

Boulder County Nature Association



"The Boulder County Nature Association is a private, non-profit membership organization committed to preserving the natural history of our region through research, documentation, and public education."

Volume 32, Number 4
Fall 2014

Letter from BCNA's President, Sue Cass

The Weidensaul Weekend: for those who missed it!

It began on Friday evening, August 22nd, at the Piombino's beautiful home west of Longmont: a casual reception for noted author and naturalist Scott Weidensaul who would be the guest speaker at the Boulder County Audubon Society's 40th anniversary dinner the following evening. This very special event was long in the planning and it was apparent Friday evening the stalwarts at BCAS had attended to the minutest detail. The weekend was off to a smooth and polished start and those of us who had not had the pleasure of meeting Scott Weidensaul before soon discovered just how pleasurable the experience would be.

The following evening, a large and lighthearted crowd assembled at Lone Hawk Farm for the big event. The showers that had been an almost daily occurrence in recent weeks had moved well to the east by early afternoon, leaving the evening cool by mid-August standards. Scott Weidensaul signed books for eager patrons, including yours truly, while visiting with each one with genuine affinity and gratitude. And the well organized and turned out silent auction was a big success for both bidders and BCAS. Dinner, catered by Pasta Jays, was delicious and the homemade desserts contributed by BCAS members were pleasing to both the eye and the palate. After dinner, Steve Jones presented a beautiful program depicting the forty-year history of BCAS, most of which he experienced personally. Keynote speaker Scott Weidensaul's presentation, "Fun With Birds and Science," was aptly titled for it presented the ordinarily serious subject of ornithology in a manner that both informed and entertained and all without notes or a script in sight.

I was up at 4:00am the next morning preparing a light breakfast to be shared on the trail at Meyers Gulch with Scott and my fellow BCNA Board members and, I must confess, worrying a little. Had we overextended Scott Weidensaul? Would he be weary after his travels and our late and exuberant night out? At 6:00am, those concerns were laid to rest when Scott strode vigorously through the hotel lobby

(Continued on page 2)

Native Bees of Colorado

Carol Kampert, Education Committee

Most of us are familiar with non-native honey bees and their importance as pollinators and producers of honey and wax. But not many of us know about Colorado's *native* bees – nearly 950 species in the state and 555 in Boulder County! During the "Native Bees of Colorado" class offered this summer by BCNA, participants acquired several helpful skills for identifying some of the more common and noticeable local bees. We also learned some amazing facts about how and where our native bees nest, their relationships with plants, and ways to encourage bees to thrive in our habitat.



Bee Class in Action, photo by Scott Severs

Here are some fun facts about bees:

- Honeybees, *Apis mellifera*, are non-native bees, intentionally brought over to North America from Europe in the 1600s for the wax they make, not for their honey. They are found in flower-rich areas throughout Colorado.
- Native bees range in size from the tiny 1/8 inch-long *Perdita salicis* bee to the giant 1 1/2 inch-long *Bombus nevadensis* queen bumble bee (one of 17 species of bumble bees found in Colorado).
- The bodies of bumble bees are all black - only their hairs are yellow or orange. (Note: Class participants were able to touch the furry back of one male bumble bee which the instructor held gently between her finger and thumb. What a memorable hands-on experience!).

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(Weidensaul, continued from page 1)
and greeted Kerrie Bryan, Cindy Maynard and me with smiles and a warm embrace for each of us.

The sun was newly arisen when we reached the Meyers Gulch Trailhead and there was a brisk and biting wind out of the east--a late summer "up slope"--that had most of us reaching for our fleeces. Steve Jones, you were right! The bluebirds and Warbling Vireos had departed. We were first chastened by American Crows flying east over our heads from their perennial roost to the west. Red Crossbills twittered from nearby. Vesper and Chipping Sparrows flitted from ponderosas to the ground and back. A pair of Lesser Goldfinches fed on the ever-present mullein and a Red-tailed Hawk, deep in symmetrical molt, hunted the homestead meadow. It turned out the best thing about that morning was the spirited and free-flowing conversation we shared on all manner of topics--even birds--as we walked the trail. The sun warmed and the wind settled just in time for breakfast.

