



On The Wing

Volume 39, Number 4

Boulder County Audubon Society Newsletter

Sept-Oct 2009

BCAS 4th Tuesday Program Series

September 22, 7:30 p.m.

Climate Change in Colorado — Present, Past, and Future

Klaus Wolter

The Earth's climate is warming, and Colorado is not exempt from this trend. How unusual are the changes in our state's climate compared to the rest of the world, and what do these changes mean for our water resources? How unusual are the last few decades compared to earlier periods of climate change in Colorado, both in the direct observational (instrumental) record, and compared to the much longer tree-ring record? What can we expect over the next half century, and what are the uncertainties associated with these projections?

Klaus's talk will draw from the 2008 "Climate Change in Colorado" report that he co-authored, and include a series of tree-ring slides contributed by Jeff Lukas.



Klaus Wolter is a researcher at the University of Colorado CIRES Climate Diagnostics Center. He received his Ph.D. in meteorology from the University of Wisconsin in 1987. His research focuses on the application of statistical methods to climate problems, such as the impact of ENSO (El Niño/Southern

Oscillation) on worldwide climate. As a participant in the Western Water Assessment Project at CU, he has developed statistical tools that allow him to make seasonal predictions of precipitation. He also engages in climate studies with the Colorado State Climatologist, focusing on assessments of drought and temperature trends in Colorado in the context of "Global Change."



October 27, 7:30 p.m.

Dazzling Dragonflies and Damselflies of Boulder County

Scott Severs

Colorful and dashing are just a few of the ways to describe dragonflies and damselflies. Boulder County's wetlands host nearly 60 varieties. Here these insects live out amazing dual lives, with the majority of time spent as nymphs in the murky depths. Voracious predators as winged adults, the dragonflies are equally insatiable during their aquatic stage of life. Armed with an incredible "spear gun" lower jaw, the nymphs snatch aquatic insects and occasionally small fish and tadpoles.

Year-old nymphs emerge to spend a few weeks as acrobatic winged adults. An inspiration to many aeronautical engineers, the dragonflies use their four independent moving wings to climb, dive, hover, and fly backwards in the blink of an eye. These skills help them catch prey, maintain territories, mate, and lay eggs.

Come and learn about the ecology of these insects, the local ecosystems they inhabit, and the threats to their existence. Scott will also share a few tips on how to photograph these tricky subjects.

Scott Severs has been fascinated by insects since his grandmother first read him *We Like Bugs*, a wonderful 1962 children's book by Gladys Conklin. He created a bug zoo for his 4th grade class and a forest floor diorama for his 7th grade science fair. He enjoys macro



photography and field biology, and assisted in the inventory of birdlife at Soapstone Ranch for Fort Collins in 2007. He currently works as a wildlife biologist for Walsh Environmental.

Twelve-spotted Skimmer—Scott Severs

Refreshments and Socializing at 7 PM — Program at 7:30

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

September-October Field Trips

Saturday, September 12, 7:00 – noon
Barr Lake Birding Festival

Join in the birding fun at Barr Lake near Brighton, CO. Lots of activities including live raptors, booths, bird banding by RMBO, bird walks on the hour, and kids' activities. Families and birders, all are welcome. Call a birding friend and carpool. Don't miss it! Please note: there is a donation of \$6 per car to benefit the Prairie Restoration Project. Call 303-659-6005 for more information.

Saturday, September 19, 7:30am - late morning
Fall Migrants

Leader: Christian Nunes (pajaroiboy@hotmail.com). Join City of Boulder Wildlife Technician Christian Nunes for a leisurely stroll along South Boulder Creek looking for fall migrants. Then move on to Baseline Reservoir to see what's stopped in. Christian has an amazing ear for birdcalls and is sure to find some interesting migrants. Meet at the Bobolink Trailhead off Baseline at 7:30am.

Saturday, October 3, 5:30am to mid-afternoon.
Fall in Rocky Mountain National Park

Leader: Mark Ponsor (303-250-2152), m.ponsor@comcast.net). It wouldn't be fall without a trip to RMNP to watch the elk bugling and enjoy the fall colors. Then we'll move up Trail Ridge to look for pika, white-tailed ptarmigan, and big-horned sheep.

