

On The Wing

Volume 35, Number 5

Boulder County Audubon Society Newsletter

Nov-Dec 2005

Birds of Special Concern Update

Steve Jones

Each year the Boulder County Nature Association (BCNA) compiles nesting reports for Boulder County Avian Species of Special Concern (Hallock and Jones 1999). This past summer, more than 30 volunteers from BCNA, Boulder County Audubon, Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks, and Boulder County Parks and Open Space submitted reports. Here's a summary of the status of our most endangered birds, those listed as "rare and declining" on the list:

Northern Bobwhite: One adult was seen in the Gunbarrel Hill area, but no nesting activity was confirmed, and we haven't received reports of nesting since the 1980s. Boulder County is on the periphery of the Northern Bobwhite's North American range, and this game bird may have been introduced to our area by hunting clubs. So its current "rare" status may more accurately reflect its natural affinities than did the "common breeder" status given it by Junius Henderson in 1908.

American Bittern: Calling individuals were heard at Boulder Reservoir, Coot Lake, Walden Ponds, and the University of Colorado south campus. This marsh bird appears to be on the increase in Boulder County, possibly due to protection of cattail marshes and other wetlands in the Boulder Creek drainage.

Northern Harrier: One territorial pair was observed at Boulder Reservoir, but for the first time in several years, we found no young. Harriers were once considered a fairly common breeding species in our area (Henderson 1908). Fragmentation of native grasslands and wetlands has apparently pushed them to the brink of extirpation from Boulder County.

Long-eared Owl: One adult was seen in Spring Gulch area on 25 June. We have received only one nesting report during the past 18 years (2004 at Heil Ranch). This handsome woodland-dweller was once considered the most common large owl in Boulder County (Henderson 1908), but breeding numbers have declined steadily as Great-horned Owl populations have increased. We believe that several pairs may still nest in remote areas of the foothills and mountains.

Burrowing Owl: We received reports of three nesting attempts, with only five young observed. Low fledging rates for Burrowing Owls in Boulder County may result from predation by urban-adapted predators, including great horned owls and automobiles. This once abundant little owl appears to be in serious jeopardy in Boulder County.

Lewis's Woodpecker: No breeding season reports. Classified as a "common breeder" by Junius Henderson (1908), this woodpecker has probably suffered from suppression of natural fire, increased density of ponderosa pine forests, and competition for nest sites in plains riparian woodlands. The only recently documented nest sites have been in Lyons and at Hall Ranch Open Space west of Lyons.

BCAS 4th Tuesday Program Series

November 22, 7:30 PM Galapagos Islands

Dave Sutherland

Since Charles Darwin's visit in 1835, the Galapagos Islands have attracted naturalists in search of the strange, rare and unique. These remote Pacific islands are home to contradictions: marine lizards, equatorial penguins, nocturnal gulls, and giant tortoises. Dave will share slides and surprises from his years on the islands, and will introduce you to some of Galapagos' most charming and unusual inhabitants.

Dave Sutherland has worked for the city of Boulder's OSMP department for nine years as an interpretive naturalist. Many of you will know him from his public nature hikes and school programs. But before coming to Boulder, Dave spent three years working at the Charles Darwin Research Station on Santa Cruz Island. Dave trained the Galapagos tour guides, developed educational programs and wrote a 7th grade science text in Spanish about the islands and their marvels. Dave's interests (which he was able to indulge in Galapagos) include bird watching, native plant gardening, astronomy and hiking.

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) **Red-headed Woodpecker:** No breeding season reports this year, and none since 1990. Primary concerns include competition for nesting sites from European starlings and habitat loss from snag removal.

Loggerhead Shrike: No breeding season reports. According to nineteenth-century naturalist Denis Gale (Betts 1913), this predatory songbird was once "rather common in the dry eastern portions of the county." Sharp population declines throughout the West have been attributed to consumption of contaminated prey and loss of nesting sites (Finch 1992).

Brown Thrasher: No breeding season reports. This species is doing well throughout much of eastern Colorado but appears to have disappeared as a breeder from eastern Boulder County.

Lark Bunting: One adult seen near 79th and Lookout, 28 May. A fairly large flock was observed in July in the Coal Creek area south of Boulder. Lark Buntings were considered "abundant on the dry mesas of the plains" by University of Colorado ornithologist Norman Betts (1913). Small and isolated populations may exist in the Coal Creek grassland conservation area, south of Boulder, at Rock Creek Farm, near Broomfield, and northwest of Longmont.



