

BOULDER COUNTY NATURE ASSOCIATION



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Fall 2006

BCNA Ecosystem Plan – Indian Peaks ECA

This is the second in a series of articles that explores the evolution of the BCNA Ecosystem Plan and the current status of the core preserves and habitat connectors.

The largest of the Environmental Conservation Areas (ECAs) is centered on the Indian Peaks Wilderness and Rocky Mountain National Park. At 100,000 acres, it represents just over 20% of Boulder County. It is our connection to the Continental Divide, the spine of the Southern Rocky Mountains, and the greater Rocky Mountain National Park ecosystem. If lynx and wolves make it back into the county, they will come from this direction. This is the summer home of most of our elk herds and big-horn sheep. Old growth forests, willow carrs, boreal toads, black swifts, twayblades, ice grass, and several species of moonwort are present. For some animals, this is probably their population source area. A study of black bears in Rocky Mountain National Park indicated a higher probability of mortality once they left the park and went to lower elevations.

Conservation efforts over the past twenty years have focused on protecting some key ecological components at the lower edge of the ECA: montane parklands and habitat connectors to lower elevations. In the mid-1980s, Lee and Virginia Evans donated a conservation easement on the 650-acre Arapaho Ranch, a montane parkland with important wetlands, grasslands, and transitional elk range, to Colorado Open Lands. BCNA worked with the City of Longmont and Rocky Mountain National Park to help secure greater protection of the Copeland Willow Carr (at 77 acres, it is the largest montane willow carr in the Front Range). The site became designated as a State Natural Area. Boulder County, City of Boulder, and GOCO funds were used to acquire easements or fee title to much of Caribou Ranch, another significant montane parkland.

Near where the South St. Vrain Creek crosses the peak-to-Peak Highway, a group of property owners

(Benedict, Welch, Goodnow, McKenna, Schmol, and others) have donated conservation easements to the Nature Conservancy and Boulder County to protect this important parkland and habitat connectors between the Indian Peaks, South St. Vrain, and Walker Mountain ECAs.

In the late 1980s, BCNA supported, both financially and with volunteers, a study of the movements of the Winiger Ridge elk herd. One of the outcomes of the study was the recognition of the importance of Reynolds Ranch and surrounding lands along Magnolia Road to animal movement between Winiger Ridge and the Arapaho Ranch and Indian Peaks. Boulder County Open Space eventually purchased Reynolds Ranch and some of the surrounding lands in order to protect this wildlife movement corridor.

Caribou Flats and Park have long been recognized as significant sites for a number of rare plants and butterflies. It also contains some large subalpine willow carrs. A cooperative management effort between the Forest Service, Calais Resources, City of Boulder Utilities, and several 4-wheel Clubs has helped reduce damage from off-road vehicles.

-Dave Hallock

You're Invited!

Gather with friends old and new at the BCNA Fall retreat, Sunday, Nov. 12, 12 noon to 3:00 p.m. We'll enjoy a potluck lunch at the beautifully restored Goodhue Farmhouse. We also hope to tour the Birds of Prey Foundation rehabilitation center!

We are seeking new volunteers of all skill levels for wintering raptor surveys. We will review protocol, welcome new surveyors, partner them with experienced teams, and look for some early season birds. Saturday, Oct. 21, 10:00 a.m. to noon: Lagerman Reservoir, Prospect Road 0.5 mi. west of North 75th St.

See page 2 for more details on both activities.

BCNA Fall Calendar

Saturday, Oct. 21, 10:00 a.m. to noon: Volunteer orientation and training for wintering raptor survey. Lagerman Reservoir, Prospect Road 0.5 mi. west of North 75th St. We will review protocol, welcome new surveyors, partner them with experienced teams, and look for some early season birds. Sue Cass (303-494-5345; cass@colorado.edu).

Tuesday, Oct. 24th, 7:00-9:00 p.m.: "The Raptors of Boulder County," a PowerPoint presentation for wintering raptor surveyors. North Foothills Nature Center, 4201 North Broadway. All BCNA members and friends are welcome! Sue Cass, (303-494-5345; cass@Colorado.edu).

Sunday, November 5, 4-6 p.m.: Board of Directors meeting at Sue Cass's house, 4560 Hanover Avenue, in South Boulder. All members are welcome at these meetings. Call Sue for directions.

