



On The Wing

Volume 34, Number 3

Boulder County Audubon Society Newsletter

March-April 2004

CONTENTS

- 2... *On the Wing* Evolves
- ... Cowbird Parasitism
- 3... December Inventory
- ... Susie Mottashed classes
- 4... 2003 Wildlife Inventory
- 5... Internat. Migratory Bird Day
- ... Birdathon May 15-17
- 6... BCAS Mission
- ... Board Meetings
- ... Contribute to OTW
- ... Gray Wolf Management Plan
- 7... Birding Belize
- ... As the West Goes Dry
- 8... Programs & Events

BCAS 4th Tuesday Program Series



Bald Eagle—Susie Mottashed



Mountain Plover—Steve Jones

March 23—7:30 PM

Rocky Mountain Storms, Soaring, and Avian Encounters

Phil Ecklund is a retired United Airlines pilot, a current Boulder County Volunteer Naturalist, and an avid glider pilot and Rocky Mountain weather junkie. He has encountered some interesting avian activity up there in the clouds. He will share some of these stories and observations with us along with the role played by our unique Rocky Mountain storms.

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

April 27—7:30 PM

Rediscovering the North American Prairie

Steve Jones and Ruth Carol Cushman, authors of the new Peterson Field Guide to the North American Prairie.

The prairie holds a mythic place in North America's history and sense of itself. During a period of less than 100 years, most of this magnificent ecosystem was destroyed. While researching their new prairie guidebook, Steve Jones and Ruth Carol Cushman encountered a growing wave of interest in preserving and restoring native grasslands. Steve will present an overview of the status of the prairie, including profiles of prairie preserves from Colorado to Illinois and Manitoba to Texas. Ruth Carol will be available to answer questions and autograph copies of their new book.

Boulder County Ecosystem Symposium

All are invited to this year's Boulder County Ecosystem Symposium on Friday, April 2, at the Boulder Public Library main auditorium. This year's speakers will address issues ranging from butterfly populations to effects of air pollution on alpine ecosystems. Free registration begins at 10 a.m., and talks begin at 10:30. For a complete schedule, visit www.BCNA.org after March 15, or call Bruce Bland, 303-499-8612.

On the Wing is Evolving

In the interests both of producing a more interesting OTW and reducing costs for BCAS, we are planning to publish OTW five times annually, and that each issue will be six or eight pages. The five issues will be Sept, Nov, Jan, Mar, and May. A four-page issue, such as that for Feb this year, has almost no room for discretionary content. An eight-page issue has room for articles of interest and costs less to produce and mail than two shorter issues. (The difference is about \$400 for our mailing list of nearly 1300.)

With greatly reduced support returned to chapters by National Audubon, it's safe to say that every chapter now confronts a serious issue of publication costs. Solutions to this problem vary. Some chapters produce only three paper issues annually and supplement those with email lists. Others accept advertising to help support the newsletter. Still others are experimenting with voluntary electronic distribution.

We have started making an Acrobat (PDF) version of OTW available on www.boulderaudubon.org each month. Because printing and mailing take about a week, the Web edition will usually be available about a week before the print edition arrives in the mail. The Web edition also will have some color features.

With this change, it is feasible for Chapter members to opt out of "snail mail" distribution of OTW. Email reminders would be sent when new editions are available. The drawback to this system is that it is *very* easy to ignore email reminders. (You wouldn't want to miss an issue, would you?) However, we are interested in experimenting. If you want to join this experiment, we need your name, preferably exactly as it appears on the OTW mailing label, address (to distinguish possible duplicate names), and the email address to which you'd like the reminder sent. Send this information to info@boulderaudubon.org. Of course, email addresses sent for this purpose will not be distributed or used in any other way.

Electronic distribution raises some logistical issues in managing multiple mailing lists. However, we think those can be managed over time. Any computer-savvy person who would like to volunteer to help with this process will certainly be welcomed.



Reduce Cowbird Parasitism

In her presentation to BCAS on Feb 24, Heather Swanson indicated a couple of things we can do to reduce nest parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds in the ponderosa forests near the Front Range cities. One of her studies was of parasitism on Plumbeous Vireo nests in ponderosa forests near Boulder. She found that 50% of the nests near town were parasitized and produced no vireo chicks. More distant nests were less often victimized.

