



On The Wing

Volume 43, Number 4

Boulder County Audubon Society Newsletter

Sept-Oct 2013

BCAS 4th Tuesday Program Series

September 24: Atlantic Puffins, Black Guillemots, and Much More:

Exploring Hog Island and the Southeast Maine Coast

Audubon's Hog Island summer camp offers a soul-stirring passage into a world of nesting seabirds, swirling gulls, razorbills, and rare warblers. World-renowned ornithologists immerse participants in the intricacies of birdsong recording and bird banding. Trips by boat to more remote offshore islands offer the chance to watch Atlantic Puffins stuff beakfuls of her- ring into the mouths of their voracious young.

Hog Island's profound beauty, ecological signif- icance, and the lessons it offers about the natu- ral world continue to inspire visitors to become stewards of wildlife and wild places. Many call their time at the camp "life-changing."



Photo by Joel Such

Skye Lewis is a freshman at Colorado State University pointing toward a major in Wildlife Ecology. Of her time at Hog Island she says, "I had a fantastic experience, made some great friends, and learned about birds and the environ- ment. I can't wait to go back." Joel Such has been watching and studying birds for as long as he can remember. Cur- rently fifteen, he has grown as a naturalist, expanding his studies to include other aspects of the natural world includ- ing butterflies, dragonflies, and more. Marcel Such started seriously watching birds eleven years ago, at the age of six, when his family took a vacation to southern Arizona. He is currently an active and avid writer, photographer, and naturalist who plans to study biology in college. Their attendance at H.I. was supported in part by BCAS scholarships.

Municipalization Discussion: The September program will be preceded by a 15-minute question and an- swer session with proponents and opponents of Boulder's proposal to municipalize its power supply.

October 22: Zoo-generated Conservation



For our October program we are delighted to welcome Dr. Richard Reading, Vice-President of the Con- servation at the Denver Zoo.

Denver Zoo's Conser- vation Biology Depart- ment was established in 1996 and works with communities, local governments, and vari- ous non-governmental organizations to devel-

op innovative solutions to conservation issues around the world. Currently the Zoo's research staff is working in eight regions from Mongolia to Viet Nam to Kenya and Botswana to Peru to the Rocky Mountain West. The Zoo seeks projects that make meaningful contributions to the conservation of endangered or other focal species and/or the preservation of fragmented or fragile ecosystems. All of the projects include a local capacity building component. Additionally, many pro- jects have a strong cultural tie, collaborating with local communities on how they can better preserve and man- age their natural resources.

(cont. on page 2 and supplement on page 14)

Program Meetings at Unitarian Universalist Church of Boulder, 5001 Pennsylvania Ave. (west off 55th St. between Arapahoe and Baseline), 7:15 p.m.

Field Trips and Events, September until Holidays

Fall migration in the sub-alpine, Sat. Sept. 14, 6:00 a.m. Linda Andes-Georges heads for a private property just west of the Peak-to-Peak Hwy for a high-altitude birdcount--and she can use all the extra eyes & ears you are willing to lend. The hike is an easy and leisurely mile or so. Please let us know if you are interested in order to receive details. We will meet along Lefthand Canyon Rd near the Greenbriar Restaurant to form our carpools (return usually from noon to 1 pm.). Phone (303-772-3239) or andesgeorges@comcast.net

Honoring Wes Sears, weeder and bird-spotter extraordinaire. Sept. 24 at 5:30 p.m. The Wes Sears Memorial Gardens are in need of attention before winter sets in. Join us for work in the xeriscape gardens on the border of the U.U. Church (see page 1 for directions). We'll share a simple catered meal at about 6:45, followed by the evening's program. Wes was the backbone and engine of Boulder County Audubon for many years and keeping the gardens lovely is our honoring of that work. Bev Sears will be on hand for moral support and management.

Gilpin County Fall Birding, Sat. Sept. 28th, 8:00 a.m. Bill Kaempfer will lead this unusual tour of our southern neighbor county. The trip will visit the Rollinsville area, drive the Moffat Road to East Portal (conditions and vehicles permitting), and the Tolland-Apex road—perhaps all the way to the tundra east of James Peak. In addition we will visit Snowline Lake, including the Eye of the Heart Wildlife Preserve (\$5/person fee), Chase Gulch Reservoir and Russell Gulch. We will be searching for late fall migrants including waterfowl. Meet at the Boulder County Justice Center parking lot at 6th and Canyon at 8:00 a.m. and return by mid-afternoon. Bring lunch and water, cold weather clothing, sunscreen, sturdy walking shoes, etc. Parking is limited at all of these stops, so please contact Bill in advance at Kaempfer@Colorado.edu or 303-954-8998 to reserve a spot.

Boulder County Fall Lakes Trip, Sat. Nov. 9th, 7:30 a.m. Learn "wet" County geography with John Vanderpoel and Bill Kaempfer as we look for scoters, loons, gulls, late shorebirds and other waterbird migrants, including stops at Boulder Reservoir, Lagerman Res, McIntosh Res, Clark Res, Terry Res, Ish Res, Hamm Pond, Panama Res and Little Gaynor Lake. Meet at Niwot Park & Ride (CO 119 and Niwot Rd.); plan on a mid-afternoon return. Bring lunch and water, cold weather clothing, sunscreen, sturdy walking shoes, etc. Contact Bill in advance at Kaempfer@Colorado.edu or 303-954-8998 to reserve a spot.

Christmas Bird Count Dec. 15th. The 72nd Boulder count is as always associated with the National Audubon Christmas Bird Count. Beginners welcome. Please consider getting in touch with count organizer Bill Schmoker (bill.schmoker@gmail.com): volunteer to join a group, adopt a vacant area—or even sit home drinking Chardonnay while you watch birds come and go at your feeder, making notes.



