-2005**

Species	J	F	M	A	My	Ju	Jy	A	S	O	N	D
Barn Owl	2	0	0	17	20	29	31	41	7	7	0	4
Flammulated Owl	0	0	1	0	28	46	11	2	5	1	0	0
E. Screech-Owl	8	10	9	16	39	22	15	7	10	9	3	47
Great Horned Owl	110	144	222	403	424	124	78	101	107	113	101	392
N. Pygmy-Owl	13	20	30	32	19	11	4	9	9	11	8	31
Burrowing Owl	0	0	3	37	45	50	80	46	17	6	0	0
Long-eared Owl	25	20	23	8	5	8	9	3	5	7	12	46
Short-eared Owl	37	8	6	3	1	0	0	1	1	4	2	18
N. Saw-whet Owl	4	5	30	22	10	4	3	4	4	3	4	3
Boreal Owl	0	2	1	4	3	1	3	0	0	0	0	0

These numbers suggest several conclusions:

1. At least four species are highly migratory. Burrowing owls and flammulated owls, which prey predominantly on insects, are present only during the warmer months. Though some barn owls and northern saw-whet owls appear to remain in our area during the winter, most probably migrate south. Short-eared owls are generally present only during the coldest months. Long-eared owls, considered a common breeding species 100 years ago, are now rare in summer and somewhat more common during winter.
2. Among the smaller, cavity-nesting species, which are more often heard than seen, northern pygmy-owls vocalize most actively February-May, northern saw-whet owls March-May, and flammulated owls May-June.
3. Owls observed on Christmas Bird Counts comprise a substantial proportion of all owls reported each year.

(Continued on page 4)

**2005 Christmas Bird Count complete results are available on the BCAS Web site**  
<http://www.boulderaudubon.org>

(Continued from page 3)

The second table, below, shows numbers of each species reported during five-year intervals.

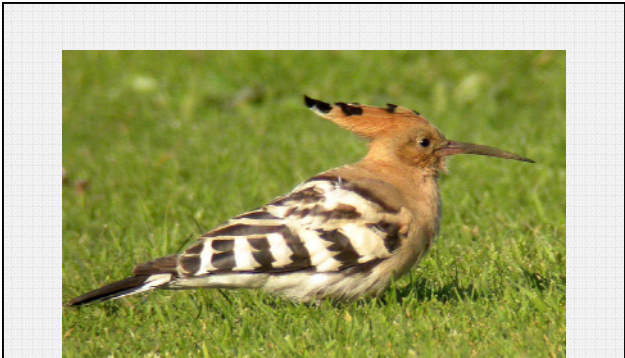
**Table 2. Boulder County Wildlife Inventory Owl Observations by Five-year Interval, 1981-2005**

Species	1981-85	1986-90	1991-95	1996-2000	2001-05
Barn Owl	5	11	11	32	88
Flammulated Owl	2	38	35	14	6
E. Screech-Owl	27	39	44	32	32
Great horned Owl	377	586	444	452	452
N. Pygmy-Owl	71	32	18	24	50
Burrowing Owl	132	57	9	28	43
Long-eared Owl	30	26	18	67	16
Short-eared Owl	36	4	3	7	4
N.Saw-Whet Owl	37	24	10	13	13
Boreal Owl	3	6	0	0	5

Again, some trends seem apparent. Barn owls appear to be on the increase. Burrowing owls and long-eared owls, both listed as "rare and declining" on the Boulder County Avian Species of Special Concern List, appear to have declined during the 1980s and early 1990s, while possibly rebounding slightly during the last 10 years. Populations of great horned owl, eastern screech-owl, and northern pygmy-owl have remained relatively steady (it helps if you understand that the high numbers of small owls reported during the 1980s stemmed largely from a massive five-year re-

What you see in these two tables is only a glimmer of the available owl data. Once we have completed the data entry, researchers will be able to go into the database and find the number of any species reported during any month, as well as the areas where they were seen. The possibilities for applying and analyzing the data are limitless--and that leads to another plea for help. Anyone out there skilled at creating user-friendly computer databases?