The reason for this is that the cowbirds overwinter in town and feed in the morning. They then fly into the mountains midday and find nests for their eggs. The return in the afternoon to feed some more and stay the night. This cycle can be made more difficult if there is less food for the cowbirds in town. Heather suggested two strategies:

1. Watch for cowbirds at feeders during the nesting season, and remove the feeders if cowbirds are using them.
2. Don't cut the lawn too short. Tall grass in lawns makes it more difficult to forage for bugs, and it also helps to conserve water.

Boulder County Audubon Society 2004

Officers

President **Barbara Beall** (303)665-6044
 Recording Secretary **Beverly Baker** (303)666-1972
 Treasurer **Curtis Williams** (303)494-5071

Standing Committees

Membership Chairs **Bob & Gail Turner** (303)499-2669
 Newsletter Editors **George & Marti Oetzel** (303)543-3712
 Conservation/Legislation Chair **Linda Tipton** (303)823-0926
 Programs **New chair needed**
 Field Trips **Wes Sears** (303)499-4751
 Education: **New chair needed**
 Bird-A-Thon Team Coordinator **Bill Kaempfer** (303)443-3175

Board of Directors

Linda Tipton (303)823-0926
Bob Turner (303) 499-2669
Scott Severs (303)541-0784
Tom Van Zandt (Emeritus) (303)443-9418

On The Wing E-mail: nature@birdhike.com

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☺ **New!** ☺

Look for *On the Wing* in PDF format
 on: <http://www.boulderaudubon.org>
 Available before you receive your copy in the mail.

December Wildlife Inventory

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

E-mail gillianbro@yahoo.com

Without the Boulder Christmas Bird Count (BCBC), the reports for December would have been few. New species for the year were **Ross's Goose**, **Sharp-tailed Grouse** and **Long-eared Owl**. **Sharp-tailed Grouse** has recently been introduced in the county, and was a new species for the inventory. Unseasonal birds included **Greater Yellowlegs**, **Band-tailed Pigeon**, **American Pipit**, **Common Yellowthroat**, **Green-tailed Towhee** and **Savannah Sparrow**. Six different species of gull were reported including **Mew Gull** and **Lesser Black-backed Gull**. **Trumpeter Swans** continued to stay in the county. Two **Winter Wrens** were seen by many observers. Other good sightings included **Long-tailed Duck**, **Brown Thrasher**, and **Rusty Blackbird**. A **Gray-crowned Rosy Finch** seen in Niwot was most unusual. Altogether 115 bird species were seen in December, of which 112 were seen on the Christmas Count. The complete listing is at www.boulderaudubon.org/inventory.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THE DECEMBER INVENTORY

Alex & Gillian Brown, Robert Brown, Gene Ellis, Peter Gent, Steve Jones, Ellen Klaver, Gene and Lynn Monroe, George and Marti Oetzel, Bill Schmoker, Randy Siebert, John Tumasonis, Bill Tweit, David J. Waltman, Chris Wood, Eric Zorawowicz.



Classes with Susie Mottashed

Susie makes the wonderful sketches you see in *On the Wing* almost every month. She will instruct both of these classes.

CREATE YOUR OWN NATURE JOURNAL

This fun 2-session class will teach you how to record what you observe in nature through field notes and sketches. Learn how to improve your observation skills and field-sketching techniques. Classroom instruction and a field trip are included. Bring an 8 1/2 x 11 sketchbook, pens & pencils. (Min 4 students-max 8) **Cost:** \$40.00

Wild Bird Center (Longmont Store)

1834 N. Main St, Longmont Call to sign up. (303) 458-3204

May 6 (Thurs) 6pm-8:30pm (classroom)

May 8 (Sat) 8am-10:00am (field trip) Cottonwood Marsh at Walden Ponds



Western Meadowlark—Susie Mottashed

BIRD SKETCHING 101

This 2-session class focuses on teaching you how to sketch birds. We will discuss bird anatomy, proportion, perspective, values and line quality. Also included is a field trip. The class is designed for beginners. Bring an 8 1/2 x 11 sketchbook & pencils (Min 4 students - max 8). Get ready to sketch and have fun! **Cost:**\$40.00

Wild Birds Unlimited

3003 Walnut St, Boulder

Call to sign up (303) 443-9659

April 22 (Thurs) 6pm-8:30pm (classroom)

April 24 (Sat) 8:00am-10:00am

(field trip Dowdy Draw Trail)