Sunday afternoon, with the prospect of returning students and the ProChallenge bike race looming large, we repaired to the friendly confines of the Ramaley lecture hall for Scott's presentation "The Search For Lost Species". Our concerns proved unfounded since the bicycle race was nearly to Golden when we arrived on campus, where the area around Ramaley and Norlin Library was unusually quiet. Unfortunately, these issues kept many of you away. We were mesmerized by the stories Scott shared about the search for avian species believed to be long extinct--you remember the brouhaha surrounding the Ivory-billed Woodpecker a few years ago--and Scott's personal adventure searching for the Cone-billed Tanager in the Mato Grosso of western Brazil. The Cone-bill was eventually found, the Ivory-bill not . . . yet! We contemplated the advisability of reviving extinct

species like the Passenger Pigeon through DNA and the frightening prospect of billions more humans on the planet. Scott left us pensive and amused and ever so grateful for our time with him.

Monday morning Alan and I drove Scott to the airport, the hour-long drive a thankful extension of our wonderful weekend with him. Only recently have I become comfortable confessing my church is the natural world in all its wonder. Scott is a disciple in that church and spreads the gospel like no one I've met before. We hugged each other goodbye. Good friends do that and Scott definitely makes you feel like a good friend!

BCNA Classes Receive Rave Reviews

Steve Jones, Education Chair

BCNA offered just 7 field classes this year, down from 12 to 13 during previous years. Our goal was to keep things simple and make sure that the classes offered were ones that our members desired and our instructors were enthusiastic about teaching. We also changed the registration process. Pam Piombino, who is also serving as president of Boulder County Audubon, stepped in as "registrar" for BCNA classes.

So instead of each instructor registering their students and keeping track of tuition payments, all registration went through Pam. We are very grateful to Pam for taking this on--and yes there were some glitches at the beginning as we adjusted to the new process--but the result was that we filled 6 of our 7 classes and our instructors were relieved of some of the administrative burdens associated with teaching the classes.

Virtually all the evaluations we received for classes this year were very positive. Students expressed appreciation, especially, for the extra time that instructors devoted to offering additional field sessions and for the instructors' patience in responding to questions.

Two new classes, *Gulls*, taught by Bill Schmoker, and *Native Bees*, taught by Virginia Scott, were exceptionally well received (I took both and loved them), and we hope to offer them again. And we especially thank longtime instructors Rick Adams, Jan Chu, and Paula Hansley, whose classes on bats, butterflies, and warblers were as engrossing and inspiring as always.

If you'd like to help out with planning and administering Boulder County Nature Association field classes next year, please get in touch: 303-494-2468 or culewsj@comcast.net.



(Bees, continued from page 1)

- Unlike honey bee colonies that persist year round, bumble bees establish a new colony each spring that can eventually house a population of 100 or more bees.
- Most native bees are solitary nesters and many dig their own nesting burrows into the soil, although some use existing rodent holes or natural cracks in the soil for nests.
- Females usually deposit pollen at the bottom of their burrows and then lay an egg on the pollen – nutritious, protein-rich food for the larva when it hatches! Some make multiple cells or multiple branching tunnels in their holes for multiple eggs, each with its own supply of pollen.
- Some bees are cavity nesters – they make or use holes in wood stumps or pithy plant stalks for their nests. (The female of the leaf-cutter bee *Hoplitis* stuffs her wood burrow with chewed leaves and pebbles to seal it off after she lays an egg in it.)
- Only female bees collect pollen; male bees don't have pollen-collecting hairs or pollen baskets for this purpose. If you see a bee without pollen on its legs or body it is probably a male bee.
- Male bees visit flowers to dine on the nectar and to find females to mate with. Female bees visit flowers for both nectar and pollen.
- Only female bees can sting. Their stinger is a modified ovipositor, an egg-laying structure not present in males.
- 19% of Colorado bees are parasitic nesters or "cuckoo bees": they lay their eggs in the nests of other bees.
- Bees are not wasps! Here are a couple of differences: bees are hairy, wasps are hairless; bees feed their offspring pollen, wasps feed their offspring meat – paralyzed insects, spiders, and other bugs.