We particularly thank Alex and Gillian, who have compiled the wildlife inventory now for more than 15 years, and all the observers who have submitted reports--several hundred of you contributing several tens of thousands of hours.



**Hoopoe**

Thanks to *Isle of Man Birding*  
[http://www.homepages.mcb.net/wormwell/may\\_2003\\_photo1.htm](http://www.homepages.mcb.net/wormwell/may_2003_photo1.htm)

The Eurasian Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) is common in much of its wide range. Linda saw many in Bhutan. However, when one shows up in the U.K. every few years, it is a powerful photographers' magnet.



**Welcome and Thanks**

to our new field trip coordinator DeAnna Williams

*Volunteer to lead a trip during the  
 March-May spring migration.  
 Contact DeAnna at 303-903-4155*



## Birds and Other Beasts of Bhutan

Linda Andes-Georges

Trekking at high altitude is not the average birdwatcher's first thought when going abroad to see what—and who—lives there. And unfortunately, watching birds and flowers was not the high priority of the people that my spouse and I joined, but this amiable group did provide a well-organized and relatively affordable way to visit one of those Shangri-la places that one reads about in *National Geographic*. So... back in February 2005, we began to get ready for our autumn trip.

It took most of nine months to learn to trudge for miles and hours at high altitude, and even then, I felt that I was ill prepared. Our group's ages spanned several decades (from 24 to 65) but ALL of them were more fit than I (some were ex-Olympians, some marathoners, all seasoned world travelers... except us).

Since our trip plan would include both jungles and high alpine, you can imagine the challenge in packing, and here also, in spite of our care and study, we went wrong. Ask me about it someday! Certainly if you ever go to "Indochina" and the Himalaya region, I can share with you a couple of lessons.

But the first one is: Go with people who share your interests.

When you arrive, and venture out of town, you will find that the trails have been created over centuries by subsistence-living farmers, their pony caravans, their cows, their yaks. If, occasionally, you should want to stop looking at your feet (a rigorous requirement when the trail is all big rocks and deep mud, or sometimes... slippery snow), and if you desire to spend many wondering moments before vistas and rushing streams and mysterious long-tailed birds and huge vultures of the high country, your hiking speed will need to be adjusted accordingly!

Several impressions struck us particularly:

- the extremely friendly—and thoroughly Buddhist—culture, which the little "enlightened kingdom" is urgently trying to preserve;
- the amount of green cover at every altitude, including rhododendron, mosses and oaks growing up to and higher than 13,000 feet;
- the marvelous bird-voice symphony in every ecotone. Most of these birds were completely unknown to me. The only easy ID was the very common green-backed tit, which is the prettiest "chickadee" in the world.



Best birds for me were not the ones listed as being on the wish list of world travelers, or even the ones which are endemic, but those that provided me with needed respite from the endless panting labor that I endured to see them: cuckoo shrikes, drongos, babblers, all manner of redstarts (as good entertainment as dippers, but more common), bulbuls, and the incredible showbird, the hoopoe. Photos of most of these are available on the Internet. My great reward for hiking up toward the Sacred Peaks was seeing a kettle of Himalayan griffons; second runner-up was the famous Lammergeier (like a grey and white condor).

Flowers were abundant everywhere last fall, but by all accounts, the flower show in the spring is even more spectacular. Bigger beasties are rare, but we caught glimpses of shy blue sheep in the high country, and in a preserve we saw the famous Takin (the national animal—a rival to the camel in committee design). Snow leopards remained a dream.

Bhutan is a dream. Save your pennies to go—you will need many.