Wild Bird Center (Longmont store)

1834 N. Main St. Longmont

Call to sign up (303) 485-3204

June 10 (Thurs) 6pm-8:30pm (classroom)

June 12 (Sat) 8:00am-10:00am (field trip TBA)

2003: An Overview of the Boulder County Wildlife Inventory

After having a record year for bird species in 2002, it was to be expected that 2003 would be disappointing by comparison. The surprise is that, although we saw 18 less bird species than in 2002, this was still our second best year ever. This was despite a string of low monthly totals due to a lack of reporting. In fact, July, August and September were all record low months for the number of bird species. However, January 2003 had a record high number. Rarities were well reported; it was the more common birds that tended to be missed. Five bird species were new for the inventory; they were Sharp-tailed Grouse (an introduced bird but still counted), Eurasian Collared Dove (a not unexpected addition), Purple Martin, Grace’s Warbler (not only was this new but it also bred in the county) and McCown’s Longspur.

Altogether, 290 avian, 30 mammalian, 8 reptilian and 3 amphibian species were reported to the Boulder County Wildlife Inventory.

Species reported in 2003 but not in 2002

Tundra Swan
Black Scoter
Sharp-tailed Grouse
Red-necked Grebe
Dunlin
Sabine’s Gull
Arctic Tern
Eurasian Collared Dove
Inca Dove
Yellow-billed Cuckoo
Barn Owl
Flammulated Owl
Northern Saw-whet Owl
Purple Martin
Gray-cheeked Thrush
Magnolia Warbler
Grace’s Warbler
Scarlet Tanager
Lapland Longspur
McCown’s Longspur
Black Rosy Finch

Species reported in 2002 but not in 2003

Chukar
Zone-tailed Hawk
Black-bellied Plover
Snowy Plover
Whimbrel
Pectoral Sandpiper
Laughing Gull
Black-legged Kittiwake
Caspian Tern
Short-eared Owl
Black Swift
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Red-headed Woodpecker
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Eastern Phoebe
White-eyed Vireo
Juniper Titmouse
Bewick’s Wren
Wood Thrush
Varied Thrush
Bohemian Waxwing
Golden-winged Warbler
Black throated Blue Warbler
Black throated Green Warbler
Bay-breasted Warbler
Prothonotary Warbler
Worm-eating Warbler
Field Sparrow
Black throated Sparrow
Sage Sparrow
Baird’s Sparrow
Northern Cardinal
Dickcissel
Eastern Meadowlark
Orchard Oriole
Baltimore Oriole
Purple Finch
White-winged Crossbill
Common Redpoll

Month-by-Month Avian Species Totals

January	83	84	99	100	100	90	90	96	89	98	103
February	88	89	98	88	90	75	97	86	91	89	95
March	104	98	116	107	112	90	120	96	97	115	100
April	144	116	140	137	146	151	137	134	155	170	150
May	210	192	229	207	208	205	221	199	203	243	211
June	156	143	150	139	144	171	164	164	153	159	155
July	157	141	121	124	147	167	150	153	132	173	113
August	157	137	113	125	152	147	139	166	125	177	111
September	164	172	152	150	166	157	165	178	146	172	145
October	135	131	99	110	127	129	118	139	124	149	102
November	95	101	110	103	97	113	101	114	118	112	113
December	103	111	103	111	102	111	114	116	118	125	115
Year Totals	281	266	273	264	270	275	286	279	276	308	290

International Migratory Bird Day—May 8, 2004

The IMBD 2004 artwork by Ram Papish depicts a variety of birds that nest colonially. The two sides of the piece roughly portray "northern" and "southern" birds.



Birds of a feather... nesting together. Congregatory nesting behavior has been a successful strategy evolutionarily for 1 in 8 species of bird

worldwide. Many colonial-nesting species are aquatic birds, such as frigatebirds, herons, egrets, gulls, terns, and puffins, but several landbirds such as swallows and blackbirds are also colonial. Colony sites take many forms: mud nests plastered on vertical surfaces; burrows riddling a seaside cliff, a stretch of depressions in a sandy beach, or bulky stick nests forming a woodland rookery; what defines them is the close proximity and social behavior of the colony members.