Virginia Scott, the instructor for this class, has been Manager of the Entomology Collections at CU's Natural History Museum since 1994 and is lead author of *The Bees of Colorado*, a comprehensive CU Museum publication. A well-organized and inspiring teacher, she is able to convey her encyclopedic knowledge and passion for bees to others with enthusiasm and humor. During the two field trip sessions of the class, it was impressive to watch Virginia sweep her net through various flowers to capture bees, put them quickly into vials for us to observe, identify, and smell (the *Hylaeus*, or yellow-faced bee, has a strong lemony scent!), and then gently release them into the wild.

Virginia is also the scientific advisor to "The Bees'



Native Bee, photo by Scott Severs

Needs," a free, interactive Citizen Science Project (<http://beesneeds.colorado.edu>) which provides participants with artificial nesting sites: wood blocks drilled with holes or tunnels of various sizes. These blocks are designed to attract various species of cavity nesting bees (about one-third of Colorado bees are cavity nesters) and cavity-nesting wasps. Virginia and others in the project are concerned about the decline of native bees and wasps in Colorado due to pesticide use, loss of nesting habitat, and loss of native flowering plants that bees depend on. The purpose of this project is to study the abundance and diversity of native bees and wasps in the greater Boulder area and to increase peoples' awareness of these important pollinators in our communities.

Next year, I'm planning on putting up a Bees' Needs nesting block in our yard and planting some of the flowers and shrubs from Virginia's list of "Great Bee Plants." Bring on the bees and wasps!

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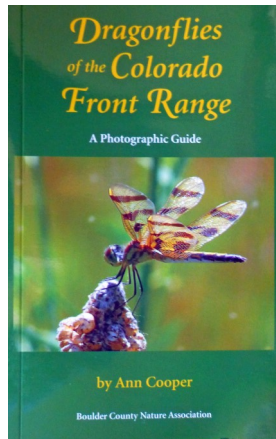


Bill Schmoker's class helps students identify gulls.
Photo by Dr. Kerrie Bryan

A New Field Guide from BCNA . . .**DRAGONFLIES OF THE COLORADO FRONT RANGE:
A PHOTOGRAPHIC GUIDE**

By Ann Cooper

Dragonflies—they are dainty, but deadly, as they dart over ponds and clearings on the hunt for prey. How can they fail to catch the eye with such shimmering rainbow colors? Ann's book highlights the species most likely to be seen in Colorado's Front Range, and doesn't claim to include all possible species. The idea here is to encourage new dragonfly watchers by not overwhelming them with information on the entire region until they feel ready for it. Ann hopes to pique people's curiosity about all things odonate (in the insect Order Odonata), and expand their search image in the wild so they'll no longer say "Oh, look, a dragonfly," but will now be more likely to exclaim, "Mating Halloween Pennants on that reed," or "Common Green Darner, wonder if it is migrating south."



On behalf of the Board, BCNA's membership, and every prospective sojourner to the natural world of the Colorado Front Range, we owe a debt of gratitude to those who have worked so hard for so long to produce this publication, author Ann Cooper, editor Lysa Wegman-French, design and layout George Oetzel, photo editors Stephen R. Jones and Sharon Daugherty, illustrator Amy Chu and local nature photographers John Barr, Ann Cooper, Leslie Flint, Richard Holmes, Stephen R. Jones, Leslie Larson, Bill Maynard, Celeste Mazzacano/Xerces Society, Jeff Mitton, Inez Prather and Scott Severs. Thank you!

Ann has another new book published recently, ***Dragonflies Q&A Guide: Fascinating Facts about Their Life in the Wild***. A book for enthusiasts newly interested in the sport of dragonflying, it is available from the publisher, Stackpole Books, and booksellers both off and online. To quote Ann, "The questions are a collection of topics I have wondered about, or that people have asked me on the trail. How do odonates eat, sleep, mate, survive the winter? What's the gossip about them—their origins, their naming, their reputation in various cultures? There's so much that is fascinating about these creatures, besides what species they happen to be."

