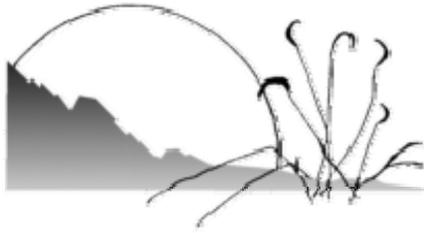


BOULDER COUNTY NATURE ASSOCIATION



Volume 21, Number 2
Spring 2004

Ecosystem Symposium to Explore Human Connections with Natural Systems

Scientists will address human interactions with nature at this year's annual symposium, at the Boulder Public Library Auditorium, Friday, April 2.

The symposium is free and open to all. Parking is limited, so please consider taking human-powered or public transportation. To reduce paper waste, bring your own cup and plate. For an updated talk schedule, go to www.BCNA.org.

Tentative Schedule

10-10:30: Welcome, sign-in, and coffee

10:35-50: Opening Presentation: "This is Boulder County." Dr. Joyce Gellhorn

10:50-11:15: "The Intangible Values of Wilderness." Dave Gustafson, Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks

11:15-40: "Pristine No More? Air Pollution in the Alpine of Boulder County." Dr. William Bowman, University Of Colorado

11:40-12:05: "R.S. 2477 Access Then and Now." Shannon Walker-Lembke

12:05-1:00: Complimentary Lunch

1:05-30: "Butterfly Species on a Managed Montane Land." Janet Chu

1:30-55: "Connecting Children with Nature through Poetry and Art." Chris Citron, Colorado Center for the Book

1:55-2:20: (To Be Announced)

2:20-45: "Mammals of Boulder County: Then and Now." Dr. David Armstrong, University of Colorado

2:45-55: Concluding Remarks

Late Spring Nature Classes

Spaces are still available in Spring Wildflowers, Prairie Dog Ecology, and Spring Butterflies for Beginners. See page 5 for details.

Do Pygmy-Owls Follow Cone Crops?

It was one of those flashes of awareness that suddenly make the world a more magical place. Linda Mahoney had e-mailed me about being mobbed by songbirds when she stood under a ponderosa pine and whistled like a pygmy-owl. "It's the red-breasted nuthatches who are boldest," she noted, "almost perching in my hair."

I'd had the same experience, and I recalled the spring of 1985, when 40 or so BCNA volunteers found 30 calling northern pygmy-owls in the foothills west of Boulder and Lyons. There was a big ponderosa pine cone crop that spring, and the foothills were full of irruptive seed-eaters, birds like red crossbills and red-breasted nuthatches that roam the Rockies searching for big seed crops.

It makes sense. Pygmy-owls are diurnal and feed on songbirds. Why wouldn't they follow the large flocks of irruptive seed-eaters from one abundant cone crop to another? And why wouldn't those prey species, including red-breasted nuthatches, respond frenetically to pygmy-owl calls?

So George Oetzel downloaded the Colorado Christmas Count data and looked for correlations between numbers of pygmy-owls and irruptive seed-eaters reported. Alas, there weren't enough pygmy-owl sightings to reveal any trends.

But I'm convinced there's something at work here; my memories are too vivid of the cone-laden pines, animated flocks of seed-eaters, and the pygmy-owls tooting breathlessly in the equinoctial light.

- Steve Jones

BCNA Spring Calendar

Friday, April 2, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.: Boulder County Ecosystem Symposium. Local scientists and naturalists will present results of research on "Human Connections with Boulder County Natural Systems." Boulder Public Library auditorium, 9th and Canyon. Free. Bruce Bland (303-499-8612).

Sunday, April 18: Board of Directors meeting and potluck. All members are welcome. The meeting will begin at 4 p.m., the potluck at 6 p.m. Joyce Gellhorn's house, 112 Deer Trail Road, in Boulder Heights. Call Joyce (303-442-8123) for directions.

Sunday, April 25, 3 p.m.: Compilation party for wintering raptor survey. New volunteers are most welcome. Sue and Alan Cass, 4560 Hanover, Boulder (303-494-5345).

Monday, May 3: Join Joyce Gellhorn (303-442-8123) for a wildflower and full moon walk in the Boulder Mountain Park. Meet at the Flagstaff Summit Amphitheater (turn right 2.5 miles up Flagstaff Road) at 5:30 p.m. Bring food to share.