Why do birds gather together to nest? It is believed that coloniality evolved in response to shortages in suitable, safe nesting sites within range of food sources. Birds nesting in colonies may enjoy "safety in numbers," for example, when colony members cooperate to chase off predators. Also, colonial nesters may learn about spotty and scattered food supplies from observing their neighbors. Congregatory nesting behavior does have disadvantages: colonies may actually attract predators, foster higher rates of disease or parasitism, and members may experience increased competition for nest materials and food.

Coloniality also increases population risks by concentrating birds in a limited area. In other words, a single event or incident can affect the nesting success of a large number of birds. There have always been natural threats to colonies such as storms and predators, but human activities have brought many new threats to colonies. The introduction of exotic species to breeding areas, disturbance of colonies, and outright loss of breeding habitat threaten many species of colonial birds.

Fortunately, colonial birds and their colonies are often highly visible and impressive, and thus can garner positive public attention and support. Join other IMBD celebrants in 2004 as we help the public get to know colonial-nesting birds and the ways people can help them survive!

IMBD in Boulder

Saturday, May 8; 7:30 to 9:30 AM at Walden Ponds

Celebrate International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) with the Wild Bird Center, the Boulder Bird Club, and Boulder County Audubon Society. There will be birdwalks around the ponds, and a Big Sit at the picnic shelter, where we saw over 60 species from one spot in a snowstorm last year! Come and learn more about migratory birds while eating free goodies and drinking shade grown coffee. IMBD T-shirts, posters, and shade grown coffee will be available for a donation, with all proceeds to benefit the bird conservation projects of the Boulder County Audubon Society. All ages are welcome. Please call 303-442-1322 for more details.

Join the 2004 Birdathon!!

The annual BCAS Birdathon will be held this year on Saturday May 15 through Monday May 17.

The Bird-a-thon is the biggest fundraiser of the year for BCAS and also represents the peak of birding activity locally.

The birdathon offers a great opportunity to bird Boulder County intensively at the height of spring migration. If you have the inclination to see 100 or more species in one day, here's your chance.

Last year, the top team actually found and identified 165 species!

Participation in the Birdathon is open to anyone at any level of birding skill. Teams consisting of three or four birders go out into the field on any one of the three days during the Birdathon for the full day and try to find and identify as many species of birds as they can inside Boulder County.

If you are interested in participating, contact Bill Kaempfer at Kaempfer@colorado.edu or 303-492-6923 to ask about signing up. You may form your own team from your birding friends or ask to be placed on a team.

Each team is asked to generate a minimum of \$50 in pledges, but the sky's the limit. Individuals and teams compete for trophies and prizes. Categories include most species seen, most species seen without using cars and most money raised.

BCAS Board Meetings

At the Feb 17 meeting, the Board voted to give \$2500 to the local Audubon at Home program. (See the Feb *On the Wing*..) Funds will come from the dissolution of the Colorado Audubon Council. One-eleventh of its residual treasury will be distributed to each of Colorado’s Audubon chapters. Projects envisioned include:

- Developing a habitat guide
- Workshops
 - “How-to” projects
 - Developing observational skills
- Stewardship awards

The Board also voted \$100 to support the BCNA Ecosystem Symposium. (See page 1.)

Board meetings are usually on the third Tuesday, one week before the monthly general program, and are open to all who want to attend. The next Board meeting is March 16 at 6:45 PM. Call Barb Beall (303-665-6044) or Scott Severs (303-541-0784) for location. (We hope this issue of OTW will arrive before the meeting.)

Contribute to *On the Wing*!

In our new, expanded format, there is room for more interesting articles, probably including yours. Send contributions to nature@birdhike.com.

Next newsletter deadline is May 3.

Colorado Prepares Gray Wolf Management Plan

The Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW) is in the initial stages of developing a Gray Wolf Management Plan this year and will gather input from the general public before appointing a multi-disciplinary work group to draft a statewide strategy.

Colorado is part of the gray wolf’s native range, but wolves were eradicated from the state by the mid-1930s. Over the past decade, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has reintroduced gray wolves into Wyoming, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico and Arizona, and some observers believe it is only a matter of time before wolves start migrating into Colorado from the north and south.

Researchers say dispersing wolves—especially single male wolves—can travel long distances. To prepare for any future wolf migrations into Colorado, the DOW will gather input from the public during a series of forums this year and set up a multi-disciplinary work group that will develop a draft Wolf Management Plan by the end of August.

“Wolves are a controversial species, and we want everyone to have the opportunity to express their opinions about wolf management in Colorado,” said Gary Skiba, multi-species coordinator for the DOW’s species conservation section.

