



On The Wing

Volume 41, Number 4 **Boulder County Audubon Society Newsletter**

Sept-Oct 2011

Tuesday Program, September 27, 7:15 p.m. Mark Ponsor and Steve Jones, *Experiencing the Whooping Crane and Greater Sandhill Crane Migrations in Kansas and Nebraska.*

Mark and Steve will update us on two of North America's wildlife success stories--the burgeoning numbers of migrating Sandhill Cranes and gradual recovery of Whooping Cranes--while directing us to out-of-the-way places to witness the migration. During the evening we'll visit the North Platte River Valley with its river otters, Bald Eagles and thousands of Sandhill Cranes; and we will view Cheyenne Bottoms (KS) and Quivira NWR in fall foliage.

As an evening bonus, Marcel Such will report on his experience at Audubon's Hog Island teen birding camp in Maine.



Boulder County Audubon field trip co-coordinator Mark Ponsor has led trips to Rocky Mountain National Park, Greater Prairie-chicken leks in northeastern Colorado, and raptor nesting sites up and down the Front Range. BCAS program co-chair Steve Jones has photographed migrating cranes in Nebraska for 20 years.

Tuesday Program, October 25, 7:15 p.m. Jason Beeson, *The Coolest Bird--the Black Swift*

Black swifts nest behind waterfalls in remote mountain canyons. They forage on the wing throughout most of the day, returning to their nests each evening to feed their young. Until recently, almost nothing was known about where they spend their winters. To help solve this mystery, a project with the ambitious goal of tracking the species from two breeding sites in Colorado to their over-wintering location was initiated in 2009 by the U.S.F.S. and the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory. The data from this study will reveal the secret of the Black Swifts.

Jason Beeson is the coordinator of the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory's Colony Watch program, which involves private citizens and wildlife professionals monitoring colonial waterbirds in Colorado.



photo by Todd Patrick

Holiday sale and Tuesday Program, November 22nd

Our sale of Christmas gift items, books, posters, greeting cards, nature-related books, crafts, original artwork, candy and much more is accelerating towards us. Plan to be with us for this, and for the beautiful presentation on *Butterflies of the Colorado Front Range*, by Jan Chu and Steve Jones. The holiday sale—beginning at 6 p.m.—precedes the program. Bring cash and checks and plan to do your holiday shopping in one evening, at one spot.

(For an expanded program description see page 9)



2011 Fall Field Trips and selected Bus-Birding events**Saturdays, September 3, 10, 17, and 24 Feathered Friends: All About Birds - Family Days**

1:00 to 4:00 pm at CU Museum of Natural History, Henderson Building, 15th Street & Broadway. Whether your family feels like a gaggle of geese, a kettle of hawks or a chattering of starlings, bring the whole flock down to the CU Museum of Natural History any Saturday in September for an afternoon of free hands-on fun and informative bird activities. More information: cumuseum.colorado.edu or 303-492-6892.

Sunday September 11th Riverside Reservoir, Shorebirds and Waterfowl

led by Skip Dines. BBC trip, meeting 7:00 a.m. at Niwot ParknRide on the Diagonal to carpool; returning in afternoon. This is a co-sponsored trip to this large, secluded reservoir to search the extensive mud flats and shorelines for migrating shorebirds. The private lake is home to colony nesters like pelicans and cormorants, and also hosts a heronry that supports egrets. There are many rafts of waterfowl on its vast surface. 4WD vehicles are best for circling the shore. Bring lunch and appropriate gear for weather, sun, and insects. Please contact leader if you wish to go: skip@dcmlc.com or 303-530-3075.

Saturday, September 17th Rocky Mountain National Park

led by Christie Owens. BBC/DFO trip, 8:00 a.m. to about 2:00. Early fall weather brings out the beauty of our local national park. Birders will meet at the Beaver Meadows parking area. Bring water, a lunch and the usual protection from sun and weather. Call Chris for more information at 303-772-6048, or email to christie-owens2@me.com.

Saturday, October 1 Special wetland exploration

led by Petrea Mah. 7:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Explore the restored Kenosha wetland on Boulder County Open Space, looking for migratory wading and shore birds as well as early migrating ducks and geese. This closed area is in the process of being restored following oil and gas drilling on the property. A County plant ecologist will participate, to describe the restoration project. This is an easy hike with some "bushwhacking" through grasses and forbs. Limited to 12 participants. Contact leader at petreamah@comcast.net or 303-494-4121 to sign up and for details.