Sunday, Nov. 12, 12 noon to 3:00 p.m.: Fall retreat and potluck lunch at the historic Goodhue Farmhouse. Carolyn Holmberg Preserve/Rock Creek Farm Open Space (on the west side of Hwy. 287 between Lafayette and Broomfield, immediately south of the railroad tracks). We hope to tour the Birds of Prey Foundation rehabilitation center and will examine the County's recent improvements to the Rock Creek riparian area. Come see the beautifully restored Goodhue Farmhouse! Sue Cass (303-494-5345; cass@Colorado.edu).

December-January: Indian Peaks Winter Bird Count. Contact Bill Kaempfer for information or to volunteer (Kaempfer@colorado.edu).

Thursday, December 21, 7-10:30 a.m.: Annual Winter Solstice sunrise hike on White Rocks Trail (which skirts, but does not enter, the White Rocks Natural Area). Expect to see bald eagles, white-tailed deer, waterfowl, and a misty sunrise. Feel free to bring a thought, poem, or song to share at a short sunrise ceremony at the Boulder Creek bridge. Breakfast afterward at the Garden Gate Cafe in Niwot. Call Steve Jones (303-494-2468) to secure a place at the breakfast table.

Autumn Natural Events Calendar

October 7: Full moon rises at 6:48 p.m., MDT.
When Elk Bellow (Ponca)
Raccoon-Breeding (Osage)
Snow Goose (Cree)

Early October: Listen for sandhill cranes and pinon jays flying south over the foothills.

Mid-October: Smooth sumac (*Rhus glabra*) turns fiery red in foothills canyons. The Kiowa call smooth sumac *maw-kho-la* ("tobacco mixture"); the Pawnee, *nuppikt* (sour top). The red berries can be boiled up into a citrusy tea. Roots and shoots are eaten raw. Bears hold the fruit stalks in their paws and nibble on them like corn on the cob.

November 5: Full moon rises at 4:48 p.m., MST
Rivers Start to Freeze (Arapaho)
Baby-Bear (Osage)
Freezing (Ojibwa)

Mid-November: Flocks of snow geese pass over Boulder County as they fly toward wintering areas in New Mexico and West Texas. Common loons and trumpeter swans pause at reservoirs on the plains.

November 17: Leonid Meteor Shower. Viewing should be good this year, with no moonlight to brighten the sky. Look for 10-20 meteors per hour radiating from Leo after midnight.

December 5: Full moon rises at 5 p.m., MST.
Frost on the Lodge (Cheyenne)
When the Deer Run Together (Cheyenne)
Single Moon by Himself (Osage)

Mid-December: Look for the first Easter Daisies (*Townsendia exscapa*) blooming on shales in Bear Canyon, just south of the National Center for Atmospheric Research. Curt Brown found them blooming there last year on December 5, a new record date for Boulder's "earliest wildflower." Please tread carefully.

December 14: Geminid Meteor Shower. There's the possibility of seeing up to 60 meteors per hour radiating from Gemini, with best viewing after midnight.

December 21: Winter Solstice officially occurs just after 5 p.m. Here's a lovely poem from Ru Wing, shared at the Boulder Creek bridge on solstice sunrise, 2003:

*Dark makes light
in the way that absence
reaches for what it's missing*

*Reaching for the missing
turns my face toward the sun
and my longing toward life.*

*But...the dark places...the curling in of me
help drain the excess and the past
before I uncurl into now.*

Happy Winter Solstice! And please join in our annual celebration of solstice sunrise December 21 at White Rocks Trail.

- Steve Jones



Common Green Darner, Minnesota.
Photo by Ann Cooper

O 'donata—My New Anthem

Once in a while a class comes along that completely reshapes my way of seeing. BCNA's workshop on dragonflies and damselflies, taught by Scott Severs in early August, was that kind of event. It transformed the rest of my summer.

Scott used the indoor session to present Dragonfly 101. We learned where dragons and damsels fit into classification's grand scheme; they're insects of the Order Odonata. Fortunately, Odonataphyles, (is there such a word?) have agreed on common names. Instead of struggling with Latin, we got to meet Darners, Skimmers, Meadowhawks, Clubtails, Bluets, Forktails, Spreadwings, Dashers, Pennants, Jewelwings, and Dancers. Delicious names!