<http://wildlife.state.co.us/news/press.asp?pressid=2633>

Editorial

What Role for BCAS?

A few months as editor of *On the Wing* has convinced me that BCAS needs to re-examine its mission among Boulder County nature organizations. The functions pursued by most Audubon chapters are divided among three organizations in Boulder County. The Boulder Bird Club sponsors a fine selection of birding trips. The Boulder County Nature Association has active programs of education and research and advises governmental organizations on conservation issues. These are core activities for most Audubon chapters. BCAS needs to define more clearly a role for itself that complements the activities of BBC and BCNA.

Perhaps it is because of the success of these other organizations that Boulder Audubon has a shortage of leaders. The education and program committees have lacked chairs for some time. Our president is planning to move to Iowa this summer; there is no vice president. To survive, BCAS needs new, committed leadership with a vision for its role and the energy to organize relevant programs. Those who care about the organization must embark on a serious program to recruit board members and committee chairs. (If anyone reading this is willing to step forward, you will certainly be welcomed!)

I’m told that the Board used to hold an annual retreat to discuss goals of the organization. This seems like a good time to schedule another. However, because there are so many vacancies at present, it’s imperative include potential recruits as well.

Comments? Send email to info@boulderaudubon.org or call any board member.

G. Oetzel



Reflections on a Week of Birding in Belize at the End of February

Wes & Bev Sears

This great trip began at Birds Eye View Lodge near the Audubon managed Crooked Tree Preserve, with a nesting Vermilion Flycatcher in the bougainvillea under our lodge window. When the male was near the nest, it was hard to distinguish it from the bougainvillea blossoms. They are that bright and beautiful.

On an early morning boat trip around the eight-mile Crooked Tree lagoon, we found 65 species, including five species of Kingfisher. One of these, the American Pygmy Kingfisher, is no larger than a sparrow. We also saw several aptly named Boat-Billed Herons hiding in dense foliage. These are night hunters the same as our Night-Herons. Many people in this area have had to stop raising cattle due to heavy losses to jaguars.

On a boat trip down the New River to Lamani Archeological Ruins, we saw a nesting Jabiru Stork. Everything about this bird is gigantic, especially its black head, neck, bill and eight-foot snow-white wing span. Seen also on this trip were two sleeping Nightjars, the Lesser Nighthawk and a Common Potoo. Potoos are truly phenomenal. They are exactly the color and shape of the bleached, broken, wood branch that they cling to--perfectly camouflaged.

Then there are the Scarlet Macaws--the ultimate designer bird--red, blue, yellow and white, three-foot long, and they never stop squawking. We watched six feeding within good binocular range.

Another day we encountered several anorexic Fork-Tailed Flycatchers. They are so skinny, they're almost two dimensional. We also saw Montezuma Oropendulas at several places and counted eighteen nests in one tree. These birds utter a loud "gobble" as they do a fake fall from a perch--comical mating behavior.

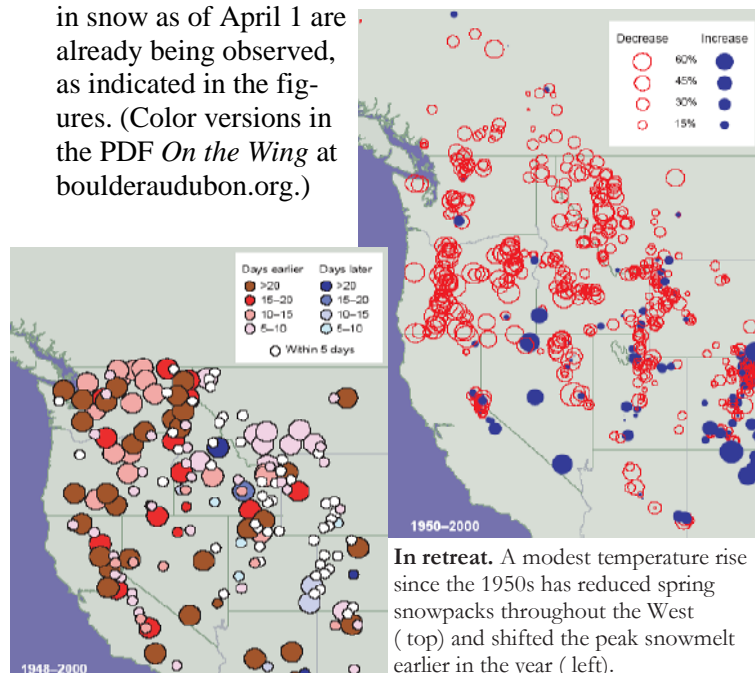
On our last day at DuPlooy's, a fine resort on the Macal River near San Ignacio, we saw a pair of Keel-Billed Toucans perched in sunlight about 30 feet above us. Wow! Every country should have a National Bird like this. Fully one-third of this big, black bird is yellow bill with highlights of blue, red and peach.