Sunday, Oct. 2 Sabine's gulls, other gulls, and waterfowl

led by Bill Fink. 9:00 to noon, more or less. If you've always been intimidated by the complexity of gulls, or if on the other hand you know and admire these garrulous creatures, join us to scour the "Rez" for wandering waterbirds of all sorts. Park and meet at the west entrance of the Boulder Reservoir at 9:00 a.m. and bring whatever keeps you warm and fueled for several hours of bird spying.

Saturday, October 15 Warblers and Woodpeckers in the Urban Woods

led by Steve Jones, a Bus-Birding trip. 8:30 am – 11:00 am (approximately); meet at Columbia Cemetery at 8:30. Take the bus to join us for a bird walk in this historic cemetery. Meet at the main entrance at 9th and Pleasant, just 3 blocks south and up the hill from the JUMP bus stop at 9th and Arapahoe. We'll search for late-migrating warblers, other songbirds, woodpeckers, and urban raptors while exploring the history and ecology of Columbia Cemetery. A representative from the Columbia Cemetery's Preservation Program will co-lead the walk.

(Schedule continued on page 9)



[BCAS on Facebook](#)



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Next issue deadline: (Nov 2011 issue) Oct 14.

Contact editor via link at: www.boulderaudubon.org/newsletter.htm

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George Oetzel Lifetime Achievement Award

When our chapter recognizes an individual for this award, it is not quite like the Oscars. The person may have won acclaim in many fields. But what most interests us is whether the person has made a stellar contribution to our chapter, our community, and our local environment over a significant period of time. George is a prime example of the former as well as the latter.



George's best known contribution to our chapter has been editing our attractive and pithy newsletter through 38 issues, expanding the Web version with color pictures and many researched articles. When he started as editor, George was drafted onto the BCAS board. He has remained on the board and served briefly as president. As default membership chair, he developed programs to automate merging national and local memberships for mailing OTW. That process has now been turned over to a new Membership Chair.

He and Laura Osborn were instrumental in resurrecting the bluebird nestbox program. He and wife Marti have nurtured the program through the past seven years. This currently includes 11 trails and 106 boxes, monitored by a couple of dozen volunteers who have access to a special website for instructions, downloadable data forms, and trail maps.

After receiving a Stanford PhD, George joined SRI International, where he worked on projects in places such as New Mexico, Florida, Alaska, Hawaii, Egypt, Korea, and Australia that also provided opportunities to observe wildlife, antiquities, and different cultures. Analytical work earned him the title Senior Technical Advisor in his last several years at SRI.

An Earthwatch Golden Eagle study on a Scottish isle led to the Oetzel interest in bird study and subsequent exploration of volunteer opportunities with the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. George participated in field programs, became a board member, and created the organization's website. With a background of interests in hiking, biking, and wildlife, Boulder was a natural retirement location. Volunteering for BCAS and BCNA were easy choices, though it took awhile to recognize that these jobs had turned into a second, unpaid, career.

We salute George, thank him, and wish him a long and bird-full life among us.

Maureen Lawry and Mary Balzer Special Recognition for Education Programming

These two co-chairs, affectionately known as the M&M girls, have re-created our public outreach and education program and given it new life.

Thanks to the imagination and energy of Maureen and Mary, our Education program has developed some handsome credentials. One highlight is an ongoing series of beginning and intermediate birdwatching classes; well-attended and well-reviewed. A second has been the coordination, with OSMP naturalist Topher Downham, of the first Roll and Stroll wildlife-watching series. The Roll and Stroll hikes provide opportunities twice a year for people who are mobility-impaired to enjoy birding on wheelchair accessible trails. Our third Education highlight has been the design and set-up of an ecosystem puppet show for third grade schoolchildren.

The prototype effort to create a story around "shortgrass prairies" (one of the most endangered ecosystems) has been wildly successful. 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 (i.e., "I learned that prairie dogs are important to other life.") Some are more endearingly unpredictable: "It taute me new things, and It was funny." "I used to think that they were just dogs that just dig and dig." "I liked the zebra." "The show was awesome."



Our education specialists are contemplating the expansion of this popular show to an ecosystem series, perhaps tackling plains/riparian or ponderosa/pine woodlands in the future. The show has gone national, with many requests on the Pineridge Sioux reservation in South Dakota. Two presentations there in May have led to multiple requests for encores. Note that this is next to the National Badlands Visitor Center, which in its exhibits has never thought to mention the concept of a "prairie ecosystem." This will soon change, however, as next fall, in celebration of the return of the Black-footed ferret, a prairie dog exhibit will be added to the Nature Center. In conjunction with this, a series of Maureen's shows are scheduled on the Reservation and in the Park. BCAS would be grateful for any help in procuring grants to-

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wards further outreach in SD and development of the next drama in the puppet show series.