May 1-14: Indian Peaks Spring Bird Count. Contact Bill Kaempfer (303-939-8005) or Dave Hallock (Eldora@rmi.net) for information.

June 1-July 15: Indian Peaks Summer Bird Count. See above.

Sunday, June 20: Summer Solstice wildflower walk and potluck picnic in the Boulder Mountain Park. Meet at the Ranger Trail (Green Mountain Lodge) parking area, opposite the Flagstaff Summit turnoff (on the left about 2.5 mi. up Flagstaff Road) at 6 p.m. Bring portable food to share. Steve Jones (303-494-2468); stephen.jones@earthlink.net.

Sightings

While hiking in the Boulder Mountain Park, Randy Gietzen came upon a set of moose tracks in the snow. Shocking, but not totally unexpected. Moose were sighted last summer and fall at Glacier Lake, along the Peak-to-Peak Highway, and even in downtown Boulder. There is no evidence that moose are native to Boulder County.

Five American white pelicans flew over Shanahan Ridge on the morning of February 6, heading south. Dave Madonna says that a few pelicans now overwinter at the Valmont Excel Energy plant.

You can watch the nesting activities of bald eagles at the Platteville plant on the Excel Energy eagle cam: <http://birdcam.xcelenergy.com/eaglecam.asp>.

Boulder County's two resident bald eagle pairs were working on their nests in February, and the Boulder Creek pair was incubating eggs on February 22. Last year's successful nesting there was the first in the county.

Drought update: Here's the 365-day percentage of average precipitation for selected stations through March 1: Boulder 120, Pueblo 95, Alamosa 97, Grand Junction 84, Goodland 71, Dodge City 100, Amarillo 72, Albuquerque 78, Farmington 81, Winslow (AZ) 30, Cedar City (UT) 94, Salt Lake City 120, Casper 110, Cheyenne 60, Scottsbluff 57, North Platte 94, Rapid City 77.



Winter Ptarmigan

*Wind flings falling flakes,
Willows protrude through undulating drifts.
Parallel skis track sasstrugi.
Chilly blanket explodes,
White wings cut through sky,
Fold, landing on snow pillows.
Inching forward, I watch
Ptarmigan watching me.
Birds shake, fluff feathers, sink into
Snowy silence,
Ebony beaks, black eyes--
Contrasts, in a white upon white world.*

- Joyce Gellhorn

Spring Natural Events Calendar

April 5: Full moon rises at 8:06 p.m.
Ice breaking in the river (Arapaho)
Green grass (Pawnee)
Buffalo-pawing-earth (Osage)

Early April: Golden and bald eagle chicks hatch. Swainson's hawks arrive from Argentina. Otters, minks, long-tailed weasels, beavers, raccoons, foxes, and porcupines are born. Look for pasque flowers in sunny areas on the Dakota Hogback.

Late April: Prairie dog pups make their first appearance above ground. If we get lots of precipitation, many pups may drown in burrows unnaturally situated in floodplains. Others may be consumed by their aunts, an unusual behavior first documented by John Hoogland in South Dakota (*The Black-tailed Prairie Dog: Social Life of a Burrowing Mammal*. Chicago University Press, 1995).

May 1. May Day traditionally marked the approximate halfway point between the Vernal Equinox and the Summer Solstice. People would dance around a Maypole, a male fertility symbol, to encourage the god and goddess to mate and produce the fruits of spring.

May 4: Full moon rises at 8:14 p.m.
Ponies shed their shaggy hair (Arapaho)
Horses get fat (Cheyenne)
Buffalo-breeding (Osage)

May 5 : Eta Aquarid meteor shower peaks after midnight. Look toward Aquarius.

Early May: Cecropia and polyphemous moths hatch from cocoons spun on deciduous trees last fall. Tent caterpillars emerge from their tents. Blue grouse drum and display on the mesas west of town. Several years ago, a mild-mannered Boulder Audubon member was attacked repeatedly and had his ankles slightly bloodied by a displaying blue grouse near Woods Quarry.

Late May: Abert's squirrels perform their mating bouts on Enchanted Mesa. The males line up behind a female and chase her through the treetops. The chase order is determined at least in part by the proximity of the suitors' home ranges to that of the female. If one of the males gets out of line, a fight may ensue. Abert's squirrels inhabit mature ponderosa pine forests. Many have been displaced recently

from the mesas west of Boulder by non-native fox squirrels.