Belize is a small country, the size of New Jersey, with a population similar to Boulder County's. One-half of its land and water have been set aside as parks, preserves and sanctuaries. Audubon is very active there. The people are a friendly mix of Mayan, Creole, Mestizos, and

As the West Goes Dry

[Science Magazine, Feb 20, 2004, 1124-27]

If the present warming trend continues, as most scientists believe it will, much of the West will experience reduced summer runoff, even if total annual precipitation increases. In the coastal states, much of the snowpack accumulates at relatively low altitudes, where a small increase of average temperature produces earlier runoff. Earlier snow melting and reduced water storage in snow as of April 1 are already being observed, as indicated in the figures. (Color versions in the PDF *On the Wing* at boulderaudubon.org.)



In retreat. A modest temperature rise since the 1950s has reduced spring snowpacks throughout the West (top) and shifted the peak snowmelt earlier in the year (left).

The authors emphasize that the storage lost from earlier melting is greater than any conceivable storage in dams. Reduced summer water flows will affect agriculture, electric power generation, and urban uses, and will require changes in the distribution and usage of water. Strangely, water conservation through such measures as xeriscape landscaping is scarcely mentioned.

The effect of small temperature increases on the snowpack in Colorado is less than near the coast, because most of our snowpack accumulates at higher altitude, where it's colder. Scientists are much more confident about predictions of average temperature in the future than they are about precipitation, which is our major concern in Colorado.

Garifuna with a good sprinkling of Caucasian entrepreneurs and Mennonite farmers. They use the dollar, speak English, drive on the right side of the road, and get no snow. What more could one ask?



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www.boulderaudubon.org

Program March 23
7:30 PM

Rocky Mountain Storms, Soaring,
and Avian Encounters - Phil Ecklund

Field Trips & Events *Spring 2004*

April 2—Friday. **Boulder County Ecosystem Symposium.** See page 1 for description.

Apr. 24—Saturday. **Returning Wetland Birds** with Barb Beall. Barb, Boulder County Audubon Society President, is an excellent birder, and April is the prime month for wetland birds. Meet at 7:30 at Cottonwood Marsh parking lot at Walden Ponds which is off 75th St. near Jay Road. For more information, call Barb at 303-665-6044.

May 8—Saturday. **Raptor Nest Tour** with Wayne & Dianna Johnston. Meet leaders at 9:00 AM at the Niwot Park N Ride Hwy 119 & Niwot Rd. All day trip, bring lunch. Nests we've seen in the past include: Bald Eagles, Golden Eagles, Prairie Falcon, Great Horned Owl (fledglings on branches) Red-tailed hawks, Swainson's Hawks, Osprey, and Burrowing Owls (if fledglings are out). For more information call 303-682-5662

May 8—Saturday. **International Migratory Bird Day.** 7:30 a.m. to 9:30 AM Walden Ponds
Celebrate International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) with the Wild Bird Center, the Boulder Bird Club, and Boulder County Audubon Society. There will be birdwalks around the ponds, and a Big Sit at the picnic shelter, where we saw over 60 species from one spot in a snowstorm last year! Come and learn more about migratory birds while eating free goodies and drinking shade grown coffee. IMBD T-shirts, posters, and shade grown coffee will be available for a donation, with all proceeds to benefit the bird conservation projects of the Boulder County Audubon Society. All ages are welcome. Please call 303-442-1322 for more details. (See page 5 for more about IMBD.)

May 22—Saturday. **Fifth Annual Lyons Walkabout** with master birder Ray Davis ("Davis")
Be prepared to stretch out a bit and see some great birds. Last year there were the Canyon Wren, Lewis Woodpecker and Pinon Jays to name a few. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Lyons Park and Ride lot just south of the only traffic light in town. Return about noon.