Laura Osborn

Environmental Conservation Award

Like many of our members and some of our award-winners, Laura claims to have been inspired and supported for many years by our 2010 Leadership winner, Steve Jones. She has lived in Boulder since 1967, and shares with most “old-timers” a disappointment in how degraded some of our natural areas have become over time, as visitor use multiplied exponentially and types of use diversified.

In spite of this, she continues to find that in certain areas on the margins of human activity, wildlife can flourish. Her endless curiosity and energy led her to work with County staff to restore bluebird nestbox trails at Walker Ranch and restart the monitoring program.

In 2006, she attended an Eco-steward meeting as this program began. With the encouragement of Steve Jones, she adopted the

Meyers Gulch area as her focus of environmental stewardship. Like many others among the early stewards, her confidence at the beginning was shaky. Steve’s support as well as the group’s peer encouragement have inspired her to learn more each year. The joy of observing the diverse birds, plants and mammals in her adopted area fueled her determination to continue. She expanded her original surveys by incorporating the point counts needed by the County (assisting biologist Susan Spaulding).

This year all of this work and self-education have suddenly become very relevant. Boulder County is conducting a comprehensive management plan for the Walker Ranch area, of which Meyer’s Gulch is a part. Laura’s systematic observations, both of wildlife and of human use and impacts, are extremely useful to environmental groups as they attempt to formulate specific suggestions to the County’s staff about future management. She urges all Audubon members to pay attention to these planning efforts, and to contact BCNA and BCAS for “talking points” in upcoming hearings.



Community Collaboration Group (CCG)

Ray Bridge, Gwen Dooley, James Gallo, Beverly Gholson, Karen Hollweg, Linda Jourgensen and Petrea Mah

Community Conservation Award

The individuals named above have—like several preceding groups of citizens—given tirelessly of their “spare” time to help this fractious community to reach consensus on issues that inflame passions in all directions. These folks were chosen in a raucous caucus by the attending “green-leaning” citizens in the fall of 2009. Their mission was to take part in a collaborative process that was supposed to last a year. To nobody’s surprise, it lasted well over 18 months, with many matters still unresolved at the end.

Was it about the national debt ceiling? Goodness no, it was more contentious than that: It was an effort to provide guidance to the City Open Space and Mountain Parks staff, to the OSMP Board of Advisors, and ultimately to the City Council, on policy for the trails management of the most beloved part of our Open Space system: the Mountain Parks. The CCG, made up of representatives who were to reflect the diversity of interests found in the community, was elected by approximately 300 Boulder residents who attended a caucus-style public meeting on September 15, 2009. Other groups participating were the recreationists (mostly bikers and runners), the mostly-neighbors, and a cultural specialist.

The hours spent by these individuals are inestimable. The amount of stress that they endured from months of wrangling with those of opposing viewpoints as well as with some allies, is incalculable. In the end, City Council unwisely rejected some of the finely-crafted compromises. Such is politics. But the legacy of the CCG included many fair solutions that have remained, and that will be implemented. We salute the Conservation Caucus, thank these intrepid individuals, and hope that now they will be able to recover “contemplative hiking time.”



BIRDING SHORTS

Coastal Maine Teen Bird Studies – by Marcel Such

A cool, salty breeze whips past my face as I sit in a tiny, elevated plywood box on a desolate mound of rock miles away from any other solid land. I direct my attention toward a pigeon-sized black bird with white wing patches and bright red feet that is preening on a nearby rock, an adult Black Guillemot.

With a flutter of wings followed by a raucous laughing noise and a scraping of feet, one of the omnipresent Laughing Gulls has perched on top of my blind on Eastern Egg Rock in Muscongus Bay off the coast of Maine. A screaming pair of Arctic Terns dives by in hot pursuit of a gigantic, predatory Great Black-backed Gull. Perching awkwardly on a rock is a chunky bird with large, orange feet, a clean white belly, a jet-black back, and a gaudy multicolored bill. With its oversized mandibles stuffed to the max with finger-length herring, I watch breathlessly as it drops down into a crevice below that pile of boulders to feed its hidden young. I do not think that I will ever tire of Atlantic Puffins.

This was just one magical moment of many during my time at the Hog Island Teen Bird Studies program, which I was able to attend thanks to a generous scholarship from the Boulder County Audubon Society. Please join me on Tuesday, Sept. 22 for a photographic presentation of my experience in Maine at the Boulder County Audubon monthly meeting. I hope to see you there!