Bring breakfast and lunch, plenty of snacks, and weather & sun protection. Email for meeting place.

Sunday, October 25, 5-9 p.m.
Moonlight stroll at Sawhill Ponds

Leader: Steve Jones (303-494-2468), curlewsj@comcast.net). We'll search for migrating waterfowl, standing wave clouds, and perhaps an owl or two and enjoy a potluck picnic in the woods by Boulder Creek. Bring portable food to pass around and meet at the Sawhill Ponds parking area, off 75th St between Valmont and Jay roads.



Female Northern Harrier, Boulder County, 2/06

Bill Schmoker (www.schmoker.org)

See article next page

Boulder County Audubon Society

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To contact the editor, use the link in
www.boulderaudubon.org/newsletter.htm

Next issue deadline: (Nov 2009 issue) Oct 16.

Harriers Fledge Four Young at Boulder Reservoir

Steve Jones

After eight consecutive nest failures during the past four years, Northern Harriers at Boulder Reservoir nested successfully this year, fledging four young in late July. The wetlands around the western edge of Boulder Reservoir comprise the only recently documented nesting site for the species in Boulder County. In recent years, we suspected that terrestrial predators, possibly coyotes or raccoons, were getting the young, as we observed nest building and feeding of young, but no fledgings.

This year a single pair began building a nest in the Little Dry Creek cattail marsh in late April. The nest was well concealed among the cattails, but we saw both adults bringing nesting material into the marsh. Throughout May, volunteers observed the male bringing food to the nest site and even saw some mid-air prey exchanges between the male and female.

By early June both adults were bringing in food, indicating that the young had hatched. Observers saw the adults chasing coyotes away from the nesting site on at least two occasions. In early July observers saw the adults bringing prey to various locations within the cattail marsh, suggesting that the young had begun to walk away from the nest. By late July four nearly full-grown young were scattered on fence posts and in prairie dog colonies surrounding the marsh. At this time, many of us rushed out to the reservoir to celebrate the fledging of these four young.

The joy of this occasion does not diminish our concerns over the future of nesting northern harriers in Boulder County, but it offers a glimmer of hope. We'll continue to monitor this site closely while hoping that open space agencies can somehow manage to preserve larger areas of marsh, buffered by grasslands, that are less vulnerable to predation.

Meanwhile, hearty thanks to all the dedicated volunteers who oversaw the fledging of these four harriers, along with eight ospreys and an undetermined number of American bitterns, at Boulder Reservoir this summer. Without your work, these species would be less well understood and considerably more endangered.

2009 volunteers: Chet Chavez, Linda Cooper, Sharon Daugherty, Ken DeBow, Carol Dozier, JoAnn Garavagli, Kelly Garrett, Jan Hambrick, Nick Haupt, Sarah Hollowell, Chuck Klomp, Adam Massey, Ralph Musfeldt, Linda Palmer, Mark Ponsor, Sue Ponsor, Charley Rosicky, Janetta Shepherd, Natalie Shrewsbury, Ann Sprague, Gary Stevens, Rachel Weaver, Nan Wilson.

Thanks also to Joy Master and Mary Malley of Boulder Parks and Recreation for making this monitoring program possible.

Education Committee Puppet Show a Big Success



Prairie Dog Puppets in Action

One of the prime objectives of our Education Committee this year has been to design and set up an ecosystem puppet show for elementary school children. Maureen Lawry and Mary Balzer have created a story about life on the short-grass prairie, as this is one of the most endangered ecosystems. The main puppet characters are prairie dogs (a grandmother and a grandchild), keystone species on the prairie. Other animals that they might encounter in the prairie dog colony appear on stage as well: a burrowing owl, a horned lizard, a harvester ant, a snake, and a black-footed ferret.

During the action the two prairie dogs sometimes move below stage level into their "underground burrow" and discuss their life and its risks by means of a shadow-puppet technique. Many boys and girls seem to particularly favor the coyote and the ferret, because of their potential for drama among the prairie dogs.

