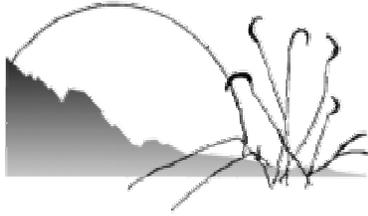


BOULDER COUNTY NATURE ASSOCIATION



NATURE NEWS

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Visitor Plan Needs Our Support

Many of you may have read or heard about the "Visitor Plan." The plan was developed to address the ever-increasing use of the City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks lands.

The major purpose of this plan is to provide a sustainable future for all the natural values of these places that make them so special, while continuing to allow people to enjoy these lands. The plan is moving forward using a three-zone management strategy. To ensure that the Management Zone strategy functions in the best possible way, BCNA generally supported the recommendations of the citizen committee appointed to develop the Visitor Plan.

Generally, BCNA recommendations were as follows:

- Sensitive and Protected Zones. No off-trail use except for scientific research. Dog use should be prohibited. The citizen committee did a good job of assessing the management needs of these areas. High quality grassland communities and ecotones should be included in the criteria for designation. These places are less fragmented and provide corridors for black bears, elk, and mountain lions.
- Natural Zones. These were the "in between" places that may have not strong enough values to be placed in the sensitive category, but still have high values. The citizen committee has developed good compromises concerning potential visitor use. We recommend dog walking on leash only in this management area, and possibly no dogs in sensitive areas within this zone.
- Passive Recreation Zones. Most of these places are adjacent to urban neighborhoods. They will continue to provide easy access to visitors. While these areas have an established pattern of use, this zone could certainly contain sensitive ecological components, which should not go ignored.

Staff has invited BCNA and other groups to help determine the boundaries of these areas. Using historical data and research (much of it supported by volunteer work of BCNA members), BCNA is using the best available information to define these zones carefully.

Sadly, many groups are putting their special interests ahead of the sustainability and the future of Open Space and Mountain Parks. Some groups have threatened to oppose future open space/mountain parks ballot initiatives unless the Visitor Plan is scrapped! Much of the opposition to the plan comes from some dog

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owners who do not recognize the needs of wildlife and the ongoing degradation of plant communities.

It's important that BCNA members express their support for the continued ecological sustainability of Open Space and Mountain Parks. Please contact the OSMP Board at their web site: <http://www.ci.boulder.co.us/openspace/about/osbt-comments.htm>

Or email Boulder City Council at: council@ci.boulder.co.us

I will post updates on the nature-net concerning the plan's status and times of upcoming hearings.

--Scott Severs, President

Fall BCNA Events Calendar

Saturday, October 18, 10 a.m.-noon: Wintering raptor survey volunteer training and organizational meeting. Boulder Reservoir west gate on N. 55th St., north of Boulder-Longmont Diagonal Highway. Sue Cass, 303-494-5345.

Saturday, October 25: Jim McKee will lead a half-day class on raptor identification on the plains of northeastern Boulder County. Time and place to be announced. Call Larry Colben-son (303-441-3899) to reserve a place.

Sunday, October 26, 4-6 p.m.: BCNA board meeting at Sue and Alan Cass's house, 4560 Hanover Ave., in South Boulder. Potluck to follow. All members are welcome. 303-494-5345.

Saturday, November 8, 6:30 p.m.: Annual Guy Fawke's Day potluck, potlatch, and bonfire at Naseem and Mike's, 2595 119th Street, Lafayette (303-673-0933). This year's potluck theme is Italian. Costumes recommended. Children are welcome and encouraged to come.

Sunday, December 14: Boulder Audubon Christmas Bird Count. Birdwatchers of all levels are always welcome. Contact Bill Schmoker (bill.schmoker@bvsd.k12.co.us).

Sunday, December 21, 7-10 a.m.: Annual Winter Solstice sunrise hike on the White Rocks Trail (east of the White Rocks Natural Area). Bald Eagles, misty views, and good company more or less guaranteed. Meet at the Teller Farms north trailhead on Valmont Road a half mile west of 95th St. You can bring a thought, poem, story, or song to share with the group during a short sunrise ceremony at the Boulder Creek bridge. Optional breakfast to follow in Niwot. To reserve a place for breakfast contact Steve Jones (303-494-2468; stephen.jones@earthlink.net).