Raptor Roundup and Sparrow Fallout

This year marked another successful season for raptors nesting on OSMP (City lands). Four Peregrine Falcon pairs nesting in the mountain backdrop produced ten fledglings, making it the most productive year for this species since monitoring began. Unfortunately, Golden Eagle productivity on OSMP was low, as it was all around Boulder County. Non-raptor birds of interest included an influx of Cassin's Sparrows to the grasslands. It is possible that on-going drought conditions in SE Colorado are forcing these sprightly sparrows north and west. [Note that other grassland species like dickcissels and bobolinks also were unusually easy to find in the County this year].

The City of Boulder has been monitoring raptor nesting and roosting areas since 1984. It has become an important part of protecting the species in the area. In 2011, OSMP volunteers logged many hours monitoring cliff-nesting raptor sites. They are an integral part of the success of this program. OSMP relies heavily on the public to respect the closures. For questions about raptor and other closures on OSMP properties, please call 303-441-3440 or visit the [OSMP Web site](#).

Curious about eBird?

Thurs., Sept. 8th at 7 p.m., George Reynolds Branch Library (Table Mesa Dr. one block west of Broadway)

Ted Floyd, Editor of Birding magazine, and local guide and presenter, will offer a tutorial to those of us who are Internet-challenged. Our goal will be to understand, use, and contribute to the eBird web resource, a website for data-sharing. Widespread use of the site will help in monitoring avian populations. This program is sponsored by our sister organization, Boulder County Nature Organization. [Learn more about eBird online.](#)

Hiking with J.J. Audubon at Sandstone Ranch

On the last Saturday of July J. J. Audubon visited Sandstone Ranch for a bird-watching and storytelling hike jointly sponsored by the Longmont Museum and Boulder County Audubon Society. Petrea Mah led the hike pointing out 30 species of birds, and Mr. Audubon had a story about the history and the naming of almost every one of the species that were seen. A great time was had by all in a magnificent setting with mountain views, prairie and wetlands ecosystems next to Saint Vrain Creek. Jean-Jacques Audubon was played by Brian "Fox" Ellis, a professional impersonator who was brought to Colorado by the Longmont Museum for their Audubon exhibit. The exhibit of Audubon original prints at the Longmont Museum is available through Sept. 18 at 400 Quail Road Longmont, CO 80501-8989. (303) 651-8374. Open Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday 9am-5pm; Wednesday 9am-8pm and Sunday 1pm-5pm .



Special editors for this issue:

Content by Linda Andes Georges

Print issue formatting by Benji Durden

Web issue formatting by George Oetzel

Note [links](#) in this PDF that you can follow to Web sites.

Boulder County Audubon Budget and Accounting Summary

After three years as BCAS treasurer, Chris Abrahamson has moved on, passing the reins to Kitty Brigham effective July 1. With this changeover, the board thought it prudent to carry out a thorough review of our budgeting and accounting procedures, so current president Linda Andes-Georges and past presidents Petrea Mah and Steve Jones met with Chris and Kitty.

Chris presented us with lists of critical information and financial schedules for items occurring during the fiscal year. He also provided a thorough review of the 2009-10 and 2010-11 fiscal year budgets.

We commend and thank Chris for his superb job of tracking all these financial details while keeping the board well informed. And, especially, for doing all this work so calmly and cheerfully!

The 2010-11 fiscal budget was \$16,349, roughly \$3800 less than the 2009-10 budget but slightly above average for 2006-11. Revenues came from a wide variety of sources, including the National Audubon dues share (\$2879), local dues (\$2672), donations (\$3475), holiday and other sales (\$2011), and our Science and Cultural Facilities District grant (\$2500). Other revenues came from King Soopers and Liquor Mart certificate sales (\$850), our species of special concern fundraiser (\$635--with about half of the proceeds still not deposited), and a birding certificate class (\$880).

2010-11 expenses, also of \$16,349, included cost of printing and mailing three newsletters (\$4499); our contribution to the Audubon State lobby fund (\$2452); prairie dog puppet programs and student scholarships (\$4350); and insurance (\$1612). We donated \$430 to various non-profit wildlife organizations, spent \$1238 on monthly programs, and spent \$708 to partially reimburse holiday sale vendors. We balanced the 2010-11 budget by drawing \$195 from our \$35,000 in reserve funds.

Our financial review group noted that newsletter costs, which typically comprise almost one third of our annual budget, declined from \$5,913 in 2009-10 to \$4499 in 2010-11. This decline reflects the board's decision to mail only three printed newsletters in 2010-11 (all newsletters are available online at our website). We plan to further reduce newsletter expense in 2011-12 by mailing only two printed newsletters (September-October and May-August), while "filling the gap" by sending out a one-page program and field trip flyer in January. Our goal here is to reduce expenditures and paper waste while keeping all our members well informed of upcoming events.