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EVENTS CALENDAR**Inaugural Film Festival**

Produced by Boulder Rights of Nature

October 17th through 19th

Dairy Center for Performing Arts

Beginning on October 17, Boulder Rights of Nature (and associated supporting groups) is proud to present a unique selection of nature-related films over a period of three days. Boulder County Nature Association, as well as Boulder County Audubon Society, will have a link to the schedule of events on their respective websites.

Tickets are \$12 for each (\$8 for students), with \$42 for the full session of films (\$30 students). A festival supporter package is available for \$100: it includes preferred seating, pre-festival wine reception entrée, and choice of t-shirt or local field guide. The series is dedicated to legendary North American documentary filmmaker Les Blank, who showed us the beauty, courage, and creativity of traditional peoples in their natural settings. Some authors and producers will be present for certain showings and discussions.

Tuesday, October 28th, 7:15 pm, **A Season in Yellowstone** with Peter Hartlove. Join us for a fascinating program following Yellowstone National Park through spring, summer and fall. Peter lived in the park for 9 months and spent many hours recording wildlife, landscapes, wildflowers and more. His professional presentation will allow us to join the changes in nature as we are awed by his photographs. Peter has been a freelance photographer for over 20 years and has been published widely. Audubon Program Meetings are held at Unitarian Universalist Church of Boulder, 5001 Pennsylvania Ave (west off 55th St. between Arapahoe & Baseline).

Sunday, December 14th: **73rd Boulder Audubon Christmas Bird Count**. Beginners are welcome to join teams on the CBC, following the leaders around and contributing their spotting skills, if not their identification skills. More experienced folks are urged to join and lead a small crew to cover an area within the circle. Anything can happen (both weather and wildlife) and it usually does. If you prefer, you can also stay at home and count at your feeder, while sipping mulled wine and munching toasties. Following a day in the field (for most of us), we celebrate together with a warm and jolly compilation supper --- some provided and some pot-lucked. If you participated in 2013, you will be contacted by your circle leader with details. If this is your first count contact Bill Schmoker (bill.schmoker@gmail.com), the count organizer, and he will direct you to a group you can join. Check out why this count is not only fun but important for conservation: <http://birds.audubon.org/how-christmas-bird-count-helps-birds>

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**A Challenge Posed by Nature:
Butterflies before and after the Flood**
Jan Chu

A unique Pale Crescent butterfly was found flying by itself over Fourmile Canyon Creek recently. It's a mid-sized orange butterfly with fine black markings and notable orange antennal knobs, and is a resident found particularly here. During last September's flood soil and sand, the foothold for plants, were washed away, leaving the sparkling clean granite foundation along the sides of Anne U. White Trail. The nectar-rich beebalm and bull thistles were nearly finished blossoming, and the blue fall asters and white yarrow, not often used for nectar, were ignored by the butterflies. The remaining sulfur flowers and white fleabane were providing nectar. Two-tailed Swallowtails and Weidemeyer's Admirals were flying high, likely from a nearby meadow or surviving willows. An immigrant American Lady and one Reakirt's Blue found their way into our cherished canyon.

Before the flood, in mid-August, 2013, we found 10 butterfly species and 80 individuals per two Research Hours along the trail. Notably, Western Tiger Swallowtail, Mourning Cloak, Red Admiral, and Small Wood Nymph were seen in 2013, but not 2014.



Pale Crescent Butterfly, by Jan Chu

This mid-August we found 17 species and 57 individuals during two comparable Research Hours. Woodland Skippers were 30 last year

and 29 this mid-August. Wherever they formed their chrysalises in September, these were propitious survival choices. Common Checkered Skippers and Western Branded Skippers were not seen on this trail last year, but two of each were found this mid-August. Not surprising to the butterfly researchers, three Cabbage Whites were found last mid-August and 18 of the opportunistic aliens flew this mid-August.