Oetzel's son, photographed these in Mongolia in July 2013).

(Zoo program, from page 1)

Included in the projects are animals as diverse as Cinereous Vultures, Tonkin Snub-nosed Monkeys, African Lions, Grevy's Zebras, Lake Titicaca Frogs, and even White-tailed Prairie Dogs and American Pika. The zoo has raised and exported back to Mongolia some Przewalski's horses. (Peter Beck, Marti

Boulder County Audubon Society

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Boulder County Audubon Society

Next issue deadline:

(November 2013 issue) Oct 11.

Contact editor via link at:

www.boulderaudubon.org/newsletter.htm

Boulder County Audubon Environmental Awards 2012

Lifetime Achievement Award:

Dr. William A. Weber

Bill Weber has been chronicling Colorado Flora and educating young naturalists for nearly 70 years. In 1946 he founded the University of Colorado Herbarium, named in his honor and currently containing half a million specimens. He authored the first field guide to the plants of our region in 1953. *Colorado Flora Eastern Slope* and *Colorado*



Bill Weber in his element .

Photo by I. Krasnoborov.

Flora Western Slope, co-authored with Ron Wittmann, are in their fourth editions--and tucked into the daypacks of every serious naturalist. He has published many dozens of additional books, monographs, and articles, including *Lichens of Colorado*, *Bryophytes of Colorado*, and an engaging biography of Colorado naturalist Thomas Cockerell.

Bill's plant keys are among the clearest ever created, and most of us have gratefully navigated through them while stooped over a challenging wildflower. He introduced most of us to scientific plant names and helped us to appreciate their importance. As a botanist and historian, he chronicled the life histories of the approximately 3500 plant species that inhabit our region, documenting the close links between many of our Rocky Mountain species and Eurasian species. You may not know, for example, that our fringed sage, *Artemisia frigida*, is abundant in the Altai Mountains of southern Siberia, or that *Stellaria irrigua*, common on talus slopes in southwestern Colorado, was first described from the Altai.

(cont. page 4)

Environmental Conservation Champion: J.D. Birchmeier

If you have hiked at Walker Ranch, Betasso Preserve, Heil Ranch, Bald Mountain, Shanahan Ridge or NCAR in the past several years and wondered where all the bluebird nest boxes came from, they have all been hand-crafted—and many installed—by J. D. “Birch” Birchmeier. While monitoring bluebirds at Walker Ranch in the summer of 2007, Birch noticed the \$42.95 price tag on a demonstration nest box installed by Boulder County Parks and Open Space (BCPOS). So, he got the notion to build his own boxes (following in the footsteps of his

father), and to date Birch has built and installed over 500 bluebird boxes in and around Boulder County.

When the County started tearing down old barns on open space, they needed bat boxes installed, so Birch graciously agreed to help out. Soon thereafter, he read up on our native bee populations and started building mason bee boxes. Birch's proclivity for nestbox building has now expanded to include wood duck, kestrel, barn owl, wren, and flicker boxes.

Originally from Michigan, this master carpenter and gardener began visiting Boulder County in 1965, to see in-laws. Birch taught physics at both the high school and college levels for many years, until his retirement in 2005. The family relocated to Longmont, and he started to “finally get to do the things I like.”

(cont. page 4)



Grocery and Gas Certificates



Certificates are available at the monthly meetings.

BCAS receives a \$5 donation from the sale of each \$100 King Soopers certificate—and you can buy gasoline! **Bring your checkbook to the meeting.**

Bill Weber, cont. from page 3:

Bill's groundbreaking work with lichens, begun during the 1950s, led to many of his later discoveries about the linkages between Rocky Mountain and Eurasian plants. He conducted the first inventory of lichens in the Galapagos Islands, and he has named close to four dozen new lichen species in our region.

Far beyond being a superb botanist, Bill is Colorado's consummate naturalist. He began looking at nature through a microscope while battling rheumatic fever and other maladies as a young boy, and during his teenage years, he led trips for the Bronx County Bird Club. His notebooks from those years will soon be published, including his account of how his youth group became world-famous after floating a wooden Dovekie, or Little Auk, in a pond for the Christmas bird count--thereby fooling a group of experts that included Roger Tory Peterson.

As a diverse, bird-oriented group of naturalists, it was our great pleasure to present this year's Boulder County Audubon Lifetime Achievement Award to Dr. Bill Weber.

by Steve Jones



J.D. Birchmeier, cont. from page 3:

Fortunately for all of us in Boulder County, some of the many things he enjoys greatly benefit our wildlife and open spaces:

—Member of the board of directors with BCAS; member of the Boulder Bird Club and CO Field Ornithologists.

—Member of the Longmont Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (including innumerable hours working on current park projects)

—Newsletter editor for the Longmont Astronomy Club.

—Member of the Longmont Hoe & Hope Garden Club; birding column editor for the newsletter. The garden this group planted for the Our Center project turned out over 20,000 lbs of produce last year that went to homeless shelters.

—Monitor of the Blue Trail at Walker Ranch for the BCAS/BCPOS Nestbox Project.

Thanks for “retiring,” Birch! by Sharon Daugherty

Boulder Rights of Nature: Special notice!

We have booked Alfalfa's Community Room for a public meeting on **Thursday September 19th** 7 - 9 p.m. (The room seats 50.) There will be refreshments. Water will be a focus of this meeting. The presenter is Gary Wockner, an award-winning environmental writer and advocate.

Community Conservation Award: Pam Wanek



Pam has a profound appreciation for the natural world around her, inspired by deep roots in Colorado and its wild open spaces. A fourth generation native of Colorado, her great grandfather immigrated here in 1870. Pam's grandmother, one of her greatest mentors, was born thirty-some years later in a small town called Boulder—population 6,000.