The evening passed in a fascination of compound eyes, gauzy wings, mating wheels and tandem flying, territorial behavior and larval predation. I couldn't wait to get out in the field.

During the second session at Sawhill Ponds, we tried to see in the wild what we'd heard about in the abstract. Before it warmed up, the damsels lurked in the grasses and reeds around the ponds, shivering their frail wings. They were easy to see but too tiny to examine unless you had close-focus binoculars. As the sun strengthened, the insects' flight muscles warmed. Dragons and damsels then took to the air. They were surprisingly speedy and often territorial—even aggressive with others of the same species. We watched aerial sendoffs that looked quite kamikaze and dipping, egg-drop flights above the weedy water. All the while, Scott led us gently through identification, asking questions about this or that feature until he steered us to a sensible answer.

With the classes behind me, I knew my canoe trip to Minnesota would have a new focus. I bought two North Woods field guides and armed with camera and binocs, went in search of Minnesota Odonata. I saw plenty, although I couldn't readily identify many of them. More important than naming names, I got the feel of where and how to look—and what to look for in the different groups. I watched hatches and found hatch cases from which new adults had emerged. All this close looking slowed me down on the lake banks and gave me deeper appreciation of my luck at being there and being free to watch and wander for hours.

I'd like to offer profound thanks to Scott for this gift to me—the eye-opener to a previously under appreciated new wild.

-Ann Cooper

CHICKADEE

Penthestes atricapillus

“in the bitterest weather
he frolics”

Mr. Burroughs say “voice full of unspeakable
tenderness and fidelity”

whistled

take food
even from between the lips

I’m coming back to you (Yakahula)
Upside-down

far and near
chickadee

chick-a-dee-dee-dee

Chick-a-dee-dee-dee

By Jack Collom

book review continued...

Jack is a passionate birder as well as a passionate poet and teacher. You may have seen him busking his poetry on the mall this summer. He takes an idea or a phrase from a passerby and turns it into poetry, adeptly drawing the passerby into the process. Eventually he hopes to turn this experience into a booklet, which will join his many other poetry books.

Be sure to look closely at the cover; there’s a sly joke there! With Jack’s permission, here is one of my favorites from the book: (see opposite column)

-Ruth Carol Cushman



Barn Owl in a Snag
Photo by Steve Jones

Book Review

Exchanges of Earth & Sky (Fish Drum Inc., New York City, 2006), a book of bird poems by Jack Collom, is a treasure trove of word jewels, snippets from ornithological works, cryptic allusions, newspaper accounts, humor, quotes from Thoreau, Burroughs, and much more. Sometimes the words on the page form drawings, like Lewis Carroll’s mouse. Open it at random and you will be charmed. For me, reading the poems feels like a just-awakening dream of fantastical birds that fly away before I can catch them.

Jack describes his book as “a collage of materials (like a magpie’s nest). Typically, the words in the “bird” portions, the upper parts of most pages, have been extracted and rearranged from the excellent book given me as a birthday present when I was thirteen.... These portions have been juxtaposed and mingled with poems and poetic fragments of mine.” Steve Jones says Jack’s book “has replaced Sibley as my standard field guide.”

continued in next column...

Owl

On a branch, invisible.

When hunting, silent.

Low hoots spook the night.

By Michael Delaney
Written for BCNA’s owl class final exam.

Bald Eagles and Osprey Taking Hold, Grassland-Nesting Birds Vanishing

As usual, this year's avian species of special concern monitoring brought good news and bad news. Three successful Boulder County bald eagle nests fledged six young, a new annual high. Osprey continue to thrive, nesting at six Boulder County locations and fledging at least seven young in 2006. Barn owls (rare) nested successfully at five known sites on the plains.

American bitterns (rare and declining) seem to be on the increase, with at least five nesting territories found this year at Walden Ponds, Coot Lake, Boulder Reservoir, and South Boulder Creek.

Two long-eared owl (rare and declining) nests fledged at least five young. One nest was located in foothills ponderosa pine woodland, the other in a shelter belt on the plains. This is the first year since 1986 that multiple long-eared owl nests have been documented in Boulder County.

Volunteers observed four pairs of burrowing owls (rare and declining) in the southeastern portion of Boulder County, but few if any young were reported. This continues a longstanding trend of burrowing owls fledging few young in our area. We believe that automobile collisions and predation by urban-adapted carnivores contribute to these low fledge rates.