CONSERVATION

"Stop the Drop" Update (Middle Boulder Creek Coalition)

The Middle Boulder Creek Coalition (MBCC) is a group of citizens and organizations (including Boulder County Audubon) that have banded together to stop the Eldora ski area from building new ski lifts and runs beyond its current location down towards Hessie and Middle Boulder Creek. Overall, it is our contention that the lands on the south side of Middle Boulder Creek between the community of Eldora and Hessie remain as high quality habitat and a wildlife movement corridor, a scenic backdrop for a major gateway into the Indian Peaks, and an acoustic buffer between the noise of snowmaking and winter recreationists heading up the Fourth of July road. It is anticipated that the ski area will soon submit a formal application to the Forest Service for a portion of their expansion. MBCC has been organizing, assembling alert lists, taking officials to the site, and setting up social media. To learn more and sign up for action alerts, visit the [Middle Boulder Creek coalition website](#).

A National Perennial: the Effort to Stop Lead Ammunition Hunting

Note that we did not say "ban hunting," or "ban firearms" or "eliminate the 2nd Amendment." To hear the NRA press releases and lobby notes to Congress, we are advocating all of that. This is incorrect.

The May/June copy of the Audubon Magazine, page 50, contains the facts in the "Incite" column, written and researched by Ted Williams (<http://www.audubonmagazine.org/incite/incite1105.html>). Although waterfowl hunters may no longer use lead (since 1991), it is still legal for other hunting, even in refuges and parks used by wildlife of all sorts. All large raptors, all large mammalian predators, almost all waterbirds, and most egregiously the condors are still subject to lead poisoning, and dying from it in impressive numbers; it is usually a slow death. So far the condors, given a last-minute renaissance at huge financial and volunteer expense, are only surviving because they are periodically re-captured and given a blood-purification treatments.

We could begin to turn back the clock on these preventable deaths by banning lead "ammo" for hunting, certainly in wildlife areas and in national parks. So far, the NRA watchdogs and certain sportsmen's organizations which need NRA support are dead-set against it. They cite "expense" (as much as twenty-five cents per 25 rounds in some cases!) and lack of need (obviously, they are not reading the scientific research). This defies common sense, as copper and steel are better performers in most cases. For replacing lead fishing sinkers

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(which cause well-documented mortality of swans and loons), effective non-toxic sinkers are available for sale everywhere.

The BCAS Board is considering a formal support of on-going proposals to ban lead for hunting. If you would like to contact us about this, see page 2. You can learn more by visiting the [ABC birds](#) or [Peregrine Fund](#) websites.

Other ongoing conservation efforts by BCAS

Don't just rock and worry (or hike and worry)—join us!

We continue to participate in discussions of:

-- the **City energy source/municipalization**;

-- the **Gross Reservoir/Moffat Tunnel expansion** which would raise the level of the reservoir, drown more drainage vegetation, and allow more Denver development-- but at the same time provide more year-round water for South Boulder Creek;

-- the potential **I-470 expansion** which would greatly impact the periphery of Rocky Flats Wildlife Refuge not to mention promote the urbanization of a new road corridor; however a political trade-off deal might better preserve the high-quality grasslands of Section 16.

-- the **West Trail Study Area** in the Open Space/Mountain Parks western natural lands. The latter has ended, as most of these management documents do, in a manner that leaves no one satisfied but everyone exhausted and relieved. See the finished documents at the City's OSMP site under West-TSA.

We would welcome your participation in our Board discussions of these issues, and your help in presenting environmental viewpoints at hearings. This makes a big difference to decision-makers--and "new faces" make a bigger impact than the same old arguers in many cases. Call any board member (see page 2) to talk to us about your concerns.

Bird Shift – a Multi-media Exhibition

Exploring through art and science how humans affect local bird activity and habitat, *Bird Shift: The Anthropogenic Ornithology of North America* is a multi-media exhibition that will be featured at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, on Boulder's Long JUMP buses, at bus stops and on the Internet. Commissioned by EcoArts Connections (EAC), the exhibition has been created by nationally recognized visual artist, educator and "re-naturalist" Brian D. Collier in collaboration with Boulder-based scientists, bird watchers, transportation specialists and others.

The *Bird Shift* exhibition has four components:

The New Birds of Boulder County, includes a mural displayed at the museum showing a map of birds that have become extinct, been introduced or shifted their ranges and/or behaviors.

Explorations of a Re-Natural Bird Sanctuary, offers a visual display that illustrates how the warmth of the cooling ponds at the coal-fired Valmont Power Plant has encouraged a rich bird habitat. A December bird walk on the Valmont grounds will also be included in the *Bird Shift* activities.

The Ornithology of the Big Box Stores, includes thought provoking objects and images displayed at the museum that offer surprising solutions for birds that are now living in warehouse stores.