Lark Bunting—Richard Holmes

Encouraging news this summer in-

cluded reports of a calling Least Bittern (rare) at Walden Ponds in mid-June, two successful Bald Eagle (federal threatened) nests, and six successful Osprey (undetermined status) nests. Cliff-nesting raptors did well this year. Golden Eagles (isolated populations) fledged at least 6 young from at least 6 nests. Prairie Falcons (isolated populations) fledged at least 17 young from at least 5 nests. Peregrine Falcons fledged 8 young from 2 observed nests.

Reporters: Linda Andes-Georges, Bev Baker, Karen Beeman, Alan Bell, Mark Brennan, André Carvalhaes, Linda Cooper, Ruth Carol Cushman, Ted Floyd, Susan Foster, Kevin Grady, Rachel Hoffner, Paula Hansley, Buffy Hastings, Rick Hatfield, Allison Hilf, Diana and Wayne Johnston, Steve Jones, Wayne and Diana Johnston, Bill Kaempfer, Joey Kellner, D. W. King, Cherie Long, Dave Madonna, Joy Master, Denny Morris, Sue Rodriguez-Pastor, Carol Schott, Scott Severs, Dave Sutherland, Heather Swanson, Joyce Takemine, John Tumasonis, Todd Van Dyke, Suzanne Webel, Carl Whitehurst, Chris Yang, Eric Zorawowicz

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Jones, S., and L. Mahoney. 2003. Owls of Boulder County. Boulder County Nature Association.

Boulder County Audubon Society

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Wildlife Inventory

Alex and Gillian Brown (303)494-3042

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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 Jan. 2006 issue is **Thu, Dec 29**. Email address for submissions:

otw@boulderaudubon.org

Wes Sears Memorial Garden Dedicated Under Rainbow Skies

Steve Jones

When despair for the world grows in me and I wake in the night at the least sound in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be, I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the presence of still water And I feel above me the day-blind stars waiting for their light. For a time I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

- Wendell Berry, from *Earth Prayers*, read by Francesca Howell at the dedication

A double rainbow arched over east Boulder as more than 100 friends and activists gathered on September 27 to dedicate the Wes Sears Memorial Garden at the Unitarian Universalist Church. The xeriscape garden was planned and carried out by volunteers from the church and Boulder County Audubon, under the direction of Connie Holsinger, Bev Sears, and Susan Tweit. It is the first Colorado Wildscapes demonstration garden in Colorado and will serve as a model for low-water, wildlife-friendly landscaping. After the dedication, Connie presented a stimulating, user-friendly program on wildscaping and autographed copies of the new Audubon Colorado publication, Colorado Wildscapes, Bringing Conservation Home.

During the dedication, yellow evening-primroses, scarlet penstemons, and russet-red grasses shimmered in the setting sun as Francesca Howell spoke of how much Wes meant to her family, to Boulder County Audubon, and to the greater Boulder community.

"In Wes I knew I had a fellow nature-lover of truly "Deep Ecological" understanding. He not only knew birds, but had a deep sense of all Nature—and I would say that Nature returned that bond."

Wes was a member of the Boulder Unitarian Universalist Church for 43 years, serving at various times as a Board Member, Sunday School teacher, Building and Grounds Committee Chair, and fundraising committee member for three capital campaigns. He served on the Boulder Audubon board for 20 years, spearheading fundraising and volunteer recruitment efforts while also organizing monthly programs and field trips.

Wes is remembered as Boulder Audubon's most enthusiastic welcomer of newcomers and staunchest supporter of volunteer projects Many members recall sight-

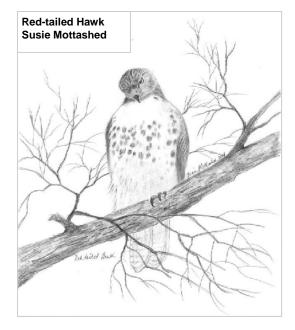
ing their first rare bird while accompanying him on a field trip to Gregory Canyon Sawhill Ponds, Rocky Mountain National Park. It didn't usually take a lot of effort. As Ru Wing recalled, "The birds just seemed drawn to Wes."



Dedication Crowd—C. Holsinger

After Francesca's remarks, the group formed a silent circle to symbolize the coming together of community to plan and dedicate the garden. Long after the ceremony was over, many of us held these words, quoted by Francesca from Ralph Waldo Emerson, close to our hearts:

To laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people and affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics...to appreciate beauty, to find the best in others; to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded.



Admire Boulder County's wintering raptors

Field trips Nov. 19, 2005 and Feb. 4, 2006 See page 5.