Pam's grandmother taught her to appreciate the natural world around her. This appreciation led to a desire, years later, to help protect prairie habitats along the Front Range for one of her favorite birds, the Burrowing Owl. This, in turn, led her to a fuller appreciation of the many intricate connections between native species and their shared habitats. Working to protect the Burrowing Owl meant working to protect the Prairie Dogs that provide them with one of their primary nesting sites.

Determined to make a difference, she began volunteering with organizations in the area doing active prairie dog relocations. Over the course of 20 years, she has moved thousands of animals and has developed revolutionary relocation methods that decrease stress on the animals and increase the chance of successful translocations. In 2006, she received national attention in *USA Today* highlighting her development of a non-lethal prairie dog management technique. She has worked with many organizations to provide guidance, knowledge, and on-site demonstrations about prairie dogs and effective relocation procedures. She consults on prairie conservation strategies with governments, private developers, and non-profit organizations.

One focus led to another. Soon protecting the Prairie Dog also meant working to protect its habitat, as new residential communities and office parks are platted, highways expanded, and natural PD habitat bulldozed and paved over. Pam had to become an expert in land-use planning in order to help mitigate the impacts of this damage, utilizing novel methods to integrate PD habitat within the changing metropolitan landscape.

by Donna Nespoli

Bird Crumbs: seasonal wildlife news tidbits



Photo by Scott Severs

Cedar Waxwings in Backyard Nest

Cedar Waxwings engage in an extended breeding period (perhaps rivaled by Say's Phoebes): from June through August, with a few managing two clutches.

In late September one can often see the parents still showing their young the places to find good berries in deciduous riparian areas like Doudy Draw. Scott Severs was one of the lucky few to actually find a nest, however. He writes (summer 2012): I had been noticing the adults perching on top of a planted spruce for several days outside my office window in east Boulder. I went to take a look and found the center of their activity - a nest with four healthy chicks in a honey locust. The adults brought in a steady stream of berries, and blue-purple stains dotted the sidewalk below the nest. The chicks fledged on August 9, all sitting together on a branch. They survived life in a busy office park with leaf blowers, deliveries, and many people walking under their nest.

Louisville Friendly to Wildlife

Time is money, they say; nevertheless, Louisville suddenly postponed a street paving project on Hoover for three weeks to give a pair of Swainson's Hawks time to raise their three chicks in a large cottonwood in a quiet subdivision near Louisville Open Space.



Photos by Tom Wilberding

Linda Kithil noticed the developing conflict between the street project and the nesting chicks, and called her neighbor Paula Hansley, well-known local birder. They are both volunteers for Louisville's Raptor Project. Paula asked the street sweeper to stop; then talked to the paving contractor, Joe Smith of Smith Paving, who had mobilized his crew and equipment and was on the verge of starting work. To firm up the protection agreement, Paula tackled the Mayor of Louisville, Jim Jones. The paving was postponed for three weeks, and the hawks were able to raise their brood of chicks in peace



The Ironic Birder

In mid-June, a number of locals heard and then saw an Eastern Meadowlark in Boulder's Beech Open Space. This lovely, lilting melody is often given short shrift compared to the Western, but music is a matter of taste...

June 13 was to be a good day, as shortly thereafter Christian Nunes discovered a rare (in these-here parts) Least Bittern at Sawhill, and the news spread. According to one witness, "Although right out in the open and mostly standing still in typical bittern fashion, the bird was actively foraging and caught at least one fish while we watched."

But as far as that particular birder was concerned, there was deep irony here. "I just returned from an extended weekend in Ohio and Florida. While I wasn't allowed much time to bird, two species I actively sought, but failed to find, were Eastern Meadowlark and Least Bittern."



Photo by David Dowell

Burrowing Owls: Dancing in the rain

On August 4th (2012) there was a wonderful refreshing shower in the Lagerman area, and all the wildlife appeared to appreciate it greatly. As Gary Rabourn was observing the local Burrowing Owl family (two adults and two surviving young), the rain seemed to perk them up. They began to flop around in their slightly clumsy way, dancing in the rain. Cue the meadowlark soundtrack...



Dickcissel photo by G. Assenmacher



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<http://tiny.cc/ez7v6>



Interludes with Nature – were you there?

During this past breeding season, B.C.A.S. held a number of our popular donation-requested special field trips and “outdoor workshops.” Dazzling, dashing dragonflies (also known as deadly drones) was the last; preceded by the Secret Garden (Skunk Canyon) with gourmet brunch in May; a North County Extravaganza hunting trip in early June; later a Barn and Burrowing Owl Quest; trips to Golden Gate State Park, as well as to Pueblo Mountain Park; to the gorgeous private Arapaho Ranch near Nederland; and in late summer, Butterflies of the Foothills and a Hummingbird workshop crew which zoomed from the plains to the high country and back. All of these were led by local experts and the limited rosters filled by late May. We all had beautiful (and yummy)

experiences and are deeply grateful to the leaders as well as to all who donated and came along to watch and learn..



More Bird Crumbs, seasonal wildlife tidbits and news

Mille grazie to our summer field trip leaders:

Joyce Takamine, John Vanderpoel, Jan Chu, Scott Severs and Ann Cooper, Paula Hansley, Steve Jones and Petrea Mah, Naseem Munshi and Mike Tupper, Maureen Lawry, Elaine Hill, Carol Kampert, Marcel and Joel Such, Ray Davis, and organizing maven Pam Piombino.

Rex-heron continues to terrorize the marsh

The dignified and benign elder statesman of the marsh may be more than it seems. Here is a summer discussion thread concerning the many comestibles that the Great Blue Heron is happy to consume.