June 2: Full moon rises at 8:25 p.m.
Rose (Pawnee)
Coreopsis (Osage)
Strawberry (Ojibwe)

Early June: Little brown bats, weighing 1.5 to 2 grams (equivalent to six aspirin tablets) are born. Elk, mule deer, and marmot young are born. Eastern Screech-Owls sing their whinnying songs as the young venture out of the nest for the first time. At this time of year, they do more whinnying than "warbling;" the pattern is reversed during the early breeding season (December-March).

June 20: Summer Solstice. On the longest day of the year, when the powers of nature are at their height, people build bonfires and leap over them to promote fertility, longevity, and love.

Late June: Fireflies begin to display at Twin Lakes, Sawhill Ponds, Dry Creek east of Baseline Reservoir, and wetlands on the flanks of Eldorado Mountain. These beetles may be holdovers from the Ice Age, or they may have migrated here along irrigation ditches constructed by nineteenth-century settlers. All of our fireflies appear to be *Photuris pennsylvanica*; if you find a different species, report it immediately to the University of Colorado Museum.



Photuris pennsylvanica
Randy Gietzen

2003 Volunteer Activities Summary

During the 2003 calendar year, 150 BCNA volunteers contributed more than 4000 hours to education, conservation, and research. If you would like to get involved with one of these projects, please call the contact person listed.

Allegra Collister Bird Banding: The crew completed their twelfth consecutive year of spring and fall banding in Lykins Gulch, where they have banded 116 species and observed 189. Eight volunteers, 690 hours. Joe Harrison (303-772-3481) .

Avian Species of Special Concern Monitoring: We received nearly two dozen reports from volunteers monitoring potential nest sites of species of special concern. We now have two bald eagle and seven osprey nests in the county. Burrowing owls, northern harriers, and red-headed woodpeckers are down to two or fewer nests. 15 volunteers, 150 hours. Steve Jones (303-494-2468) .

Cliff-nesting Raptors: Most of the monitoring work has been turned over to the various agencies, but we continue to keep track of nesting golden eagles and falcons from Golden to northern Larimer County. 5 volunteers, 100 hours. To volunteer, contact Lisa Dierauf (DieraufL@ci.boulder.co.us) with Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks or Mark Brennan (MEBPA@co.boulder.co.us) with Boulder County Parks and Open Space.

Coal Creek Riparian Renaissance: We completed our seventh year of monitoring bird populations inside the four-mile-long Coal Creek grazing enclosure. Numbers of shrub-nesters and cavity-nesters continue to increase. Elk grazed within the study area this year. 7 volunteers, 225 hours. Steve Jones (303-494-2468) .

Conservation and Administration: Four BCNA board members also served on parks and open space advisory boards. We worked for completion of the Open Space and Mountain Parks Visitor Plan, supported statewide conservation programs, and submitted referrals on wildlife issues in Little Thompson Canyon and the Valmont Butte area. 20 volunteers, 1500 hours. Bruce Bland (303-499-8612) .

Ecosystem Symposium: Last year's symposium, which focused on grasslands, was attended by 120 scientists and conservationists. 12 volunteers, 200 hours. Bruce Bland (303-499-8612) .

Field Trips and Special Events: Sawhill Ponds breakfast hike, wildflower walks, dawn warbler hunt, Guy Fawkes annual bonfire, winter solstice sunrise hike, and other events. 10 volunteers, 100 hours. Naseem Munshi (303-673-0933) .

Field Ecology Classes: Twelve classes on birds, butterflies, bats, and botany were attended by more than 100 students. 8 volunteers, 100 hours. Carol Kampert (303-499-3049) .

Indian Peaks Bird Counts: These four-season counts have been tracking mountain bird populations for 22 years. A new publication is forthcoming. 40 volunteers, 350 hours. Dave Hallock (eldora@rmi.net); Bill Kaempfer (303-939-8005).

Newsletter, Nature-Net, and Web Site: Check out our newly expanded web site, or subscribe to the nature-net. 15 volunteers, 300 hours. George Oetzel, newsletter layout and web site (303-543-3712); Steve Jones, newsletter editor (303-494-2468); Randy Gietzen, nature-net (303-530-4355).

Publications: We published our first perfect-bound booklet, *Owls of Boulder County*. 5 volunteers, 200 hours. Steve Jones (303-494-2468) .