Northern harriers (rare and declining) also suffer from fragmentation of nesting areas and possible nest predation. Volunteers monitoring harriers at Boulder Reservoir observed three nests, but no young. A fourth nest was reported north of Hygiene, but again, no young were observed.

Among other species listed as rare and declining, we received no reports of nesting northern bobwhites, red-headed woodpeckers, Lewis's woodpeckers, loggerhead shrikes, or brown thrashers. Lark buntings were seen throughout the summer on Marshall Mesa, but nesting was not confirmed.

It looks to have been a good year for prairie falcons (isolated populations), with 5 successful nests in Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks, alone, fledging at least 17 young. Two OSMP peregrine falcon (isolated populations) nests fledged at least four young.

One big surprise this nesting season was an invasion of dickcissels (rare) in May and June. At least 17 singing males displayed in hay meadows and sweet clover fields in the St. Vrain Creek floodplain and at Teller Farms Open Space. Early haying, or a shortage of females, may have deterred any nesting attempts. Dave Hallock continues to find singing sage thrashers (rare) and Brewer's sparrows (undocumented) near treeline west of Nederland, but so far, no nests.

Remarkably, a pair of rose-breasted grosbeaks (undocumented) spent much of the summer at Arapaho Ranch, west of Nederland. We received several reports of ovenbirds (rare) singing in June in the Boulder Mountain Park. Should someone finally find an ovenbird nest, it would be the first nesting confirmation for this species in Boulder County.

Much thanks to the dozens of volunteers who submitted reports. Send me an e-mail if you'd like to receive a copy of the spreadsheets detailing recent nesting observations.

- Steve Jones

Help Wanted!

It is that time of year again when we are thinking about new board members for BCNA. It is an interesting, satisfying and enjoyable task and we urge any of you who might be interested to contact us. Also, please let us know if you have any suggestions of folks who might be good members for the board. If you would like to visit a board meeting and see how we operate, please do. The next meeting will be November 5, 4-6 p.m. at the home of Sue Cass. For more information contact a member of the nominating committee: Jan Carnes 303-827-3024, Paula Hansley 720-890-2628, or Scott Severs 303-684-6430.

The Pack Rat That Went to Boulder

If you own a mountain cabin you have probably encountered a pack rat, also called the bushy-tailed woodrat. If you can get past your fear of small animals, they are rather attractive, some might even say cute. But their habit of collecting various objects from our cabins for their nests makes them the object of our desires to remove them from the premises. One of my encounters with removing a pack rat gave one of these little guys the ride of its life.

It normally happens sometime in the fall. We will be lying in bed at night when we will hear the sound of something climbing on the pipes in the crawl space. Clang, clang-clang. We have learned over the years that the pack rat is the only animal to get under the cabin and have the weight to clang the pipes. Then, things will start disappearing from the bathroom. And when the electric cord to my razor (there was a time when I shaved) gets cut by bites in two places, the pack rat has gone from cute to "out of here."

So, it is time to get out the live-trap. Peanut butter works real well. No special brand. Normally it takes only a few hours to have it in the trap. This is when you take a good close-up look and think to yourself, yes, they are rather cute.

One early winter morning I had to catch the bus down to Boulder, but checked the trap before going to the car. Sure enough, the woodrat was inside. I quickly carried the trap to the car and drove to a place where it would be released, knowing that I was running out of time to catch the bus. Stepping out of the car, I carried the trap away from the car and then opened the trap and shook out the woodrat. It hit the ground, which was covered by fresh snow, and low and behold it headed straight for the car, WHERE THE DOOR WAS STILL OPEN, and hopped in. As I ran back to the car, I swore at myself, then opened up all the doors hoping it would hop out. But I never did see it, and thought maybe it had gotten out, and headed to catch the bus. While in Boulder I worried what might happen to the car, but when I returned in the afternoon, there was no sign of the pack rat.

Next morning I had to drive down to Boulder, as the car was going to be serviced. Much to my surprise, when I got in the car, there were several little animal droppings on the floor mat – it was still in the car! I drove down to Hoshi Motors in Boulder and told Hal, the owner, that his workers may find

something while working on the car. But when I came back in the afternoon to pick it up, they had seen nothing. Surely, I thought, it had escaped the car.