From Paula H, June 18:

In Daughenbaugh Open Space north of Cherry St. and Coal Creek in Louisville, I saw an amazing sight Sunday evening: a GBH stalking baby prairie dogs! I didn't see it catch one, but I couldn't help but imagine the heron trying to swallow a prairie dog. It might not be so different from swallowing a large frog...

From Bill K, continuing the discussion thread:

Many years ago at Little Gaynor Lake along Oxford Rd. west of US 287 in Boulder County, I not only saw a Great Blue Heron capture a baby prairie dog, but then take it, while it dangled from its bill, to the lake and drown it before flipping it up in the air to catch and swallow it.



More Rex Heron >>>

String Theory

In mid-June Cara Stiles made a quick hop into her garden and then back in the house; fifteen minutes later she visited the garden again. This time she noticed a striking change during the interim: A thin jute string that hadn't been there before was hanging over the garden gate, with the wrapper it came from lying loose on the ground. Curious, Cara followed the string through the garden for over 100 feet. The string trail draped across the ground, then up through a lilac, then through a small, twiggy tree, and finally to a large cottonwood. It went around the cottonwood in a jagged array, climbed about 30 feet, and... came to an end, hanging over a branch. The string collector had vanished. There was no sign of the ambitious bird who had tried to drag it into the construction of a home. Who was the empty nester? Cara speculates that it was a robin. The bird must have been frustrated. It never returned to finish the job.

Anecdote told to Cobirders by Cara Stiles in mid-June 2013

Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory will host the 11th annual BBQ for the Birds, a yearly celebration of birds, people and land, to raise funds for conservation and education programs.

The BBQ for the Birds will take place from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Oct. 5 at the Old Stone House at Barr Lake State Park, 14500 Lark Bunting Lane in Brighton, Colo.

The event is open to the public and features bird banding, bird walks, kids' activities, live raptors, live music, workshops, presentations, exhibitors, silent and live auctions, and a harvest-themed lunch.. This year, Greg Miller will lead a bird walk at 7 a.m., make the featured presentation, "My Big Year," and host a workshop on citizen science with RMBO biologist Jeff Birek. Miller is a nationally acclaimed speaker whose participation in a birding competition was portrayed in the book and film *The Big Year*.

Admission, which includes lunch and all activities, is \$11 for RMBO members, \$13 for non-members, \$6 for ages 5-12 and free for kids under 5. Register by Sept. 27 and save \$1 off per person. Register online at www.rmbo.org or by calling 970-482-1707 ext. 30 by Oct. 3, or at the door on

From Chip C:

I watched a Great Blue Heron catch and eventually swallow a smallish muskrat at Gilbert Water Ranch near Phoenix in April (the drowning part didn't really work here but it clamped down around the neck after several dunks and eventually cut off its air while standing tall out of the water.). I have also watched them catch mice in dry fields north of Boundary Bay, BC.

From Gary L:

In Florida I got a photo of Great Blue Heron with Common Moorhen in bill.

Boulder Reservoir Water Camp

On most Tuesday mornings during the summer months, nine different Boulder Audubon adults and three Boulder Audubon teen naturalists gathered at the boat house at Boulder Reservoir to provide participants in the City of Boulder water sports camp an opportunity to learn about the critters that inhabit the ecosystems around the reservoir.

At 9am the Auduboners gathered with binoculars, butterfly nets and bird and butterfly guides and traveled (some by water and some by land) to different areas around the reservoir to await the arrival of the 10-to-13-year-old campers in their canoes, kayaks and paddleboards. When the campers arrived, they received an overview of the area, played some ecology games, and participated in open-ended discussions about the animals and plants in the area as well as ecology, evolution and any other topics that were of interest to the group.



Everyone was then turned free to see what they could find, to report back to the group later. The young adventurers discovered an amazing number of birds, butterflies and amphibians.

We made sure they had time to paddle back to the boat house for lunch, most appearing happy and stimulated by their experience (often much to their own surprise.) Over 300 children were exposed to a mini-adventure in nature in this way.

Boulder County Audubon Society would like to thank: Jan Chu, Renee Haip, Sarah Horn, Steve Jones, Hank Lacey, Julia Lacey, Maureen Lawry, Petrea Mah, Carol McCasland, Donna Nespoli, Joel and Marcel Such for their help with this noteworthy project.



by Petrea Mah



Aphrodite Fritillary Butterfly

Crowdsourced Data Reveal Feats of Bird Migration

New research is now giving quantitative information about the migration of over 100 species of birds, using data from more than 2.3 million sightings submitted to eBird by thousands of amateur bird watchers. Extract below is from a Cornell Lab of Ornithology emailed news release, July 24, 2013. [See also New York Times article <http://tinyurl.com/l2yjlnhf>]

The results provide a fascinating glimpse at an astonishing range of species: for instance, the tiny Calliope Hummingbird crosses the continent almost three times as fast as the Northern Shoveler, which outweighs it more than 300 times. They also highlight the immense scientific value to be gained from bird watchers' sightings when they can be combined into a single large database.

"Up to this point, migration theory has really only been examined at the individual level," said Frank La Sorte, a research associate at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and lead author of the new study. "But in the end, you want to conserve populations—you want to maintain their migration corridors, flyways, or stopover habitats. And that's why there's so much potential here."

"In some ways this study is just opening up potential for a really innovative field of study," La Sorte said, noting that the team plans to investigate the continent's major migratory flyways next. "It really represents a new perspective on avian migration."

La Sorte's coauthors on the study include Daniel Fink, Wesley Hochachka, and Steve Kelling of the Cornell Lab, and John DeLong of the University of Nebraska. The study was funded by the Leon Levy Foundation, Wolf Creek Foundation, and National Science Foundation.