UNUSUAL CHRISTMAS OR HANNUKAH GIFTS

Something for your family and friends and Something for Boulder County Audubon

Santa suggests that you consider this list when making your own. Thanksgiving is looming and... you know what's next):

- Purchase the picture-ful Colorado Wildscapes book for everyone you know in the State—or perhaps in the Southwest. Even if your friends don't garden, they will be interested in this lively text, the exciting possibilities for attracting wildlife to their yards, and the tender illustrations by local artist Susie Mottashed. Price: \$12.95 each—get a dozen! You can buy these at chapter meetings, on our chapter website (boulderaudubon.org), or by calling any of the Board members for help.
- Imported Egyptian glass ornaments to add a classy touch to your holiday decorations, or to tickle your friends who love sparklies. These ornaments and perfume bottles are in clear and jewel-toned handblown glass and can be found right on Pearl St. at Art Mart. B.C.A.S. receives a substantial part of the sale; our education and conservation programs will directly benefit. One Audubon member strings these lovely lightcatchers completely across her dining room windows all year-round.
- There is still a limited supply of B.C.A.S. T-shirts from activities in past years. There are what you call a real bargain-basement buy: \$3.00 each. Call Steve Jones or Linda Georges to inquire.

Conservation Issues

Linda Andes-Georges

The following interesting issues are under discussion in our City and County departments:

- Urban Wildlife Management Plan: after years of wrangling about what to do, the city is trying to develop a coordinated policy. Public hearings begin in November (the first before the Environmental Advisory Board on Nov 9). Contact Alice Guthrie of the Environmental Affairs dept. for more information (GuthrieA@ci.boulder.co.us, or tel. 303 441 1915); see also www.boulderwildlifeplan.net. Expect to see this issue in the headlines, because concerns for individual animals, for neighborhood (human) health, for species preservation, and for habitat preservation often produce clashes.
- Trail planning and habitat preservation on City
 Open Space in the Marshall Mesa area: in connection with the over-arching Visitor Plan (already passed), specific planning proceeds in reviewing trails and access southeast

(continued next column)

of the City. These matters are always hotly debated. What wildlife does and where it lives is greatly affected by people and their pets and bikes. See trails proposed by staff and recreation groups) at www.ci.boulder.co.us/openspace under Visitor Plan Trail Study Areas (great maps). Come to the public open house at the Annex (entrance from 75th St. between Arapahoe and Valmont, west side) on Nov. 15, 6 to 8 PM. Let Board members know what you think.

- Commercial use of City Open space is also being discussed. Should non-profits and commercial operations receive equal treatment in obtaining permits for field trips and classes in Habitat Conservation Areas? Second meeting on this matter is Nov. 8 at the Cherry-vale Administration building, 6 to 8 PM.
- Off-trail permits is another policy decision you may want to consider. Who should get permits, how many should be issued, what effect will this have on creation of undesignated trails in low-access (think: high-quality habitat) areas?
- Boulder Feeder Canal Trail: for years, runners and bikers and families have asked for permission to use the Feeder Canal road (used by ditch riders to monitor the canal flow) from Coot Lake north to Rabbit Mountain near Lyons for recreation. Formerly, the water board members opposed this; but this year some consensus is being reached between the board and the city, and a trail may be created on the opposite side of the Canal. However this will not be without negative effects: winter raptor use in the rural areas and prairie dog villages along the route will no doubt be reduced. What position is reasonable? More information can be found at www.ci.boulder.co.us/buildingservices/long_range/ Bldr_Fdr_Canal.htm. Call Jean Gatza of City Planning for more information: 303 441 4907.

For meeting schedules on these topics, check http://www.ci.boulder.co.us/openspace/meetings.htm http://www.boulderwildlifeplan.net

http://www.co.boulder.co.us/openspace/



The Wild Bird Center of Boulder

On 28th Street, South of Canyon. (303)442-1322 www.wildbird.com/bld

"Your Backyard Birding Specialists since 1989"

Boulder County Audubon Field Trips for Nov. 2005—Feb. 2006

Saturday, Nov. 19—Wintering Raptors: Diana and Wayne Johnston (303-682-5662) will lead a driving tour of eastern Boulder County to spot wintering raptors, including bald eagles, golden eagles, ferruginous hawks, and prairie falcons. Meet at 9 a.m. at the Niwot Park 'n Ride (Diagonal Highway and Niwot Road). Bring lunch and plan to return around 3.