Next morning as I got in the car, amazingly there they were again; the telltale calling cards, the small little droppings. It was still in the car! Upon returning home in the afternoon, I opened up all the car doors. And that night while we lay in bed, we heard it again: clang, clang-clang. It was back in the crawl space! So, next day I started all over again. Got out the trap and peanut butter, waited a few hours, and "poof" there it was. I drove very far away, then stopped and walked very far from the car, and remembered to CLOSE THE CAR DOOR, and dropped the little guy into the snow.

One returns almost every fall. I often wonder if it is the same one. My theory is that there is only one pack rat in town, and we all keep moving it around. Combined with a trip to Boulder, this is one well-traveled pack rat.

-Dave Hallock



Bird song class students Becky Eeds, Cathy Comstock, Diane Carter, and Bob Wing on Niwot Ridge.
Photo by Steve Jones.

2006 Research Grants Awarded

BCNA awarded 3 grants this year from our general research fund. Dr. Rick Adams was awarded \$800 for his study on "Monitoring bat populations in Boulder County". His project especially looks at the importance of water holes to sustaining bat populations. University of Colorado graduate student Robert Brikerhoff was awarded \$600 for his study "Are mammalian carnivores plague vectors?" – a novel study looking a plague transmission and its threats to black-tailed prairie dogs and other mammals. The final grant awarded (\$550) was also to a CU graduate student Ty Tuff for his study "Why are Western Wood-Pewees rarely parasitized by Brown-Headed Cowbirds?" This project looks at the low rates of hosting of cowbirds by pewees and the implications for conservation of heavily parasitized species such as Plumbeous Vireos.

The Ken Evenson Memorial Big Cat Research Grant (\$2000) was awarded to Colorado State University researchers Dr. Kevin Crooks and Dr. Sue Vandewoude for their study "The effects of urban fragmentation and landscape connectivity on disease prevalence and transmission in Front Range felids". This study will look at the transmission of domestic cat diseases in an increasingly urban landscape to mountain lions and bobcats, and how habitat fragmentation plays a role in the spread of disease. This will allow wildlife managers to assess potential disease threats to wild feline populations in remaining Front Range ecosystems.

Researchers agree to share the results of their projects with BCNA. This requirement may take the form of a written report, a presentation at our annual eco-symposium or BCNA meeting, or other similar activity.

The BCNA Board allocates limited funding every year for research projects we feel that will benefit the general knowledge and conservation of Boulder County ecosystems. Wildlife research is greatly under-funded in the United States. We encourage our members to contribute financially, beyond their regular dues, to either to our general research grant funds, or to the Ken Evenson Memorial Big Cat Research Grant. Contributions are tax deductible to the extent to the law allows. Please contact us at mail@bcna.org or send your contributions to: BCNA Research Grants, P.O. Box 493, Boulder, CO 80306. Please indicate which grant you are contributing to.

--Scott Severs, president

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Committees and Contacts

-Avian Species of Special Concern:
 Dave Hallock (dheldora@rmi.net) and
 Steve Jones (stephen.jones@earthlink.net)

-Ecosystem Stewardship:
 Steve Jones (303-494-2468)

- *Education:*
 Carol Schott (303-530-9108) and
 Carol Kampert (303-499-3049)

- *Indian Peaks Bird Counts:*
 Dave Hallock (303-258-3672) and
 Bill Kaempfer (303-939-8005)

- *Newsletter:*
 Rebecca Hill (303-786-0553)
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 and Steve Jones (303-494-2468)

- *Publications:*
 Steve Jones (303-494-2468)

- *State and Regional Wildlife Issues:*
 Jim McKee (303-494-3393)

- *Website:*
 George Oetzel (303-543-3712)

- *Wintering Raptor Survey:*
 Sue Cass (303-494-5345) and Jim McKee

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

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The membership year is January 1 to December 31. Those who join after October 1 are considered members in good standing through the following year. All members receive this quarterly newsletter. Supporter-level members and higher also receive a complimentary copy of each BCNA publication.

Please make checks payable to "Boulder County Nature Association" or "BCNA" and mail to:
P.O. Box 493, Boulder, CO 80306.

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Note: If your name is checked in red, your membership has expired