BOULDER COUNTY WILDLIFE INVENTORY, DECEMBER 2012 & JANUARY 2013**Gillian and Alex Brown, 4560 Darley Avenue, Boulder, CO 80305**

Common Redpolls continued to be seen throughout the county both months with at least 129 individuals reported in December; this is an increase in numbers from November. The male **Northern Cardinal** in North Boulder continued to be seen by many. A large flock of **Bohemian Waxwings** was seen in the mountains, although none was reported on the plains. The **Tundra Swans** continued to stay in the county with at least fifteen birds reported; again this was an increase from November. **Red-throated Loon** was a new bird for 2012, as was a **Dunlin**. Any shorebird seen in December is an unusual sighting; **Dunlin** is always unusual but is more commonly seen in December than any other month.

The Boulder Christmas bird count (BCBC) always provides good coverage of the birds still around in the middle of December. The count circle is fifteen miles in diameter centered on the middle of Boulder, and thus provides a wide range of habitats. The cone crop in the mountains was very poor this year resulting in only two **Red Crossbills** being observed, and no **Cassin's Finches**. **Pine Siskin** numbers were also lower than normal. The only **Rosy Finch** observed all month was a **Gray-crowned Rosy Finch** seen out on the plains in the north of the county. The **Golden-crowned Sparrow** continued near the Teller Lakes parking lot, along with a **White-throated Sparrow**. Eight **Harris's Sparrows** were reported in a variety of locations.

The start of a new year is always an exciting time with the beginnings of a new year's list. 2013 is especially exciting as it is the beginning of a "big year" for birders in Boulder County. The idea is to see as many bird species as possible within the county during 2013. It means that many birders will be chasing any rarities that are reported, and all will constantly be on the lookout for different species. I am thus going to make a prediction – something that I hate to do – that 2013 will be a record year beating the previous record of 320 species seen in 2011.

Probably the most exciting event of January was the enormous collection of gulls feeding at Teller Lake No. 5 at the end of the month. The lake had thawed to the point that large numbers of frozen dead fish were available as food, an enormous bonanza for large gulls. This is not an unusual occurrence at this time of year, but what was extraordinary is how many unusual gulls were present. It was speculated that this was because the fish were too large for our normal **Ring-billed Gulls** to handle. It was a wonderful opportunity to study unusual gulls in all plumages. The most unusual species were an **Iceland Gull**, a **Glaucous-winged Gull** and a **Great Black-backed Gull**. **Iceland Gull** was last seen in 2010 and **Great Black-backed Gull** was last seen in 2011. **Herring Gulls** were often more numerous than **Ring-billed Gulls**, and there were several **Thayer's** and **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** present.

Two very unseasonal birds seen in January were an **American White Pelican** and a **Sandhill Crane**. Unusual birds that continued from 2012 were several **Tundra Swans**, the **Golden-crowned Sparrow** and the male **Northern Cardinal**. **Common Redpolls** continued to linger on the plains. Both **Eastern** and **Mountain Bluebirds** were reported. **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** and **Short-eared Owl** had both not been reported since 2011. Other good January sightings included **Snow Goose** and **Ross's Goose**, **Ring-necked Pheasant**, three **Northern Pygmy Owls**, two **Chihuahuan Ravens**, a **Marsh Wren** and a **Swamp Sparrow**.



Altogether 129 bird species were reported in December, the second highest total ever, but still a long way off the record 138 bird species seen in 2010.
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Contributors to the December 2012 and January 2013 Inventories:

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Western grebe photo by Brent Daniel

BOULDER COUNTY WILDLIFE INVENTORY, FEBRUARY & MARCH 2013

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

The most unusual birds seen in February were either birds that had already been observed in January, or birds that had arrived unseasonably early. In the former category were the **Iceland Gull** and the **Glaucous-winged Gull** which lingered into early February. The **Northern Cardinal** and **Golden-crowned Sparrow** continued at their previous locations. **Common Redpolls** had diminished in numbers but were still to be found in the county. The single **American White Pelican** reported in January, increased to an amazing flock of thirty nine birds congregating on Panama Reservoir. Other unseasonal birds included a **Turkey Vulture** seen on the plains on the 3rd, and a **Fox Sparrow**. In spite of these unseasonal arrivals, our first harbingers of spring, **Cinnamon Teal** and **Mountain Bluebird**, which are frequently reported in February, were not observed this month.

An **Eastern X Spotted Towhee** hybrid was an interesting February sighting. An irruption of **Bohemian Waxwings**, with birds numbered in the thousands occurred from mid-February onwards. The biggest flocks seemed to occur in the Gunbarrel area of Boulder. Mixed in with the **Bohemian Waxwings** were a few **Cedar Waxwings**. Other good sightings included **Eastern Screech Owl**, **Northern Saw-whet Owl**, **American Three-toed Woodpeckers**, six **Eastern Bluebirds**, five **Harris's Sparrows**, and all three species of **Rosy Finch** (**Gray-crowned**, **Black** and **Brown-capped**). A small flock of **Evening Grosbeaks** seen on the plains is worth mentioning as these birds have been increasingly hard to find. We do not often comment on the absence of birds since it is usually due to poor reporting, but the Indian Peaks Winter Count turned up only a single **Pine Siskin**, the sole report for February.

March 2013 was a spectacular month – more spring than winter - with many arriving migrants, a handful of rarities and most of the wintering species still present. **Boreal Owl** is one of our rarest small owl species and was last reported in 2011; the one sighted this month was stunned by flying into a window but fortunately survived. Photographs helped confirm the identification of this bird. Other unusual sightings included a **Greater White-fronted Goose**, two **Short-eared Owls**, a **Red-headed Woodpecker**, a **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** (last seen in 2011), a **Chihuahuan Raven**, and a **Sage Sparrow** on a feeder in the plains. The **Northern Cardinal** and **Golden-crowned Sparrow** continued as in previous months, and both **Bohemian Waxwings** and **Common Redpolls** were still to be found in the county.