Saturday, Dec. 3— Winter Gulls and Ducks: A great tour of Front Range reservoirs. Targets will include Jaegers, Gulls and Ducks. Dress for the weather, and bring water and snacks. Everyone and all skill levels are welcome. Meet at the Niwot Park 'n Ride at 7:30 AM.

Leader: John Vanderpoel, 303-809-9611 or jvandepoel@peregrinevideo.com

Join the Christmas Bird Count!

64th Annual Boulder Christmas Bird Count

This year's Boulder CBC will be on Sunday, December 18. New and experienced birdwatchers alike welcomed, or you can participate as a feeder watcher if you live within the count circle. Potluck compilation to follow at the Foothills Nature Center (at the Wonderland Lake Trailhead.) Contact Bill Schmoker (bill@schmoker.org or 720-201-5749)

Wednesday, December 21, 7 to 10 AM

Annual Winter Solstice Sunrise Hike: Come walk the White Rocks Trail with us. Feel free to bring a thought, poem, or song to share at a short sunrise ceremony at the Boulder Creek bridge. Breakfast afterward at the Garden Gate Cafe in Niwot. Leader: Steve Jones Contact info: Call 303-494-2468 to secure a place at the breakfast table or for more information.

Saturday Jan. 28, 2006, 8 AM until 1 PM White-tailed Ptarmigan Field Trip:

Come 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, baclava or face mask, mittens and over-mitts, 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. Space is limited to 12-15 people so please call or email Joyce to reserve a spot. Leader: Joyce Gellhorn Contact info: 303-442-8123 or jgellhorn@sprynet.com

Saturday Feb. 4, 2006, 9 AM until 1 PM Wintering Raptors: Join Alex and Gillian for a great driving tour of winter raptors on the Colorado plains. We'll also keep our eyes peeled for any other winter birds. Dress for the weather, and bring water and snacks. Everyone and all skill levels are welcome. Meet at Scott Carpenter at 9 AM. Leaders: Alex and Gillian Brown, 303-494-3042

Many thanks to our new field trip coordinator, DeAnna Williams.

Membership Renewal Time— (Or Join BCAS)

If TIME TO RENEW appears on your mailing label, it's that time for you. Please send your check with the form on the last page. You may also join or renew on our Web site, http://www.boulderaudubon.org.

Each year, National Audubon (NAS) returns a small portion of your dues to BCAS. Audubon Colorado asks that we donate most of that to them, which we have done. The end result is that our net from NAS is about \$0.50 per member. To produce and mail each issue of On the Wing costs about \$0.80 per member. Your BCAS local membership eliminates that deficit and helps to support some of our other activities.

You can choose to read only the online edition (www.boulderaudubon.org) and save BCAS some postage. Email your request to otw@boulderaudubon.org. If you'd like, we'll email you when the online edition is posted. Of course, we still need your membership support if you choose this option.





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BOULDER COUNTY WILDLIFE INVENTORY, JUNE - JULY 2005 Gillian and Alex Brown, 4560 Darley Avenue, Boulder, CO 80305.

Early June often sees the arrival of unusual late migrants, and birders were well rewarded this year for their efforts. First a **Little Blue Heron** stayed at Walden Ponds for a few days; this species was last seen in the county in 2000. Then, while birders were looking for this bird, at least two **Least Bitterns** were heard and eventually sighted. The last report for **Least Bittern** was in 1997. **Green Herons**, a bird that is not seen at all in some years, were seen both months at Walden/ Sawhill Ponds and appear to be breeding.

Other unusual migrants were a **Bewick's Wren** and a **Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Yellow-billed Cuckoos** have been known to breed in the county but over the previous decade there have been reports of only five birds. However, this is the second sighting for 2005. A **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** was seen in very nearly the same place that one was seen last year. A lot of birders tried unsuccessfully to re-find this bird. A **Golden-winged Warbler** (last seen in 2002) is always an exciting find; this is the eighth reported individual of this species since the inventory began in 1979. At least two territorial **Ovenbirds** were seen in the Boulder Mountain Parks through the first half of June and are a potential breeder. Another unusual find was a **Wood Thrush**. Late May and early June is the most likely time to see and hear **Veery** in the county; a single bird was found in Eldorado Canyon on June 21. An **Eastern Wood-Pewee**, the third ever reported to the inventory, was seen and heard in the Boulder foothills at the end of July. This is a bird that is primarily identified by song. A **Semi-palmated Sandpiper** (last seen in 2003) was a very unusual sighting for July 10 as this seems too late for a spring migrant and too early for fall. Most **Semipalmated Sandpipers** are seen either in April and May or in August and September. The earliest previous sighting for July was in 1992 on the 16th. A **Black Swift** seen in early June is a bird that is often missed. Although this bird was seen on the plains, they are known to breed at high elevations in the county. A **Baltimore Oriole** is a bird that had not been seen since 2002.