The show has been presented in classrooms, libraries, and other public venues to an always-enthusiastic and curious group of children. Their take-away impressions appear to be mostly in the desired range (e.g., "I learned that prairie dogs are important to other life."). Some are more endearingly unpredictable: "I used to think that they were just dogs that dig and dig." "It taught me new things, and it was funny." In response to a question about what other animals might be found in a prairie dog colony, one child brightly answered, "zebras."

Our education specialists hope to expand this popular show to a sort of ecosystem series, perhaps tackling plains/riparian or ponderosa/pine woodlands in the future. We would be grateful for any help in procuring grants towards this goal.

– Linda Andes-Georges

BOULDER COUNTY WILDLIFE INVENTORY, JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2009

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

The beginning of a new year usually brings out birders who wish to record species for their annual lists, and 2009 was no exception. The unusually mild weather provided additional incentive. There was more open water in the county than is normal for January, and large numbers of gulls were reported. As these birds seem to visit many different reservoirs during the day, then return to a select few at night (most notably Valmont and Macintosh Reservoirs), it is difficult to estimate total numbers. **Ring-billed Gulls** were reported in the thousands. The next most common gull was **Herring Gull** with 52 reported in January. All the remaining gulls can be considered unusual and required careful observation among the large mixed flocks of gulls. The remaining six species of gull reported were **Mew Gull**, **California Gull** (less usual in winter), **Thayer's Gull**, **Lesser Black-backed Gull**, **Great Black-backed Gull** and **Glaucous Gull**, bringing the total number of gull species seen to eight. Usually February is the peak time for gull viewing, but the mild weather seems to have moved this event to January this year.

A field trip to Valmont Reservoir in the middle of January not only provided good gull viewing but also produced many species of grebes and ducks. **White-winged Scoters** were reported in several locations (it is not clear whether these were all the same or different birds). This species was last reported in 2007. Other less usual ducks included **Greater Scaup** and **Long-tailed Duck**. Stern's Lake in southern Boulder County produced many different species of geese including **Greater White-fronted Goose**, **Ross's Goose** and **Snow Goose**. Blue-phase **Ross' Goose** and blue-phase **Snow Goose** were reported as well as the more standard white geese.

Mountain species of birds were also well reported, partly due to the Indian Peaks winter bird count (IP), and partly due to the many feeder watchers who frequented the Fawnbrook Inn in Allenspark. A **Common Redpoll** reported in the foothills was the first report of this species since 2005. A single **Band-tailed Pigeon** in Allenspark was reported throughout both months and is our first record for this species in January and February. All three species of Rosy Finches were reported with 2 **Black Rosy Finch**, 80 **Gray-crowned Rosy Finch** including many Hepburn's, and 450 **Brown-capped Rosy Finch** in Allenspark. What was interesting was that birders had wildly different numbers of birds seen with **Gray-crowned Rosy Finch** sometimes outnumbering the **Brown-capped Rosy Finch**.

Other less usual winter sightings included Short-eared Owl, Winter Wren, Hermit Thrush, American Pipit, Great-tailed Grackle and Common Grackle. Mountain Bluebirds were reported in both January and February. Although the sighting on February 28th would be typical for returning spring migrants, it is not clear whether the January sighting was of migrants or of wintering birds. Altogether 101 bird species were seen in January and 90 in February. This was a respectable total for January, and average for February. More extended coverage of the county in February would probably have produced more species. For the full listing of observed species go to www.boulderaudubon.org/inventory.htm.

CONTRIBUTORS to the January-February Inventory

Linda Andes-Georges, Alan Bell, Mike and Mary Blatchley, Ron Bolton, Julia Bond, Jessica Brauch, Alex & Gillian Brown, Mark Chavez, Carol Cushman, Eric De Fonso, Todd Deininger, Gene Ellis, Warren Finch, Bill Fink, Ted Floyd, Steve Frye, Peter Gent, Brian Guarante, Paula Hansley, Thomas Heinrich, Chuck Hundertmark, Steve Jones, Bill Kaempfer, Nick Komar, Bill Kunz, Chishun Kwong, Mark Miller, Gene and Lynn Monroe, Sharon Norfleet, Christian Nunes, George Oetzel, Tom Parchman, Chris Petruzzo, Nathan Pieplow, Peter Plage, Suzi Plooster, Rolf, Bill Schmoker, Scott Severs, Tim Smart, Walter Szeliga, Joyce Takamine, Oakleigh Thorne, Knut Waagan, David J. Waltman, Tom Wilberding, Cole Wild, Wild Bird Center, Bob Zilly, Eric Zorawowicz.