Shorebird migration was well under way with three “peeps” – **Western**, **Least** and **Baird's Sandpipers** – reported. Two separate pairs of **Dunlin** were reported, a rare spring occurrence. An **American Avocet** reported on the 16th seems early for this species, as does a **Solitary Sandpiper** at the end of the month. **Franklin's Gulls** were present from the 9th onwards, and a **Bonaparte's Gull** was seen at the end of March. A **Mew Gull** was reported in the Longmont area. Several flights of **Sandhill Cranes** were reported. A **Lincoln's Sparrow** seen on March 6th was another early migrant. More seasonal arrivals included **Cinnamon** and **Blue-winged Teal**, **Swainson's Hawk**, **Peregrine Falcon**, **Greater Yellowlegs**, **White-winged Dove**, **Say's Phoebe**, **Western** and **Mountain Bluebirds**, and **Yellow-rumped Warblers**.

Altogether 105 bird species were reported in February. Two events helped the reporting in February: the Indian Peaks Winter Bird Count and the “Gullapalooza” where well over three hundred birders explored the Valmont Lake complex. Birders were very active looking for new arrivals in March resulting in 132 bird species reported, far surpassing the previous record of 120 species in 1999.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THE FEBRUARY & MARCH 2013 INVENTORIES

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Our Coming Food Crisis

Summary of column by Gary Paul Nabhan, *New York Times*, July 21 2013. <http://nyti.ms/118e4sO>

The heat wave that blanketed the Western states earlier this summer covered an area larger than New England. The biggest problem isn't with spiking temperatures, but a new reality in which long stretches of triple-digit days are common — threatening not only the lives of the millions of people who live there, but also a cornerstone of the American food supply.

People living outside the region seldom recognize its immense contribution to American agriculture: roughly 40 percent of the net farm income for the country normally comes from the 17 Western states; cattle and sheep production make up a significant part of that, as do salad greens, dry beans, onions, melons, hops, barley, wheat and citrus fruits. The current heat wave will undeniably diminish both the quality and quantity of these foods..

The most vulnerable crops are those that were already in flower and fruit when temperatures surged, from apricots and barley to wheat and zucchini. Idaho farmers have documented how their potato yields have been reduced because their heat-stressed plants are not developing their normal number of tubers. Other crops also suffer from increased heat. Higher temperatures tend to make plants grow faster, which reduces the amount of time that seeds have to grow and mature. This can reduce yields. (<http://tinyurl.com/d2mqtn>)

While farmers have been helped by payouts from crop insurance plans, that assistance is merely a temporary response to a long-term problem. Many farmers and ranchers have been employing strategies that improve productivity under the “new normal” condition.

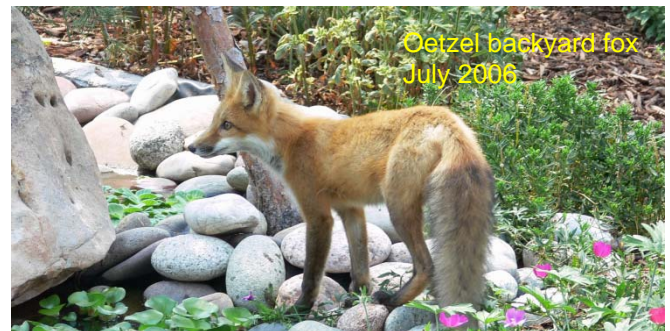
One strategy is to promote the use of locally produced compost to increase the moisture-holding capacity of fields, orchards and vineyards. In addition to locking carbon in the soil, composting buffers crop roots from heat and drought while increasing forage and food-crop yields. By simply increasing organic matter in their fields from 1 percent to 5 percent, farmers can increase water storage in the root zones from 33 pounds per cubic meter to 195 pounds. And we have a great source of compostable waste: cities.

Another desirable strategy is to use small- and medium-scale rainwater harvesting and gray water (that is, waste water excluding toilet water) on private lands, rather than funneling all runoff to huge, costly and vulnerable reservoirs behind downstream dams. Both urban and rural food production can be greatly enhanced through proven techniques of harvesting rain and biologically filtering gray water for irrigation. However, many state and local laws restrict what farmers can do with such water.

Funds are needed to help farmers transition to forms of perennial agriculture — initially focusing on edible tree crops and perennial grass pastures — rather than providing more subsidies to biofuel production from annual crops. Perennial crops not only keep 7.5 to 9.4 times more carbon in the soil than annual crops, but their production also reduces the amount of fossil fuels needed to till the soil every year.

We also need to address the looming seed crisis. Because of recent episodes of drought, fire and floods, we are facing the largest shortfall in the availability of native grass, forage legume, tree and shrub seeds in American history. Yet current budget-cutting proposals threaten to significantly reduce the number of federal plant material centers, which promote conservation best practices.

If our rangelands, forests and farms are to recover from the devastating heat, drought and wildfires of the last three years, they need to be seeded with appropriate native forage and ground-cover species to heal from the wounds of climatic catastrophes. To that end, seed collection and distribution programs need better financing.



Did you Find a Fox?

Your contribution of vital red fox information is central to the success of native Rocky Mountain red fox research.