December 15-February 15: Count period for the Indian Peaks Winter Bird Count. For information, contact Bill Kaempfer (303-939-8005; kaempfer@colorado.edu).

Sightings

On August 24 Ann Cooper was working at her desk in her North Boulder home when her dog started barking frantically in its 'bear' tone of voice. Ann looked up to the west-facing window to see a humongous bear standing there, front paws on the eaves, nose pressed against the window pane. Ann writes: "Although we were divided by double-glazing, three feet felt way too close! I wonder if the bears have hit the western suburbs early this fall?"

Earlier in the month, Carron Meaney spied a sow and her three cubs ambling through the same North Boulder neighborhood. This bear family became famous, their photos appearing almost weekly in the *Daily Camera*. Throughout August and early September biologists repeatedly chased the family back up into the hills. In July biologists killed a black bear that had been following hikers around in the Boulder Mountain Park. They speculated that the bear had learned to associate food--garbage, bird seed, or handouts--with humans.

Jim Knopf watched a gray fox flash through his yard in lower Skunk Canyon on August 26. "It scampered down the driveway toward the window, then zoomed by the side of the house and stopped once to look back...beautiful!" Some years ago local gray fox populations were devastated by canine distemper. It's good to receive these occasional reports indicating some are still around--and acting somewhat wild.

Drought relief? The 2.15" of rain that fell in South Boulder on August 29-30 brought our annual total through August 31 to 20.81", about 140% of average. Recent wet conditions in central and northern Colorado are the exception in the high plains and intermountain west. Drought persists throughout much of the region. Here are 365-day percentages of average (31 Aug. 2002-30 Aug. 2003) for selected stations: Grand Junction 107, Alamosa 87, Billings 73, Great Falls 71, Casper 100, Cheyenne 70, Boise 107, Pocatello 67, Scottsbluff 45, Valentine 77, Bismarck 82, Dodge City 80, Cedar City (UT) 97, Amarillo 72, Albuquerque 77, Farmington 125, Ely (NV) 78. Source: National Weather Service web site.

Wintering Raptor Survey 2003-4

This year's orientation/training session for wintering raptor survey participants is scheduled for 10 a.m., Saturday, October 18, at Boulder Reservoir. We'll scan the area for early arrivals, review survey procedures, and assign routes. BCNA members are invited to attend a Boulder County Parks and Open Space identification class taught by Jim McKee the following Saturday, October 25, a bonus for folks wishing to hone their skills. Time and place for the class are yet to be determined, but you can reserve a spot by calling Larry Colbenson, 303-441-3899.

The wintering raptors survey, in its 21st year, has documented previously unreported raptor behaviors and population trends. Survey results have contributed to the designation and preservation of critical wildlife habitat in Boulder County. Join us and welcome aboard! Questions? Contact Sue Cass, 303-494-5345; cass@colorado.edu.

Raptor Ecology Classes with Steve Jones and Randy Gietzen

Improve your raptor identification skills while observing bald eagles, golden eagles, northern harriers, falcons, and hawks on the plains of Boulder County. Class discussions will focus on behavior, population status, and conservation of local birds of prey.

Thursday, February 5, 7-9 p.m., Foothills Nature Center
Saturday, February 7 and 21, 8 a.m.-12:30 p.m., field classes

Tuition: \$70 (\$60 BCNA members). To register contact Steve at 303-494-2468; stephen.jones@earthlink.net.

In addition, we are offering a Spanish-English raptor ecology class for families (including children, age 7-15) Saturday mornings, November 15 and 22. This class is targeted at folks who have had little prior opportunity to watch birds. Please spread the word or contact Steve for more information.

Boulder OSMP Cliff-Nesting Raptor Report

Nearly 50 volunteers contributed 2700 hours monitoring cliff-nesting raptor sites. Nest productivity this year was mixed:

Bald eagle: 2 active sites, 1 young fledged
Golden eagle: 2 active sites, 1 young fledged
Peregrine falcon: 2 active sites, 4+ young fledged
Prairie falcon: 3 active sites, 6 young fledged

The bald eagle chick fledged from a large stick nest on private property near White Rocks. This is the first successful bald eagle nest ever documented Boulder County.