Owls were well reported for both months. Barn Owls have successfully bred in at least three locations. The resulting nests led to more Barn Owls being reported than Great-horned Owls! This does not reflect the true status of these owls in Boulder County. Flammulated Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl and Eastern Screech-Owl were also reported. With breeding successfully taking place, the number of Bald Eagle sighted throughout the summer has increased. Osprey are now nesting in many locations and are typically well reported. A few Peregrine Falcons are successfully nesting in the foothills.

Altogether 161 bird species were reported in June and 137 in July. There was a definite lack of reporting of ducks, and some common birds were missed. However, these totals are pretty average for these summer months.

Galapagos Finches Threatened

Darwin's famous finches are under attack by a most unforgettable foe: blood-sucking flies. Birgit Fessl and Sabine Tebbich of the Konrad Lorenz Institute in Vienna report in the journal Nature that parasitic flies have infested the islands. The fly larvae live in the birds' nests, emerging at night to feed on chicks, sucking their blood and burrowing into their flesh. The flies seem to thrive in the highlands, where on some islands larvae can be found in nearly every nest. About one-quarter of the nestlings die; however, it is unclear what the long-term impacts on finch populations may be.

The alien pests are thought to have arrived in shipments of fruits or vegetables from the Ecuadorian mainland. While treating nests with insecticides kills most larvae, the tactic is not a long-term solution. The researchers hope the finches will do what they seem to do best: adapt.



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Article adapted from:

http://www.calacademy.org/science_now/archive/headline_science/galapfinch.html

CONTRIBUTORS TO THE JUNE & JULY INVENTORIES

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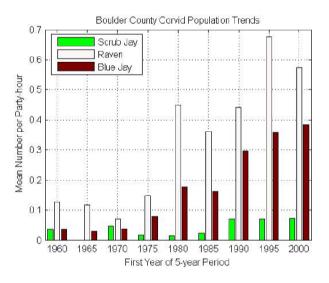
CBC Contributes to Science

George Oetzel

We participate in the Christmas Bird Count for the pleasure of discovering how many birds overwinter in Boulder, as well as being a part of a century-old tradition. At the same time, we are contributing to science. The historical results are all online at http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/hr/index.html. They can be used for a variety of population trend studies.

Year-to-year variations in the number of observing parties, weather, and other factors mean that the raw results have to be processed a bit to see trends. On average, the number of observing parties has increased with the growing popularity of birding. This variability can be counteracted by reducing the counts to the number seen per party hour. Further smoothing can be obtained by lumping a few years together.

For example, the accompanying graph shows that Blue Jays and Ravens have both become more common over the past 40 years. The steady increase of Blue Jays illustrates their colonization of the area as they moved west and thrived. Western Scrub Jays, never common, have changed very little. The other common corvids in the area—Crows, Magpies, and Steller's Jays—are too numerous to plot on the same graph scale.





Project FeederWatch 2005-06 season.

It's not too late to join!

FeederWatchers all over North America are counting their feeder birds, for fun and science. You can, too! Become a FeederWatcher today!

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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.

We cannot phrase this in a stronger way: we have no regular source of income at present except through your purchase of Safeway and Wild Oats cards, King Soopers and Liquormart certificates. To function, and certainly to dream of achieving bird-friendly goals, we must have member participation in this simple way.

Call your coupon salespeople today, and ask how to regularly buy and use these coupons without any cost to you as you get provisions for your family. 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 to \$10 into the BCAS piggybank for our local chapter needs.

Coupon sales contacts (we promise a friendly reception!):

Maureen Lawry, tel. 303 499 3833

Bev Sears, tel. 303 499 4751

Linda Andes-Georges, tel. 303 772 3239

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

If you would like to receive your coupons or cards through the mail, we will double-enclose them and post them after receiving your check. A number of people are now doing this regularly.

The mail method entails some risk: anyone who finds or steals the coupons (or a gift card) can "spend" them like cash. The risk is fairly low, but if you are ready to assume it, mail orders can be a easy way to keep in stock. Use the order form at the top of the page.

On The Wing

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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.

However, BCAS receives only a small amount of your dues from NAS to support local activities. We encourage you to join BCAS to help support local activities.

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