The research seeks to locate and better understand the distribution of two subspecies of red fox through central Colorado. The Rocky Mountain red fox historically occurred in the higher elevations of the Rocky Mountains, but nonnative red foxes (a produce of fur farm stock) began expanding eastward toward the Rocky Mountains in the mid-1900s. Now that the distribution of red fox appears continuous, it is unclear where the boundary of native and nonnative red foxes occurs or whether the two subspecies hybridize. Research is needed to better understand the native red fox population's distribution, ecological role, and interaction with the non-native red fox.

By providing the location of red fox that you have seen, our research can better focus on collecting genetic samples in the following, non-invasive ways: hair, saliva, feces, and road-kill specimens.

Visit www.ifoundafox.org to report sightings.

An Experience at Hog Island, Maine Audubon Camp

By Carol McCasland

The last camp experience I had was many years ago as a Girl Scout. I never really got tying knots, hated horse-back riding, and the food was awful. Imagine my surprise after attending 2 weeks at the Audubon camp at Hog Island, Maine this summer! Just off the coast of Maine, near Bremen, Hog Island has a rich history of educating birders since 1936. Among the first educators was Roger Tory Peterson. Imagine now in the year 2013, attending camp with such birding experts as Kenn and Kimberly Kaufman, Scott Weidensaul, and others. The first week was The Joy of Birding, a program designed to hone one's birding skills, as well as to discover breeding warblers, black guillemots, and the famed Atlantic Puffins. For someone who had never experienced breeding Eastern Warblers in their full regalia and songs, this was an experience of utter enjoyment. Imagine the first very early morning (4 a.m.) walk through the woods. There in a clearing at the top of a spruce was a male Black-throated Green Warbler singing his heart out. And he stayed, turning so we could see every angle and feature well. And then in a nearby tree-top, sat a male Blackburnian warbler also singing his heart out. To be serenaded by two life birds at the same time with such great views, was a magnificent way to start the two weeks! But wait, it only gets better.

Probably the rarest bird in the area, the Black Guillemot, plies the waters between the mainland and Hog Island regularly, as do Common Loons and Common Eiders. After a while, people were saying "oh, it's just another guillemot." So important are these birds, that we celebrated International Guillemot Appreciation day during the 2nd week of camp. Until you've seen Kenn Kaufman in a guillemot hat, you haven't lived! But let me get to the Atlantic Puffins, probably the most endearing success story of the area. By 1901, Atlantic Puffins had all but disappeared south of the Canadian border. All but one pair had been killed for food or for their feathers. The one remaining pair were protected and over time, the puffins began to come back. But some of their original habitats were now patrolled by predatory gulls. One person, Steve Kress, had the vision to restore former puffin habitats. He got permission from Canada to bring 6 chicks to Eastern Egg Rock Island off the Maine coast, and place them in human-made burrows, feed them until they fledged, protecting them from predatory gulls. When puffins fledge, they leave their natal burrows, go out to sea for 2 or 3 years. Then they return to the island where they fledged to breed. Over time, Steve and his crew brought hundreds of chicks to Maine, establishing colonies on five islands. Today there are over 1000 nesting pairs on 5 islands off the Maine coast. And by controlling the predatory gull population, Arctic terns and

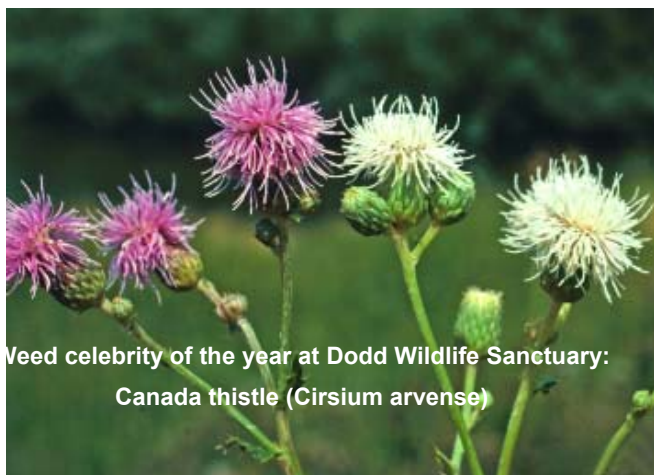
Roseate Terns have also returned to Maine. Today, human interns live on the islands to help deter the gulls as well as to observe and research the puffins and terns who breed on the islands. As if viewing puffins and terns at Eastern Egg Rock Island with Steve Kress weren't enough, the next week's camp was Field Ornithology, or everything I wish I knew about birds. Until you've seen the brood patch on a nesting female Northern Parula, or the cloacal protuberance on a male Parula, or heard the heartbeat of a Parula, or listened to the song of the Black-throated Green Warbler through a parabola, or bird with Kenn Kaufman, you just haven't been birding! All this was done with the expertise of two excellent Professors of Ornithology, Dr. Sara Morris and Dr. John Kricher, with Kenn and Kim Kaufman, and with Scott Weidensaul, among others. We watched as the experts banded ruby-throated hummingbirds, warblers, and purple finches. Being able to hold a warbler and release it is a joy that must be experienced in this lifetime. The evening lectures were some of the most inspiring talks I've heard anywhere! To hear Scott Weidensaul talk about the search for vanishing species made me rush to get his book, "The Ghost with Trembling Wings", a great read!

Other benefits of camp: meeting people who all share a love of nature. The second week of camp included the Teen Program, along with Boulder's two teen campers, Joel Such and Levi Stone. It was fun watching the group of teens congregate for their programs, which mercifully for them, was separate from the adult programs. And the food was GREAT. There were 3 resident chefs, all competing for 'best' meal. The food was varied, balanced, and prepared beautifully. We were served fresh steamed lobster both weeks along with a special dessert of 'puffin' cream puffs.



For more interesting news of local participation in the Hog Island, ME nature camps, visit our website at **BoulderAudubon.org**. Above is board member Carol McCasland listening to the heartbeat of a Northern Parula on Hog Island.