Bus Birding will be displayed on Long JUMP buses, at bus stops and on the Internet. Bus Birding is designed to inspire people to ride the bus while encouraging bus riders to look for birds on their travels. It will include posters and brochures with *Bus Riders' Guides for Birds* in the buses; signs at 13 bus stops showing which birds can be seen at each stop; and a special call-in hotline for people to report bird activity. An interactive website will be posted at BusBirding.SocietyRNE.net. [See also page 2 for a few specific events].

Our King Sooper grocery cards and Liquormart coupons cost you nothing—and yet magically deliver funds to our Audubon chapter. (5% and 10%, respectively, of the purchase price is returned to us.) Look for the friendly card seller at Tues. program meetings (bring your checkbook!), or call Petrea Mah to place an order. King Soopers -- \$100 gift cards; Liquormart --\$25 certificates. Use them like cash.

Remember: brightly colored foods and red wine are especially good for you.



BOULDER COUNTY WILDLIFE INVENTORY, JANUARY AND FEBRUARY 2011**Gillian and Alex Brown, 4560 Darley Avenue, Boulder, CO 80305.**

January always brings out birders beginning a new year's list, and January 2011 was no exception. The most exciting bird of the month was a **Tufted Duck** seen at Golden Ponds in Longmont on the 17th. This is only the second sighting of **Tufted Duck** reported since the wildlife inventory began in 1979. The last sighting was at Walden Ponds in 1997. Thanks to modern communication technology, several observers managed to add this unusual species to their county lists although it was only seen for the one day. Valmont Reservoir, being one of the few open reservoirs due to the heated water from the Valmont cooling plant, is always one of the more rewarding areas to bird in January. The annual January field trip there had well over two hundred human participants and fifty eight bird species. The **Tundra Swan** continued to linger at the reservoir all month. A **Black Scoter** was seen at Valmont on the 1st and a **Ruddy Duck** on the field trip. All five of our commonest grebe species were reported: **Pied-billed, Horned, Eared, Western** and **Clark's Grebes**. By far the most prevalent of these were the **Pied-billed Grebes**. Gulls numbering in the thousands left the reservoir each morning and came back in the evening rewarding the patient observer; **Mew Gull** and **Great Black-backed Gull** were some of the more unusual gulls.

A **Golden-crowned Sparrow** continued at the Teller Lakes Farm trailhead, and a **Varied Thrush** was reported in Longmont. An **Orange-crowned Warbler** was seen several times over the first half of the month at our South Boulder feeder; this is the first report that we have had of this species in the middle of winter. It is to be hoped that the poor bird did not expire from the cold. A **Harris' Sparrow** was also a regular visitor throughout the month at the same feeder. **American Pipit** was one of the more unusual land birds reported on the Valmont field trip. Four **Eastern Bluebirds** and a **Hermit Thrush** were reported in the White Rocks area. A **Lesser Goldfinch** was reported in the foothills, and both **Gray Catbird** and **Swamp Sparrow** at Waneka Lake in Lafayette. Altogether 103 bird species were reported for January which is a very respectable total.

In contrast, February is often a slow month for birders in Boulder County with some trying their luck in more exotic climates. The first sighting of **Mountain Bluebirds**, this year on the 24th, is always an exciting harbinger of spring. Ducks, particularly our diving ducks, increased greatly in numbers with the most unusual probably being the **Ruddy Duck** that seems to be wintering at Valmont Reservoir. A **Common Loon**, also seen on Valmont Reservoir, was an unusual February sighting.

Chihuahuan Raven is always somewhat difficult to confirm, although often suspected when a small oddly calling raven is encountered. However, care must be taken later in the breeding season when young **Common Ravens** may be both smaller than adults and have odd sounding calls. Viewing of the throat hackles and comparative size and feathering of the bill must occur for positive identification. **Bushtits** seem to have been seen much more regularly than in the past. Flocks of **Evening Grosbeaks** have been reported in the foothills after a few years when this species was largely absent. **Gray Catbird, Swamp Sparrow** and **Harris's Sparrow** all continued to stay in the locations where they were observed in January. Fifty **Great-tailed Grackles** were reported at Stearn's Lake; this marsh loving Icterid is definitely on the increase and a more likely winter sighting than **Common Grackle**. Altogether 96 bird species were reported for February, a very average total for this month.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THE JANUARY AND FEBRUARY 2011 INVENTORIES