Beautiful, Boisterous Bats

"This is the best field course I've ever taken," said one student about Bats of Boulder County. The BCNA summer class was taught by local bat biologist Rick Adams. Participants learned, among other amazing facts, that a bat emits up to 250 echolocation calls a second. These ultrasonic calls, sometimes as loud as a smoke alarm, are mostly inaudible to humans--luckily--because of the calls' high frequency. To keep from going deaf, bats have an "off-on switch" in their ears that prevents them from hearing transmission of their own piercing calls yet allows them to hear the echo responses.

Bats use echolocation to catch hundreds of insects each night, typically scooping them out of the air with their tails and transferring them to their claws while executing a reverse somersault. This gravity-defying maneuver, sometimes performed while a dependent youngster hangs on for dear life, takes a fraction of a second.

During the second evening of the class, Rick and his assistants set up a mist net at a local foothills pond. Bats are really thirsty when they wake up from their daytime naps, so ponds are good places to observe, hear (with a bat detector and "translator"), and capture them as they swoop down to drink. We caught 27 bats (4 different species), and after gently extricating them from the net, Rick recorded their vital statistics and released them. Seeing these amazing mammals up-close-and-personal was an incredible experience for all. Be sure to sign up for this class in 2004!

--Carol Kampert

Fall Natural Events Calendar

Early October: Listen for the pulsating calls of sandhill cranes overhead. The cranes are migrating from breeding areas in the northern Rockies and the Arctic to wintering areas in New Mexico and Texas. When clouds hang low during upslope storms, flocks stop to feed in grasslands and stubble fields near Haystack Mountain. Throughout the rest of October, flocks will continue to stream over the eastern plains. Many are headed for Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, in New Mexico's Rio Grande Valley, and Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge, in west Texas.

October 10: Full moon rises at 6:56 p.m. MDT. "Moon of Falling Leaves"--Lakota

October 20-22: Orionid meteor shower. The peak is predicted for October 21. Best viewing should be after midnight.

Late October: Smooth sumac (*Rhus glabra*) turns fiery red in foothills canyons. According to Kelly Kindsher (*Edible Wild Plants of the Prairie*), sumac berries were used by native peoples for tea or sumac-ade, and the roots and spring shoots were peeled and eaten raw. People crafted the stems into chew-sticks to clean teeth and used the stems and berries medicinally for treating sore mouths and tongues. "Chew-sticks can be made easily by cutting off a small stem several inches long, removing the outer bark, and chewing on the tip to soften the fibers, which then can be effectively used to massage the gums." (p. 193)

Early November: Black bears retreat from crowded foothills canyons to nap under a log or rock. A few stray snow geese may fly over as they race south. Thousands of crows fly over Boulder each afternoon on their way to roosts on Green Mountain.

November 8: Full moon rises at 4:47 p.m. MST. "Baby Bear Moon"--Osage.

November 17-18: Leonid meteor shower. An average to above-average year is expected. The shower rises after midnight (as does the quarter moon, unfortunately).

Late November: This is a likely time to see common loons and trumpeter swans on reservoirs

in eastern Boulder County. Try Baseline Reservoir, Boulder Reservoir, and Dodd Reservoir. Last year a trumpeter swan overwintered on the gravel pond behind the Presbyterian church on N. 63rd St., just north of Valmont Road. Three years ago, an immature trumpeter spent the winter on gravel ponds adjacent to the South Boulder Creek Trail.

December 8: Full moon rises at 4:25 p.m. MST. "Freezing Moon"--Ojibwe.

December 21-23: Ursid meteor shower. Look toward the Big Dipper after dark.

December 22: Winter Solstice occurs at 12:04 a.m. Don't miss our annual celebration at the White Rocks Trail (see BCNA calendar).

Late December: Easter daisies (*Townsendia exscapa*, *T. hookeri*) bloom on south-facing foothills shales in Bear Canyon, below NCAR. Curt Brown has tracked their blooming times for 15 years. The earliest blooms were on December 14, after a cold, snowy fall. So the time of the first frost and the amount of available moisture may determine when these adventurous wildflowers unfurl. By growing on bare shales and flowering in winter they avoid competition, but who pollinates them?

For updates, listen to "Boulder County Nature Almanac," on KGNU radio the first Friday of every month at 8:10 a.m.