See also <http://projectpuffin.audubon.org/>. And if you want to spend quality time on line, check out the puffin chick webcam <http://tinyurl.com/myebk4w>



Weed celebrity of the year at Dodd Wildlife Sanctuary:
Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*)

Boulder County Audubon Unenvironmental Award 2013

An attractive but prickly plant with the lovely name *Cirsium arvense* has won our 2013 award for Environmental Persistence. It continues to have tough competition from Smooth Brome (a common pasture grass), as well as from an ugly stepsister called Teasel, and the alien Russian Knapweed. However at our small wildlife sanctuary at Dodd Reservoir, it is Canada thistle which is our first award winner in this category.

The good news is that the Smooth Brome on the north side of the reservoir is no longer viable and the cover crop of Milo is doing well. The new shrubs that were planted on a cold and windy day in April have had a high survival rate. The bad news is that the Canada Thistle, Russian Knapweed and Teasel are

also growing healthy and strong. Much help is needed throughout August and September to get the upper hand on these weeds.

We need as many hands as possible through September to reduce the weed populations. Let's get our land ready to be planted to natives in late October!

Meet Our Newest Residents at Dodd

These beautiful thistle gall flies were released in one of the thickest thistle patches on the northwest shore on June 28th. ▼



Petrea exhorts the troops in April

They were purchased from the Colorado Department of Agriculture and were raised at the Palisade Insectary. The adult flies lay eggs on the Canada Thistle stem and when they hatch the larvae burrow into the stem and a gall is formed as the larvae develop into instar stages and a gall is formed. The larvae overwinter in the gall and hatch in the spring to begin the cycle again. The thistles are not killed but are very stressed and often misshapen to the point that they cannot make flowers and seeds. In some areas Canada Thistle populations have been reduced by 48%.

By Petrea Mah

Book review – *On the Wing*

By Alan Tennant
Borzoi Book, Alfred Knopf, 2004

An irresistible title for the editor of our own *On the Wing*, spotted at the BCAS November sale. It turns out to be a delightful tale of adventure birding. Initially, Tennant teamed up with retired WW II pilot George Vose and his aging Cessna on an Army program to radio-track the initial northward migration headings of Peregrine Falcons as they departed from the Texas coast. The pair decided it would be a great adventure to track one of the falcons over its entire migration. They weren't allowed to use Government equipment for this project, so they acquired some of their own.

It was quite a challenge, following the bird by day, finding a suitable place to spend each night, and acquiring the bird's signal again the next morning. Not content with following the northward migration, they also returned in the fall to follow another falcon south toward its wintering grounds. Along the way, the two men nearly lose their lives and run afoul of the law in the race to keep their birds in view and their rattletrap Cessna gassed up and running. Tennant also renders with gorgeous precision and skill the landscape and wildlife they pass on the way and the falcons that direct their course.

By George Oetzel



October Program Supplement — Denver Zoo conservation Programs

Our October program features Dr. Richard Reading, Vice President of Conservation Biology at the Denver Zoo. The zoo has an interesting website that describes their numerous conservation projects, both local and in the field.

<http://denverzoo.org/conservation/overview.html>

Of particular interest is this YouTube video about a project at the Rio Mora National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico. (<http://tinyurl.com/llvu3s2>) In it, Dr. Richards and others describe how bison help to preserve the grassland from erosion and invasive species, in contrast to the grazing habits of cattle. They also describe efforts to restore grasslands that have erosion gullies that drain water away and prevent water storage for the grasses.

The YouTube site also has links to other Denver Zoo videos that may be of interest.



Bison, South Dakota—G. Oetzel

Colorado Gives Day 2013: BCAS may be a beneficiary

The [Community First Foundation](#), an Arvada-based foundation dedicated to increasing community generosity and involvement, and [FirstBank](#), Colorado's largest locally owned bank, are again organizing and sponsoring Colorado Gives Day, an initiative to increase philanthropy in Colorado through online giving. The date to mark is **Tuesday, Dec. 10, 2013**. BCAS has submitted an application to be listed among the 900-plus nonprofits participating in this centralized giving center. As of press time, we do not know if we will be accepted. We ask that you highlight the date and look for us when you are doing your annual giving. (If we are not there this year, we will be next year!).

Community First Foundation and FirstBank have partnered on this initiative since its inception three years ago, distributing \$8.7 million to Colorado nonprofits in 2010, \$12.8 million in 2011 and \$15.7 million in 2012.

How it all works:

The website giving process is secure. You register, then browse through the listed charities, or write in your nonprofits of choice; you can look at their mission statements, programs, photos and even their financial basics. Credit card and processing fees will be covered by the sponsors to ensure that *100 percent of Colorado Gives Day donations go directly to the nonprofit organizations*. In addition, FirstBank provides \$250,000 for an Incentive Fund to leverage donations made through the CG website. The fund is proportionally allocated across all donations received, increasing the value of each donation.

There will also be ten prizes worth \$1000 each for trivia winners to use in additional donations to the non-profit of their choice (see the FirstBank Facebook page to enter these contests, which take place twice a day from Dec. 2 to Dec. 6).

Finally, a luck-of-the-draw prize will benefit 18 of the non-profits which have received at least 30 donations from their supporters; these prizes are worth \$5000 each.

Mark your calendars, join the fun; do all your local holiday giving in one spot in December. You'll feel great that evening.

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. Visit <http://www.boulderaudubon.org/about.htm#membership>.

Paper copies of the Nov-Dec, Jan-Feb, and Mar-Apr issues of *On the Wing* are mailed only to BCAS Supporting Members who request them. The electronic edition, available online, has color pictures and usually includes extra articles.