CONTRIBUTORS to the March-April Inventory

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BOULDER COUNTY WILDLIFE INVENTORY, MARCH - APRIL 2009

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

It is exciting every year to see the transition from winter to spring reflected in the bird population. April was particularly well reported with many birders out in the field looking for returning and unusual migrants. Some of the best days for birding occur when spring snowstorms arrive, forcing migrating birds to the ground to wait out the storm. There were numerous reports from the snowstorm in the middle of April (April 16 and 17) of both common and unusual species. It was also noticeable how the birds changed on a daily basis with 105 **White-faced Ibis** at Boulder Reservoir one day, and only a single ibis left the following day. There were two well documented reports of **Glossy Ibis** among the many **White-faced Ibis** in the county. These are notoriously difficult species to differentiate, as are **Rusty Blackbird** and **Brewer's Blackbird** in breeding plumage. However, the general consensus seems to have been that there was a **Rusty Blackbird** at Boulder Reservoir.

The most unusual species reported was a **Black Phoebe** at Walden Ponds. This is only the second report for the wildlife inventory since it started in 1979; the previous sighting was in 1988 over twenty years ago. Unfortunately, it did not linger although many birders looked for it. One rarity brought in by the spring snowstorm of April 16 and 17 was a female **Vermilion Flycatcher** at Walden Ponds which several birders managed to see. This is the fourth report of **Vermilion Flycatcher** for the wildlife inventory. Interestingly, the previous reports have been in May, June and December so there seems to be no consistency as to the best time to look for this unusual species. A **Sage Sparrow**, also found at Walden Ponds, was the first seen since 2005. Other less usual sightings included **Chukar** (last seen in 2007), **White-winged Dove** and **Short-eared Owl**.

Shorebird migration was well underway in the second half of April and nearly all our regularly occurring species were reported. Good sightings included **Semipalmated Plover**, **Black-necked Stilt**, **Whimbrel**, **Long-billed Curlew**, **Semipalmated Sandpiper** and **Western Sandpiper**. Seven gull species were reported over the two months with **Mew Gull** being seen both months. Duck numbers steadily declined as most of our resident winter ducks migrated north for the summer; the most unusual sighting was the continued presence of two **White-winged Scoters** on Baseline Reservoir. Warbler migration was only just getting started at the end of April but unusual sightings included **Northern Parula**, two **Black-throated Gray Warblers** and a **Black-and-White Warbler**. **Solitary Vireo** was reported in March and **Cassin's Vireo** in April. Sightings of **Cassin's Vireo** seem to be equally split between spring and fall migration; there have been significantly more sightings of **Cassin's Vireo** than there have of **Blue-headed Vireo** since the species were split over a decade ago. However, both these vireos were seen more than a month earlier than previous spring sightings.

In summary, March was a very poorly reported month with only 96 bird species observed. However, April made up for this by having 164 species, which is above average even if it does not rival last year's record high of 179 species. The number of species was not helped by a lack of reporting of common species such as **White-throated Swift**, **American Dipper** and **Brewer's Blackbird**.

On the Wing and the BCAS Budget

Printing and mailing costs to send five issues per year of *On the Wing* to about 1200 addresses are about \$6000, roughly half of the BCAS budget. Usable funds received from National Audubon contribute less than \$600 to support OTW and our other programs. The rest has to be raised locally through local memberships, food coupon sales, grants, and special projects.

Like other print media, we're looking at ways to reduce costs without impacting the quality of the newsletter.

You can help:

- Opt out of paper copies and read online. (Use the form on p. 8 or email via www.boulderaudubon.org)
- Support the chapter by becoming a local member.

The Board is considering cost-saving options that likely will be presented in the November issue of OTW.



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Efficiency: Low-cost Energy

Steven Chu, the U.S. Secretary of Energy, recognizes that improving energy efficiency offers enormous benefits for U.S. energy security and as one component of a policy to limit climate change. He says that energy-saving investments quickly pay for themselves in lower energy bills: "Energy efficiency isn't just low hanging fruit; it's fruit lying on the ground."