--SJ



Early Easter Daisy by Margie Lanham

Spring Bird Banding Report from Allegra Collister Nature Preserve

A total of 39 species were captured and 247 individuals banded this spring, after a late start (May 12) because of rainy days and banders being away on birding trips. The most numerous species were:

Yellow warbler 40
Bullock's oriole 23
Lincoln's sparrow 20
Dusky flycatcher 15
Gray catbird 14
Lazuli bunting 11

We captured two returns: a yellow-breasted chat and a house wren that were both banded at the preserve in spring, 1999. The BCNA field class, "Introduction to Bird Banding," was enthusiastically attended by 11 participants. Everyone came away with a newfound appreciation of banding and what it entails.

--Joe Harrison

Books: Migration and Mountain Lions

Living on the Wind, by Scott Weidensaul. North Point Press, 1999. Reviewed by John and Jan Carnes.

At whatever moment you read these words, day or night, there are birds aloft in the skies of the Western Hemisphere, migrating. If it is spring or fall, the continents are swarming with billions of birds . . .

If you enjoyed the film, "Winged Migration," you will be fascinated by the book *Living on the Wind*. It is an extended discussion of bird migration: how it developed, how it is accomplished, and what it says about the future of avian species. It is amusing, dramatic, poetic, moving. The wonderful stories it tells about this extraordinary phenomenon can hardly be paraphrased: we can perhaps do better by simply giving a few excerpts, hoping that they may tempt you to enjoy the book in its entirety.

In Veracruz Mexico. "Watching the [Swainson's Hawk] migration was a bit like seeing some great, slithering snake. . . . Within this migratory river the birds eddied and swirled, forming sheets and curtains, billowing up into kettles, gliding out in

streams, so that at any given moment there were many thousand of hawks in sight." That day Weidensaul and companions counted 88,000 raptors.

On Dauphin Island off the Gulf Coast you might experience the "fallout" from the spring migration as exhausted birds complete the crossing of the Gulf of Mexico. "Over and over again, small explosions of birds would materialize out of the sky, whirring from on high, beyond the limit of vision and into the trees like bolts, until the woods were stuffed to overflowing with them. "

Or consider the migration of the tiny blackpoll warbler (which is so small, two of them could be mailed with one first-class stamp). It first travels 3,000 miles across Canada, and then strikes out south over the open ocean non-stop another 2,000 miles to the coast of South America. Researchers have said, "If a Blackpoll Warbler were burning gasoline instead of its reserves of body fat, it could boast of getting 720,000 miles to the gallon."

Perhaps the best recommendation we can give is that upon finishing the book we wanted to visit every place that Weidensaul described.

Baron, David. 2003. *The Beast in the Garden, the Lions of Boulder County*.

Wednesday, November 19, 7-8:30 p.m , Boulder County Recycling Facility, 1901 63rd St., Boulder

Local author and former NPR reporter David Baron speaks about his new book, *The Beast in the Garden*, a true tale about encounters between mountain lions and humans in the Boulder area during the late 1980s. The book explores the historical persecution of mountain lions, the species' remarkable comeback, and the struggle to get humans and large cats to coexist in a suburban landscape. A scientific detective story and an environmental whodunit, the book recounts the events that led to Colorado's first fatal mountain lion attack and the lessons that this tragedy teaches. Baron will illustrate his talk with slides. A book signing follows.

Owl Tales Shared at Sunset at Barr Lake (Complements of the BCNA Owls Class)

Saw-whet Owl
Diane Andrews

Leaving Cottonwood Creek, we drive for miles on dirt roads to our next destination, McPhee Park. On the San Juan National Forest map the park is described as "virgin forest," and I've longed to see it since I first read about it on the map. We drive off the main dirt road and a side road takes us to a sign that describes the park:

McPhee Park. Established 1925 through cooperation of New Mexico Lumber Co. and U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service to preserve a sample area of virgin ponderosa pine timber.

At an elevation of 8,080 feet, the park is a small grove of large ponderosa pines and pine snags, more big pines than I've ever seen in one place. In the shade of the pines a variety of small trees and shrubs grow--oak, aspen, serviceberry, wild rose, grape holly, sagebrush, rabbitbrush, and snowberry.

We circle some trees with our measuring tape and find many ponderosa pines over 36 inches in diameter. The largest is close to 4 feet in diameter. In addition to the trees, though, we see lots of big old ponderosa stumps, so the area is really not a "virgin forest," as described by the Forest Service. Evidence of cattle grazing is also abundant. Cow pies litter the ground.