A noisy flock of Mountain Chickadees, Red-breasted and Pygmy Nuthatches, and Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers reminded us that our feathered friends easily move from one site to another.

The Pale Crescent is one survivor in this washed-out canyon where it had prospered in good numbers before the flood. We'll watch for its rehabilitation next year.

Note: The Anne U. White Trail is currently closed to the general public until the flood-damaged trail is restored. Jan is co-author with Steve Jones of *Butterflies of the Colorado Front Range: A Photographic Guide to 80 Species* published by BCNA in 2011.

**Congratulations to BCNA Members,
Paula Hansley and Sue Cass:
Boulder County Audubon
Environmental Award Winners**

Paula and Sue are treasured members of BCNA, wearing many hats over the years of their affiliation with BCNA and other environmental organizations. Paula Hansley received the Lifetime Achievement Award and Sue Cass received the Environmental Champion Award. See the BCAS website, www.boulderaudubon.org, for the complete citations of their contributions to our understanding and appreciation of the natural wonders of this beautiful state and county we inhabit—and of their efforts to preserve them. We send our congratulations and our gratitude!

(Calendar, continued from page 4)

Saturday, December 20th, before dawn, **Winter Solstice Celebration Hike**. One of Audubon's most cherished chapter traditions is the annual Solstice Hike with Boulder County Nature Association. We gather at the White Rocks trailhead (on south side of Valmont east of 75th St.), and after greeting and meeting with many puffs of frosty air, we walk down to the creek crossing to view the sunrise, admire whatever winter is bringing our way, and share readings, poetry and a song or two. Warm up afterwards with breakfast in Niwot. Let Steve know if you are coming in order to advise the restaurant. Steve Jones, 303-494-2468.



Instructor Rick Adams shows a bat to BCNA class participants
Photo by Dr. Kerrie Bryan

Burrowing Owl Survey . . . we did it again!

Sue Cass,

Burrowing Owl Survey Volunteer Coordinator

The 2014 Boulder County Parks and Open Space (BCPOS), Boulder County Audubon Society (BCAS), Boulder County Nature Association (BCNA) Burrowing Owl Survey (Boy, that's a mouth full!) began on April 15th and ended on August 15th with a total of 38 volunteer monitors contributing 448.65 hours and completing 196 monitoring assignments on Boulder County Open Space properties to date. I say "to date" because, though the season has officially ended as I write, the single nesting pair observed is still being monitored and will continue to be monitored by Joe and Beccy Pem until all five fledged young and their parents leave the nesting area, which should be soon.

The commitment of time by monitors increases by a factor of four when a nesting pair is observed on assigned properties and Joe and Beccy have tirelessly reported on their charges every week throughout the late spring, when the pair was first observed, until now, late summer, when the family prepares to migrate south independently of each other. Our subset of the subspecies *Athene cunicularia hypugaea* are the only Burrowing Owls that have adopted migration as part of their breeding strategy, which almost certainly contributes to the dispersal of the family and the lack of long-term pair bonds in the adults. All other Burrowing Owls throughout their North, Central and South American ranges are sedentary and remain paired throughout the year. Typically, our migratory owls return to their natal area to reproduce. With the guaranteed loss of roughly 75% of first year birds, the low fledging rate in Boulder County in recent years will make recovery of the species a difficult undertaking despite all our efforts. Yet, we continue and there isn't a volunteer monitor out there who wouldn't be thrilled to have his or her work load increased times four!

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(Burrowing Owl, continued from page 6)

Oh! Did I mention that for the third time in the last four years the open-ended BCPOS/BCAS/BCNA Burrowing Owl Survey completed 100% of all contracted monitoring assignments, an unheard of accomplishment until we did it in 2011 and again in 2012. We missed the mark last year due to a new electronic data entry system which made monitoring the monitors an almost impossible task. Michelle Durant, Wildlife Biologist and Volunteer Program Coordinator for BCPOS, enhanced the data reporting process during the off-season and this year it worked exceptionally well, making my job of coordinating the volunteer monitors much easier. Thank you, Michelle and thank you, volunteer monitors! And a "heads up" to all of you who do double duty on the BCNA Wintering Raptor Survey! We are going to attempt electronic data entry for the first time with the upcoming season. I'll keep you posted.