Of course, there is more to obtaining major benefits from energy efficiency than designing better light bulbs and refrigerators. An 8-page article in the 14 August *Science Magazine** delves into the issues involved in great detail.

A major problem is that there are many perverse incentives for avoiding efficiency improvements.

- The most efficient "Energy Star" appliances are usually aimed at high-end customers. They're manufactured in low volumes and come with additional features that drive up the price, giving a clear signal that these are not appliances that the store expects most customers to buy. However, if Wal-Mart and Costco were to announce that they would only carry Energy Star, the more efficient appliances might become both standard and less expensive.
- In many cases, purchase decisions are made by people who don't pay the bills for energy usage. A prime example is that landlords generally minimize up-front costs, because they don't pay the monthly utility bills.
- A similar situation applies in many businesses. For example, the IT department buys computers, but facilities is responsible for energy bills. IT has no incentive to seek efficiency.
- Many cable-TV set-top boxes consume about 40 watts continuously, which is more than an efficient refrigerator. Cable companies have no incentive to make them more efficient.
- Buildings are responsible for 40% of U.S. energy use. Yet, according to Amory Lovins, of the Rocky Mountain Institute, architects, engineers, builders, and maintenance workers are "systematically rewarded for inefficiency and penalized for efficiency." Builders are trained to satisfy the minimal standards of construction codes, but they rarely exceed them.

There is a lot of interest in ways to influence people's energy-using behavior. A crisis is undesirable and can temporarily be very effective. Brazil cut its power consumption 20% in 6 weeks in response to a 2001 crisis. Longer-term approaches using the results of behavioral science are being investigated.

The Sacramento Municipal Utility District began an experiment in competitive energy saving in April 2008. 35,000 randomly selected customers received informa-

tion in their utility bills showing how their usage compared with their neighbors. The typical customer responded by reducing consumption by about 2%.

Feedback is another approach. Just as Prius owners are generally very happy with their fuel-consumption display, homeowners may respond to the instant feedback made possible by "smart meters" that record every spike or dip in electricity use. As Boulder is already an experimental site for the "smart grid," we may also be among the first places that this is tried. As you might expect, Google is among the companies that may be involved in delivering the information.

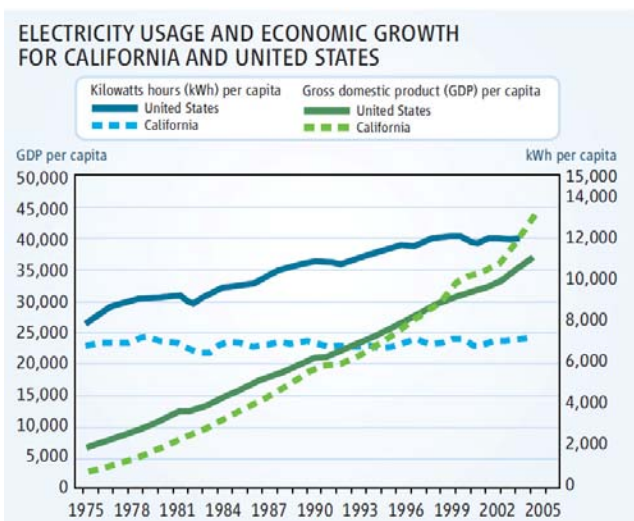
The California Example

Thirty-five years ago, in Berkeley, CA., Arthur Rosenfeld set up a new research division at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (LBNL) devoted to energy efficiency. Then-Governor Jerry Brown and state regulatory agencies adopted Rosenfeld's ideas with astonishing speed. California canceled planned nuclear power plants, passed path-breaking efficiency standards for refrigerators and buildings, and ordered electric utilities to spend money persuading their customers to use less power.

The effect of this continued emphasis on efficiency has been that per capita electricity usage in California has remained flat over the past 30 years. Total energy use has grown with the population, of course.

Recent calculations suggest that the state's energy policies can take credit for only a quarter of California's lower per capita electricity use. Increasing urbanization and high prices for energy and land that drove heavy industry out of the state are also important factors.