Wintering Raptors Survey: We completed our twenty-first year of monitoring raptor populations on the plains of Boulder County. Ferruginous hawk and rough-legged hawk numbers continue to decline as grassland habitat becomes more fragmented. Bald eagles are thriving. 45 volunteers, 500 hours. Sue Cass (303-494-5345) .



Ferruginous Hawk
Steve Jones

Books: Heroic Acts, Alarming Indifference, Vanishing Species

Hope is the Thing with Feathers
Christopher Cokinos
Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2000

Tinkering with Eden
Kim Todd
W.W. Norton & Co., 2000

I stumbled on both of these books on the remainder tables of local bookstores and obtained hardbacks at bargain prices. Both have become popular enough to be issued in soft cover. Most of us are somewhat familiar with the introduction of the Starling and the demise of the Passenger Pigeon. These authors bring to life tales of these and other introductions and extinctions that have dramatically changed the American environment since the eighteenth century.

Hope is a "personal chronicle of vanished birds," the extinction of six North American bird species. (Carolina Parakeet, Ivory-billed Woodpecker, Passenger Pigeon, Heath Hen, Labrador Duck, and Great Auk.) Driven by a desire to understand these extinctions, Cokinos embarked on ten years of extraordinary detective work. He traveled from Bird Rock in the Gulf of St. Lawrence to Louisiana's tangled bayous in search of those who stalked these birds and those who tried to save them. He discovered strange stories and glorious quests, tales of scientific heroism and political stupidity, of inconceivable apathy and equally astonishing personal devotion.

Tinkering "centers on a ragged band of heroes, adventurers, and villains who have reshaped the United States because somehow we as a species wanted it that way. We chose starlings, gypsy moths and honeybees just as surely as we chose the Grand Coulee Dam and the Sears Tower. What we have ended up with after centuries of experimentation is an ecosystem at risk, biodiversity in decline, and a scramble to eradicate exotics and reintroduce natives. But as weevils lay eggs in knapweed roots, ... and house sparrows flit through alleys, we are witnessing the manifestations of all our desires." [from the introduction]

- George Oetzel

BCNA Spring Nature Classes

A few spaces may still be available in these late-spring classes. See the enclosed brochure for a complete description of summer and fall classes.

Identification of Spring Wildflowers
Joyce Gellhorn

Learn to recognize the major plant families while using taxonomic keys to identify flowering plants.

Session I:
Wednesday, April 28 and May 5, 6:30-9:30 p.m.,
Foothills Nature Center
Saturday, May 8, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., field class.

Session II:
Wednesday, May 12 and 19, 6:30-9:30 p.m., Foot-
hills Nature Center
Saturday, May 22, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., field class

Tuition: \$65 for Session I or II (\$55 for BCNA mem-
bers); \$120 for both sessions.
Call Joyce at 303-442-8123 or e-mail jgell-
horn@sprynet.com

Prairie Dog Ecology
Steve Jones

Observe prairie dog behavior while learning about the role these rodents play in prairie ecosystems.

Thursday, May 27, 7-9 p.m., indoor class
Saturday, May 29, 7 a.m.-noon, field class

Tuition: \$40 (\$35 for BCNA members). Call Steve
at 303-494-2468; stephen.jones@earthlink.net.

Spring Butterflies for Beginners
Jan Chu

On this Memorial Day walk, we'll identify all butter-
flies we see, looking for migrants, local "hatchers"
and over-wintering species.

Date: Saturday, May 29, 9:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m., out-
door class, Dowdy Draw Trailhead
(Rain date Sunday, May 30)

Tuition: \$20 (\$16 for BCNA members). Call Jan at
303-494-1108 or e-mail chuhouse@hotmail.com.
(Please write "BCNA Butterflies" on the subject line
of e-mail.)

Volunteer Opportunities: Boulder Bat Monitoring Program

The City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks Department is now recruiting volunteers for its bat monitoring program. These volunteers use bat detectors to locate areas of high bat activity and then monitor sites throughout the summer months.

Once a site has been determined to be active, volunteer monitors work with a partner to observe and record bat activity. Monitors will work two to three evenings a month during June, July and August, performing visual and auditory counts, and completing and submitting observation record forms.

Applicants should be comfortable working independently outdoors at night and be able to observe sites for several hours at a time. All new volunteers must attend a mandatory two-night training in early May, followed by field training.