Linda Andes-Georges, J D Birchmeier, Skyler Bol, Julia Bond, Steve Bouricius, Kitty Brigham, Alex & Gillian Brown, Todd Deininger, Kathy Mihm Dunning, Doug Faulkner, Ted Floyd, Steve Frye, Peter Gent, Bryan Guarente, Paula Hansley, Steve Jones, Ed Jurkoulch, Bill Kaempfer, Loch Kilpatrick, Elena Klaver, Sandra Laursen, Petrea Mah, Steve Mlodinow, Gene and Lynn Monroe, Kayleen Niyo, Christian Nunes, George Oetzel, Laura Osborn, Beth Partin, Chris Petrizzo, Nathan Pieplow, Bill and Inez Prather, Scott Roederer, Bill Schmoker, Larry Semo, Scott Severs, Tim Smart, Cara Stiles, Joel Such, Marcel Such, John Valenta, John Vanderpoel, Wild Bird Center, Eric Zorawowicz.

Become a Supporting Member of Boulder Audubon

We get very little return from National Audubon dues and have to rely primarily on local funding to support Boulder County Audubon society activities. Supporting memberships are just \$20 annually. You can [join online](#) or [download a printable form](#) to send with your check. (Click a link.)

Paper copies of the Nov-Dec and Mar-Apr issues of *On the Wing* are mailed only to BCAS Supporting Members who request them. The electronic edition, available online, usually includes extra articles. In 2012, the full Jan-Feb paper edition will go to supporting members. Others will receive a single-sheet (4 page) version.

More Field Trips *(continued from page 2)*

Fri. Oct. 28 through Mon. Oct. 31 *Fall Migration Field Trip to the Central Flyway*

led by Mark Ponsor. Carpooling from Boulder on Friday (about a six-hour trip), we'll spend the weekend exploring Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, staying three nights in area motels. Quivira and Cheyenne Bottoms were recently named one of the Eight Wonders of Kansas. Cheyenne Bottoms is a Ramsar wetlands of international importance, consisting of 41,000 acres of wetland. It is said that 45 percent of U.S. shorebirds stop at the marsh, including thousands of Sandhill Cranes and some endangered Whooping Cranes. At least 320 species of birds have been recorded there. Amazingly, 800,000 geese and ducks pass through Quivira NWR in route to the Gulf Coast and Mexico. Whooping Cranes occasionally visit the refuge en route to their wintering grounds in Texas, most recently in late October 2010. Note that if you do not drive, it is the policy of BCAS for passengers to reimburse drivers for gas. Ask leader for details. For more information or to reserve your spot, email Mark Ponsor at m.ponsor@comcast.net.

Bus Birding at Sombrero Marsh with Petrea Mah

8:30 am – 11:30 am (Please be on time – the bus will not wait!)

Meet at Scott Carpenter Park. Join us for a bus ride to the bird watching spot. We'll meet near the Long JUMP bus stop on Arapahoe on the north side of Scott Carpenter Park (30th and Arapahoe in Boulder), and bus out to Sombrero Marsh for an easy walk to look for ducks and other wetland birds. We will do a brief orientation to wetland birding on the bus as we ride to this alkaline salt marsh that is Boulder County's largest natural wetland. Please bring water, a snack, and footwear suitable for easy trail hiking; also bird guides and binoculars if you have them.



Urban Magpie – G. Oetzel

(Expanded from page 1)

Holiday sale (6:00) and Tuesday Program, November 22, 7:15 p.m.

Jan Chu and Steve Jones, *Butterflies of the Colorado Front Range* Boulder County Audubon Holiday Sale precedes the program at 6 p.m.

While preparing their new field guide on local butterflies, Jan Chu and Steve Jones photographed more than 100 species, and Jan added several new species to the Boulder County butterfly list, which now numbers more than 200. Their field guide, intended for beginning and more experienced butterfly-watchers, includes a striking color photo of each of the 80 species most likely to be seen in our area accompanied by details about the butterfly's life history and unique behaviors.

Jan and Steve's presentation will profile a few of our most intriguing butterfly families, including swallowtails, blues, and brushfoots.

Jan Chu taught high school biology for 38 years and has conducted butterfly population studies on Boulder County open space for 10 years. Since 1983 she has organized the annual 4th of July Butterfly Count at the Cal-Wood Education Center. Steve Jones is author of *The Last Prairie, A Sandhills Journal*, and co-author of the *Peterson Field Guide to the North American Prairie*. He works as a teacher and wildlife consultant.