A sobering alternative viewpoint: "The real potential of energy efficiency is not going to be realized until we get away from the idea that it has to pay for itself," says Alan Sanstad, a LBNL associate of Rosenfeld's.



* www.sciencemag.org/cgi/reprint/325/5942/804.pdf

The Traveling Birder – 2009

J.D.Birchmeier

In late June, some of our extended family traveled to Sicily for a family reunion and to investigate some of my wife's roots. On the way, we spent a couple of days in Paris going and London coming back.

In Paris, the skies were full of Common Swifts. While the ladies went to some museums, I went to Versailles on the underground to visit the gardens (gardens are free, they charge for the palace). The grounds contained European Coot, Wood Pigeon (all over Europe), Song Thrush and Grey Wagtail; House Martins had several mud nests under the eaves of the Palace itself. A lot of other birds were in the forests surrounding the gardens, but my American birdsong ear is unreliable!

Then we flew to Palermo, met other family members, and caught a bus to San Vito lo Capo – a small beach town on the northeast coast of Sicily. Using bread crumbs for bait, I successfully lured several Stock Doves, a single Sardinian Warbler and Tree Sparrows to the wall surrounding the apartment patio. Euro Magpies and Collared Doves were seen often. In our travels around the island and in between some excellent meals and good drink (we were warned not to drink any city water in San Vito) I saw European Merlin, Red-rumped Swallows, and a batch of singing Cirl Buntings (at Agrigento). Being on the coast, Yellow-legged Gulls passed over frequently; the sea was surprisingly sterile – that was it for seabirds.

In London, Jackdaws and Wood Pigeons were so common that a rock tossed over your shoulder had a good chance of nailing a couple, and every pond contained a few Mute Swans and some bird the English called a Ma-Lard, but one of the excellent gardens had European Robins (a warbler) feeding. While the ladies went shopping the next day, I took a train to the suburbs, met up with Joan Thompson (found via www.birdingpals.com) and we were off! Joan's a twitcher (serious birder and lister) and does a couple of the breeding Atlases, so we went around for 5 hours looking over her areas. Reed Bunting, Reed Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Common Whitethroat and Willow Warbler were in her "overgrown field, open space" area. Off to the marsh and lake for Greylag Goose, Great Crested Grebe, Euro Gadwall, Pochard, Tufted Duck, more House Martins, and Euro Barn Swallow. Then another city park and Pied Wagtail, a very lucky Little Owl in plain sight, Jay, Yellowhammer, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Chaffinch, Cormorant, and Winnet. I bought lunch at a pub in the country down a road that was 8 feet wide max, and while we were drinking our bitter, a Common Pheasant walked across the lawn and Green Finches visited the bird feeder. One last stop for raptors yielded a Winnet, Red Kite and Euro Kestrel on the way back to the train. Twenty lifers for one day isn't bad, eh?

GROCERY COUPONS SUPPORT BCAS

Every time you buy food (or wine or beer), you could be supporting this chapter and its goals of backyard habitat creation, schoolroom programs for kids, and protection of important bird areas in our own county.

Cards and certificates are used exactly like cash. You are whisked through the check-out line as though you were handing over greenbacks. Every \$100 you spend puts \$5 or \$10 into the BCAS piggybank for our local chapter needs at no cost to you.

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Coupons are always available at chapter meetings, the fourth Tues. of each month. Bring your checkbook!

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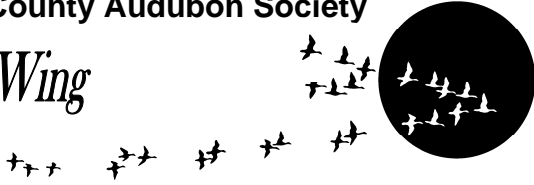


European Barn Swallow nest in Turkey, 2006

G. Oetzel

Boulder County Audubon Society

On The Wing



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Program Oct 27
Scott Severs
Dazzling Dragonflies and
Damselflies of Boulder County

Support Boulder County Audubon!

Local memberships are an important part of the support that makes this chapter possible. We get very little return from national memberships. (NAS membership is not required for membership in the local chapter.) **Local memberships are for calendar year.** (New memberships will extend through 2010.)

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