Space in this program is limited, so please apply by Friday, April 16. Applications are available at our web site or by calling 303-441-3440. Information on volunteer programs, as well as interesting facts about bats and other inhabitants of Open Space and Mountain Parks, may also be found on the web page: <http://www.ci.boulder.co.us/openspace/involved/volunteers.htm#batvols>

- Lisa Dierauf

Be a Volunteer Park Host

Do you enjoy being outdoors? Do you enjoy friendly conversations with other park visitors? Are you a Boulder County resident? If you answered 'yes' to these questions, you should consider becoming a volunteer park host this year.

Park hosts have many opportunities to make a difference while out on the trails at five premier Boulder County properties: Betasso Preserve, Hall Ranch, Heil Valley Ranch, Rabbit Mountain, and Walker Ranch.

After training, you'll be able to describe an area's natural and cultural resources, recreational opportunities and current resource management projects. You'll be given an official T-shirt, ball cap and nametag to wear whenever you're hosting a park. You will also be invited to Parks and Open Space advance training and special events.

Training will take place on two Saturdays, April 17 and April 24, from 8:30 a.m. To 3:30 p.m. Training will include information about Boulder County's recreational opportunities, local flora and fauna, department regulations, current resource management initiatives and communicating with park visitors effectively.

For more information and to apply, contact Michael Bauer: 303-441-1645; mbauer@co.boulder.co.us.

Grasslands Bioblitz

Get ready for the 2004 Grasslands BioBlitz! From 12 noon, Friday, June 25 to 12 noon, Saturday, June 26, this event will allow all to discover the biodiversity of our publicly-owned grasslands.

A bioblitz is a 24-hour community effort to discover the diversity of plant and animal life in a certain area. The Grasslands BioBlitz will take place on publicly-owned and managed grasslands near the border of Jefferson and Boulder counties.

Scientists will identify as many species as possible to create a biodiversity snapshot of about 6,000 acres, some in reserves closed to the public. Participants of all ages will have opportunities to:

- Interact with scientists, learn about the techniques and tools they use, and discover what they are finding,
- Observe a diversity of organisms with the help of scientists and naturalists at trailheads, including a handicap accessible location, and through interpretive programs
- Learn about grassland biodiversity through an array of displays and scheduled presentations.

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, University of Colorado Museum and the Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Department, the U. S. Department of Energy, City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks, Boulder County Open Space, Jefferson County Parks and Open Space, Colorado Division of Wildlife, and the Colorado Native Plant Society are all working together and collaborating with many other organizations to plan this year's Grasslands BioBlitz.

Please visit <http://www.grasslands-bioblitz.org> for more details.

- Karen Hollweg

State Conservation Issues: Black-tailed Prairie Dogs

The Conservation Plan for Grassland Species in Colorado was approved by Russell George, then director of the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW). Although developed primarily to conserve the black-tailed prairie dog, it also addresses conservation of mountain plover, burrowing owl, ferruginous hawk, and swift fox. While no one was completely happy with this plan, everyone in the work group felt that they could live with it. I believe that on-going activities by the Species Conservation and Habitat Sections of CDOW will ensure the health and survival of all of these species.

Lynx

Following the birth of 16 kittens last year and the known survival of at least some of them (from observed tracks), CDOW will be releasing approximately 50 more adult lynx in April. There are plans to release an additional 50 in 2005 and 10-12 per year for three years after that. As was noted by division personnel, success will occur when we have a sustaining population.

- Jim McKee

Thorne Natural Science School Summer Classes

The 2004 Thorne Natural Science School catalog is out! Week-long classes start on June 7 and run through August 6 for children ages 6-14. This is the 48th summer that Thorne Ecological Institute has run the TNSS, and it is also the 50th Anniversary of the Institute! For more information, call 303-499-3647 or e-mail info@thorne-eco.org

* * * * *

"Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we must be saved by love."

- Reinhold Niebuhr

BCNA Board of Directors

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Committees and Contacts

- *Allegra Collister Birdbanding Site*: Joe Harrison (303-772-3481).
- *Cliff-Nesting Raptors*: Nan Lederer (303-447-1899).
- *Conservation*: Bruce Bland and Joan Ray (303-444-5011).
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- *Wintering Raptor Survey*: Sue Cass (303-494-5345) and Jim McKee (303-494-3393).

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

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

JOIN THE NATURE-NET LIST SERVICE

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

E-mail BCNA at mail@bcna.org

Support the Boulder County Nature Association

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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.

Boulder County Nature Association
P.O. Box 493
Boulder, CO 80306