**Taktsang (Tiger's Nest) Monastery, perched on a cliff 900 meters above the valley floor.**

- Linda Andes-Georges



**Yak (other beast)**

## BOULDER COUNTY WILDLIFE INVENTORY, AUGUST—SEPTEMBER 2005

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

Although we tend to think of August as a summer month, when we talk about birds August is definitely a major month for fall migration. In the words of Ted Floyd: "August is a superb time of year for observing birds doing really interesting things - migrants and dispersers, flocks and singles, juveniles and adults, lovers and fighters, skulkers and chasers, etc., etc." With only two days reaching 90F and an average high of 84F, it was a great month for birders to be out and about. August is typically a month when the birds are under-reported with the number of species seen ranging from a low of 111 species (2003) to a high of 177 species (2002). This year's total of 152 species is higher than average. However, some common species (which were surely present) were not reported; in this category fall **Northern Harrier**, **White-throated Swift** and **Townsend's Solitaire**. September, which typically sees the peak of the fall migration, had a scarcity of reports resulting in a slightly lower than normal total of 154 species.

However, both months provided some exciting finds. **Chukar** is an introduced species which is not thought to breed in the county; a single bird was seen each month in two different locations. These are the first reports of **Chukar** since 2002. A **Black-chinned Hummingbird** which arrived at the feeder in our South Boulder yard was the first reported since 2003. As seems to have become the norm, **Calliope Hummingbirds** were reported in several different locations. However, unlike previous years, they did not linger into September. Sparrows were reported both months in fair numbers as well as with a fair variety of species. A **Field Sparrow** seen in Dowdy Draw was the first reported since 2002. Although **Lark Bunting** is our state bird, they are often hard to find in Boulder County; in August 111 **Lark Buntings** were reported from at least three different locations. The **Eastern Wood Pewee** found in July in the Boulder Mountain Parks continued to linger for the first few days in August allowing some more birders to view (and hear) it.

Many observers saw the **Green Herons** at Sawhill and Walden Ponds. There were known to be at least six birds; it is nice to find that these elusive birds appear to be breeding in the county again. **Least Bittern** was found at Walden Ponds in August having previously been reported in June; these could be a potential breeder. Shorebird migration was underway both months. The most rewarding spot was Six Mile Reservoir which had both large numbers of shorebirds and a fair variety. This is not a reservoir that there have been many reports from in the past. Sightings from there included 150 **Long-billed Dowitcher**, a single **Marbled Godwit**, **Baird's Sandpiper** and **Wilson's Phalarope**. Stearn's Lake, in the south of the county, also produced some shorebirds including **Red-necked Phalarope**. A **Baird's Sandpiper** was seen in the alpine tundra; apparently this species is well known for migrating at high altitudes. Stearn's Lake was also the place to see **Black Terns**; there were at least 24 of these birds present in August. In September gulls were observed in their thousands and careful observers managed to find a **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at Prince Lakes and two **Sabine's Gulls** at Boulder Reservoir. The **Sabine's Gulls** were surprisingly easy to find as they flew around as the white triangles on their wings are highly identifiable.

Fall warbler migration was not particularly notable except that two species not seen in the spring were observed: **Nashville Warbler** and **Magnolia Warbler**. Other less usual warbler species included **Townsend's Warbler** (typically seen more commonly in the fall) and a **Northern Waterthrush**. By mid-September most of the flycatchers had disappeared, but two **Cassin's Kingbirds** seen in September were a new species for the year. For a full listing of the wildlife inventory please visit the Audubon website at [www.boulderaudubon.org/inventory.htm](http://www.boulderaudubon.org/inventory.htm).

**CONTRIBUTORS TO THE AUGUST & SEPTEMBER INVENTORIES**

Linda Andes-Georges, Maggie Boswell, Andy Boyce, Alex & Gillian Brown, Cathy Comstock, Carol Cushman, Todd Deininger, Gene Ellis, Warren Finch, Ted Floyd, Steve Frye, Peter Gent, Paula Hansley, Jim Hill, Steve Jones, D.W. King, Steve Larson, Dave Madonna, Gene & Lynn Monroe, Laura Osborn, Peter Plage, Suzi & Myron Plooster, Bill Schmoker, Scott Severs, Debra Sparr, Joyce Takamine, Scott Taylor, Oakleigh Thorne, Richard Trinkner, David J. Waltman, Tom Wilberding, Eric Zorawicz.