The 2014 BCPOS/BCAS/BCNA Burrowing Owl Survey volunteer monitors are: Linda Andes-Georges, Kerrie Bryan, Sue and Alan Cass, Karen Clark, Carol Cushman, Reneé Haip, Paula Hansley, Brinda Henley, Tim Henson, Steve Jones, Carol Kampert, Elena Klaver, Peter Kleinman, Lark Latch, Kristin Laubach, Maureen Lawry, Viki Lawrence, Joe Lupfer, Petrea Mah, Carol McCasland, Doyle McClure, Janet McLachlan, Joe and Peccy Pem, Connie Redak, Joel and Marcel Such, Jean Sobolik, Mort and Lysa Wegman-French, Cal Whitehall, Maikel and Susan Wise, Howard and Pattiann Witkin, Kristi and Kevin Winseck.

(Dragonflies, continued from page 4)

She hopes this book will help new dragonfly watchers to understand why the dragonflies are doing what they are doing, what's actually going on as we watch these fascinating and ferocious predators zip to and fro.

Ann Cooper has been a volunteer naturalist and teacher with Boulder County Parks and Open Space for 35 years. She dates her consuming interest in dragonflies to a BCNA class taught by Scott Severs. Since 2010 she has monitored dragonfly populations at several county wetlands. Ann has also written ten nature books for children, published by the Denver Museum of Nature and Science.

Note: Boulder County Nature Association supporting members (\$40 a year or higher) and life members receive complimentary copies of all our publications. Contact the BCNA membership chair, Cindy Maynard (cmaynardre@gmail.com), for directions on how to receive your copy.

Northern Harriers Nest Successfully at Two Locations in Boulder County

Steve Jones

Chair, Boulder Reservoir Birds of Special Concern Monitoring Project

For the first-time in ten years, observers found two successful Northern Harrier nests within Boulder County this summer. The first was located in the Little Dry Creek drainage just west of Boulder Reservoir in a cattail marsh where harriers have nested several times during the past ten years. This year's nest was located 70 to 100 meters west of North 51st Street and fledged two young during the last week of June. More than 20 volunteers from the Boulder Reservoir birds of special concern monitoring project helped monitor this site.

The second successful site was found by Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks wildlife biologist Will Keeley, near Saint Vrain Creek west of Hygiene. We'd suspected that harriers might be nesting at this location for many years, but no one had ever found evidence of nesting. Will observed an adult pair flying with three recently fledged young in a meadow near the creek on June 25.

With the addition of these two successful nests to the database, we've documented a total of six successful Northern Harrier nests in Boulder County since 2004. We fear that this level of productivity is far too low to maintain stable breeding populations, but at least there is some cause for hope, after two consecutive years, 2012 and 2013, when no nests were reported within the county.

After considerable lobbying by Rights of Nature advocates this winter and spring, Boulder County Parks and Open Space committed to striving to retain populations of all naturally occurring species in Boulder County. They have included Northern Harrier on a tentative list of species for which that they plan to develop conservation and recovery plans.

Thanks especially to all the volunteers who continue to monitor nesting attempts of harriers, Burrowing Owls, and American Bitterns at and around Boulder Reservoir.

2014 Boulder Reservoir birds of special concern monitors: Linda Andes-Georges, Sharon Anderson, Emily Burley, Leigh DiNatale, Carol Dozier, Katie and Kay Hartrick, Chuck Klomp, Liz Litkowski, Doyle McClure, Nancy Ries Morrison, Kitty Noonan, Sabine Painter, Linda Palmer, Mark and Sue Ponsor, Janine Pow, Gary Raybourn, Gretchen and Peter Ridgeway, George Roxborough, Patrick Schappe, William and Kate Steffes, Anna Swarts.

We invite you to report your sightings to
www.coloradofrontrangebutterflies.com

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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.

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