The afternoon is mostly sunny and warm with clouds gradually building, with intermittent light rain showers, called "female rain" by Native Americans. Juncos, nuthatches, chickadees, Steller's jays, and magpies come and go on their own errands. After lunch, we walk up a hill to measure another tree. I hold on to one end of the tape while Tom takes the other and pushes his way through the shrubs that hug the base of the ponderosa. As we are talking, I look to my left and am surprised and delighted to see a small owl only a few feet away, perched on a branch of a small oak, large eyes looking directly at me. I excitedly call to Tom to come and look, for the owl seems completely unaffected by all the commotion we are making. We do not immediately recognize the species, so we walk quietly to my pack and leaf through the bird guide. Then we walk back to look at the owl, still sitting quietly on

the oak branch, and decide we are in the company of a northern saw-whet, one of the small owls that prefer old-growth conifer forests.

Since the owl still seems disinclined to leave its perch, Tom sets up his tripod beside the big pine and waits for good light. The sun has been moving in and out of the clouds all day, and once the clouds move in again to soften the contrast of light and shade, Tom begins snapping pictures. But this little owl, which the field guide describes as "very tame," seems bored with the proceedings and turns his head away from the camera. Tom waves his arms and calls softly to get the owl's attention again and takes a few more pictures.

Back at camp, reading through my reference books, I learn that saw-whets perch in woodlands to hunt field mice, their main prey. They nest in tree cavities in snags in the old conifers, usually in old woodpecker holes. A shortage of tree cavities limits northern saw-whet breeding populations. If we want to hear their call, we will have to visit the forest in April and May, when the birds are preparing to mate.

Owl Haiku

(Guess the species for each poem)

Silently watching
softly, yielding to the touch
trusting, golden eyes.

One feathered dancer
plays with wind driven rain drops
whirling in circles.

--Linda Mahoney

Snowy ghost spirit
seen only where shadows hide
heard only in dreams.

When moonlight brightens
still wood and waking meadow
Whoo will hear my call?

Creeping pine shadows
cloak thickets where giant moths
flit on silvery wings.

Toot-toot-toot, toot-toot
toot-toot, toot, toot, toot, toot-toot
toot-toot, toot, toot-toot.

Haiku (continued)

Hoo-hoo-hoo the joy!
tracking squirrel, mouse, and vole
o'er fresh starlit snow.

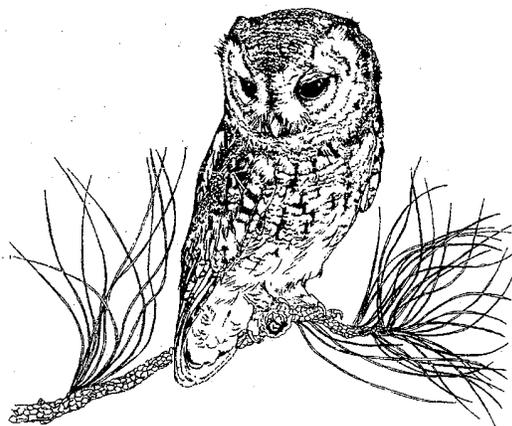
A quavering cry
when moon shadows melt away
and gray dawn awakes.

--Steve Jones

Small owl cry
lost in traffic noise
big sale at Mordor.

--Jan Carnes

[Answers: Northern saw-whet owl, burrowing owl, barn owl, great horned owl, flammulated owl, northern pygmy-owl, boreal owl, eastern screech-owl, great horned owl nest at Flatirons Crossing].



Flammulated Owl by Linda Mahoney

Postscript: Maddie Estin read an exquisite poem, "Hawks," by Lynn Unger. We can't reproduce all of it here, but you can find it in Lynn's book, *Blessing the Bread*. Here's the final stanza:

*Each breath proclaims it -
the flash of feathers, the chance to rest
on such muscled quietness,
to be in that fierce presence,
wholly wind, wholly wild.*

Our final tally was 16 great horned owls, 25 burrowing owls, and 0.5 flammulated owls (a disputed "sounding").

--SJ

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- Winter Raptor Survey: Sue Cass (303-494-5345) and Jim McKee (303-494-3393).

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For the calendar, class offerings, research results, publications, and other BCNA-related information: www.bcna.org

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For the latest news and in-depth discussions of Boulder County natural history issues, go to: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nature-net>

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