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**Next Issue of *On the Wing***

Scott Severs has agreed to fill in as editor of the March-April issue. Articles for that issue should be sent to Scott (Rostrhamus [at] aol.com), or to [otw@boulderaudubon.org](mailto:otw@boulderaudubon.org). Deadline for articles is Feb 28.

## Life Lessons from an Arizona Grassland

reviewed by Steve Jones

—Carl E. Bock and Jane H. Bock. 2005. *Sonoita Plain, Views from a Southwestern Grassland*. Photographs by Stephen E. Strom. University of Arizona Press, Tucson.

—Carl E. Bock and Jane H. Bock. 2000. *The View from Bald Hill, Thirty Years in an Arizona Grassland*. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Midway through *The View from Bald Hill*, Boulder ecologists Carl and Jane Bock describe a gentle rise on the Audubon Society's Appleton-Whittell Research Ranch that affords a sweeping view of a mature oak savanna. "We came there many times over the years, mostly just to enjoy the view and share it with others," they write. "Although we did not realize it at the time, our initial attraction to that high spot by McDaniel Well was probably far from accidental."

They relate the importance of savannas to evolving *Homo sapiens* in Africa, invoking E. O. Wilson's term *biophilia*, coined to describe a deep human desire for contact with nature. They then focus on the relationships among birds and mammals that live in oak savannas, highlighting the cooperative strategies that oaks, squirrels, jays, and even javelinas have evolved to survive and prosper. The chapter ends with a plea for greater human cooperation so that we might hope to survive on our overcrowded planet.

None of these ideas is completely new, but their incorporation into a scholarly and meticulous work on grassland ecology makes the Bocks' writing both unique and indispensable. In *Sonoita Plain*, a new collection of essays accompanied by Stephen Strom's intimate color photos, the Bocks explore the roles of rain, fire, predation, invasive species, grazing, and people in southwestern grasslands--all the while making a compelling plea for honoring and preserving native ecosystems.

Topics explored include the evolution of speed in pronghorn, the nesting success of sparrows in stands of native and non-native grass, how predators control (or are controlled by) grasshopper populations, and the effects of burgeoning ranchettes on species richness and diversity. Each essay is a primer in evolutionary biology, revealing the beauty, intricacy, and complex "logic" of natural selection.

It's in keeping with the Bocks' humanistic approach that they devote one of the book's final essays to the issue of illegal immigration, comparing the flow of people across the imaginary line between the United States and Mexico to the millions-years-old flow of plants, animals, and culture throughout the desert Southwest. "The situation of 'illegals' is much closer to home for residents of the Sonoita Valley than it is for the average American," they write. "There must be some better way to deal with our neighbors to the south than inviting them to share in our bounty, usually by working for us, but only after they have been made to run a gauntlet."

Both these books, filled with love and respect for nature and for the troubled human cultures that hold nature's future in their grasp, deserve a prominent place on the shelf.

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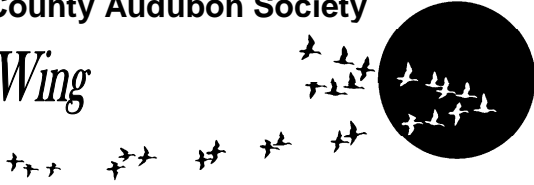


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**Program Feb 28**  
Richard Holmes  
*Birding in Arizona*

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### **Boulder County Audubon Society Membership**

When you join the National Audubon Society (NAS), you automatically become a member of the Boulder County Audubon Society (BCAS) as well. Joint membership in the NAS and BCAS includes the NAS quarterly *Audubon* and the BCAS newsletter *On the Wing* (5 issues annually), as well as participation in all BCAS activities.

BCAS receives only a small fraction of local-area NAS dues to support local activities. We encourage you to join BCAS to help support local activities. You may join BCAS whether you are a member of NAS or not.

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- \$20 Annual BCAS membership
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