Bigger Brains in City Birds

Did you ever wonder why Big Bird chose to line in downtown Manhattan? Writing in [Biology Letters](#), researchers describe evidence for the first time that successful urban-dwelling birds have larger brains than exclusively rural species, suggesting that the larger brains give them better adaptability to unnatural environments. By measuring the brain volumes of 82 different bird species (corrected for body size) and comparing them against each group's ability to breed in 12 different urban centers in Europe, the researchers found a strong correlation between large brains and city-dwelling. The authors suggest that this phenomenon likely holds true for other vertebrates as well: street smarts help birds find innovative solutions to problems such as a lack of trees, ubiquitous plate glass windows, and deciding whether or not to eat crumbs dropped at the local coffee shop. House Sparrows are ubiquitous at outdoor eateries in Boulder. Perhaps you recall the story of crows dropping nuts in front of cars at an intersection during one red light and picking up the crushed nuts when the cars are stopped again at the next red light.

Ocean Acidification and Global Warming

Our world's oceans help regulate the global climate by absorbing carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the air, and research has shown that the oceans have not only absorbed about 30 percent of human-caused CO₂ emissions over the last two centuries, but also continue to absorb about 1 million tons per hour. However, as this CO₂ is absorbed, seawater becomes more acidic. Since the Industrial Revolution of the mid-1800s, Earth's oceans have become 30 percent more acidic.

CO₂ depletes carbonate ions in seawater, leaving fewer ions free to build the calcium carbonate-based shells and skeletons of organisms known as calcifiers: corals, crustaceans (e.g., shrimp), echinoderms (e.g., starfish), and mollusks (e.g., clams). This could have a devastating impact on biodiversity and the food chain, as millions of organisms depend on coral reefs for shelter, and on other calcifiers for food.

While ocean pH levels have fluctuated over time, acidity levels have increased at a much more rapid pace than in the past, and will continue to worsen if our CO₂ emissions continue unabated. And it should be noted that proposed "geoengineering" solutions to global warming, such as injecting light-reflecting particles into the atmosphere, would do nothing to halt ocean acidification even if they succeeded in reducing temperatures (which is not a given). The surest way to avoid the most dangerous impacts on marine ecosystems is to shift quickly to energy sources that produce less CO₂.

Ref: [Union of Concerned Scientists](#);
Earthwise Summer 2011

Monarch Butterflies and Roundup

The great Monarch migrations of the 90s are a thing of the past. The main reason for the decline is Monarch habitat has been reduced by at least 140 million acres in the last 10 years. At least 100 million acres of habitat has been lost due to the adoption of herbicide resistant corn and soybeans. The herbicide tolerant (HT) crops allow growers to spray their crops with herbicides without affecting the crops. The result has been the near elimination of milkweeds in these row crops and a reduction in monarch numbers—monarch production in these fields was higher when measured in 2000 than in roadsides, old fields, conservation reserve lands and other habitats (Oberhauser, et al PNAS 2001). The adoption of HT crops began slowly in 1996 but has been increasing rapidly since 2003. By 2010 80.7% of the corn and soybeans planted in the United States (161 million acres) were herbicide tolerant. Since these crops are used in rotation, it is likely that milkweeds have been eliminated in more than 81% of the total acreage.

From [MonarchWatch.org](#)

Warming Drives Species to Cooler Climates

Faced with the heat wave that's sweeping the earth, it's natural to assume that species—both animals and plants—might move to cooler climates to accommodate to the changes. However, it's difficult to tie species migrations directly to climate change, particularly with human activity destroying ecosystems every year. Researchers have now gathered data from 54 scientific papers that collectively map the habitat ranges of more than 2000 species during the past 4 decades.

Ecologist Chris Thomas of the University of York in the United Kingdom acknowledges that the recent study has plenty of limitations. Most of the papers reviewed targeted North America or Europe; few were from the Southern Hemisphere, and no marine species were included. "We're prisoners of the data," he says.

Analyzing the papers that met their criteria, the researchers found that, on average, organisms move up hills at 12.2 meters/decade, twice the rate described as recently as 2003. They moved away from the equator 17.6 kilometers/decade, three times the rate previously described.

The researchers also calculated how far a species would have to move in a given region of the world to stay at the same temperature. The actual migration rates, on average, closely follow the rate of warming year by year in that region—strong evidence, the researchers say in their paper, published in *Science*, of a direct link to climate change.

The authors were surprised to find there was no difference between taxonomic groups: plants move at the same rate as insects, and birds are no faster than mammals. But when they looked at individual species, they found that within these taxonomic groups, some species move much faster than others, such as the comma butterfly, which moved northward 220 kilometers in 2 decades. And 22% of species, including the Girdling bunting, even move in the opposite direction toward warmer temperatures, suggesting that they are more flexible to changing climates than others, Thomas says.

References:

Full article: *Science* 19 August 2011: pp. 1024-1026
[ScienceNow synopsis](#)



Monarch—from
*Butterflies of the
Front Range*
(p 58)

Photo by Steve
Jones