

# 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 27, Number 3  
Summer 2009



## **The Amphibian Extinction Crisis Lecture and photo presentation, July 17**

BCNA and the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History are partnering to sponsor a lecture by Dr. Kerry Kriger, Executive Director of Save the Frogs, a national non-profit organization dedicated to amphibian conservation. Frog populations have been disappearing worldwide at unprecedented rates. Threats include pollution, infectious diseases, habitat loss, invasive species, climate change and over-harvesting for the pet and food trades. Kriger will discuss necessary actions to prevent further amphibian declines and extinctions. The presentation includes many of his award-winning photos of amphibians from around the world. Kriger's research has been supported by the National Geographic Society, among several others.

Come to this free lecture, Friday, July 17, 3 p.m., in the Henderson Museum on the CU-Boulder campus. Come early and reacquaint yourself with this wonderful resource, where in addition to biology, archeology and paleontology exhibits, there is currently a fabulous exhibit of Navajo textiles. Parking is available at the Euclid Auto Park.

[www.bcna.org](http://www.bcna.org)  
Online newsletter, courses, and nature  
almanac.

## **2009 Research Grants Awarded**

BCNA's grants committee received a record nine applications in this year's competition. In April, the Board of Directors awarded a total of \$3,750 to four proposals. For the second year, we are funding a study to determine the origin of prairie dogs that repopulate colonies which have been wiped out by plague, with implications for the necessity of wildlife migration corridors. The researcher, Loren Sackett, is a doctoral student in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology (EBio). Jeffrey McClenahan, an EBio master's candidate, is looking at grasshopper species richness in the Front Range and how it is affected by urban fragmentation in the native grassland remnants. The third grant from our general competition is partially funding a study of native garter snakes by Anthony Saviola, again an EBio candidate for the master's degree. His hypothesis is that garter snakes are declining in sites where they have lost a significant prey source (leopard frogs) and have to contend with a new, invasive predator (bullfrogs). Finally, from the Ken Evenson Memorial Native Cats fund, Will Keeley and Whit Johnson from the City of Boulder's Open Space and Mountain Parks Department are studying the use by native cats of various underpasses and culverts as connections between large habitat blocks separated by roads. BCNA's funds will be used to purchase additional motion-detecting infra-red cameras. OSMF hopes to learn optimal designs for these increasingly important wildlife corridors.



**Pronghorn**  
photo by Steve Jones



### **Comanche Bird Atlas Rendezvous: "I Don't Think We're (Quite) in Kansas"**

Toto, a testy African gray parrot with a colorful vocabulary and an aversion to Cooper's hawks, led the way on our Comanche Grassland Atlas rendezvous May 20-24. Other participants included Jim and Irene Thompson and their seven-year-old granddaughter Maddie (La Junta); George and Petrea Mah (Boulder); Comanche wildlife biologist Stephanie Shively (Springfield), and Toto's omniscient providers, Naseem Munshi and Mike Tupper (Lafayette).

The Comanche was green and sprinkled with wildflowers, mostly plains coreopsis and Engelmann's daisy, but also prairie evening-primrose, spider milkweed, scarlet globemallow, prairie turnip, sand-verbena, and dozens more. We met Thursday afternoon at Picture Canyon Picnic Area, then dispersed westward into the rimrock canyons of the Tubs Springs block to spend the night.

At dawn a pair of previously confirmed western screech-owls flew over my tent, and I heard a barn owl screaming down the canyon. Fledgling common ravens squawked from a cliff-crevice across the way. Other rendezvousers confirmed nesting Cooper's hawks (T/UN) Chihuahuan ravens (NB), eastern phoebes (UN), Cassin's kingbirds (NB), Bewick's wrens (NB), and blue grosbeaks (ON). These and other observations brought us up to 67 potential nesting species in this block (18 more than were found during Atlas I), including peregrine falcon, ladder-backed woodpecker, rufous-crowned sparrow,

and painted bunting.

On Friday we dispersed even more, into four separate blocks where we all camped. At Reader Lake, George and Petrea confirmed nesting burrowing and great horned owls. At Carrizo Mountain, Maddie bagged the group's first bird, a killdeer, and Jim found nesting eastern phoebes and a pair of wood ducks. In Edler I confirmed nesting Chihuahuan ravens (MSP and MSC--a windmill!), Swainson's hawks (NB), barn owls (ON--attic of abandoned house), burrowing owls (ON), and northern mockingbirds (NB). I was plenty pleased, since there is only the one building and about six scrawny trees in the entire block.

All of us up on the flats were serenaded throughout the night by larking Cassin's sparrows, but none of us could confirm nesting, since the females hadn't arrived yet. Singing grasshopper sparrows, vesper sparrows, lark sparrows, lark buntings, and meadowlarks heralded the fiery dawn. Pronghorns and horned lizards kept us entertained.

Toto and his entourage had gone ahead to Pintada Canyon Southeast, where we re-rendezvoused Saturday evening. This block has special memories for many BCNA members, since it was the home of our dear friend Lucile Kirkpatrick for 75 years. Lucile passed away in 2007 at age 99. During Atlas I, when we worked 15 blocks in southeastern Colorado, she hosted numerous potlucks and birdwatching forays at her stone and stucco cottage tucked beneath the ochre-colored cliffs of Tecolote Canyon.

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Lucile's daughter Kay Feemster and her husband Buddy had given us permission to camp under the cottonwoods across from Lucile's cliffside spring. As we set up our tents, wild turkeys (NE) foraged in Lucile's wheat field and a black-chinned hummingbird buzzed by.

That evening we strolled down the canyon, confirming nesting green herons (NB), Mississippi kites (UN), Lewis's woodpeckers (NY), and cliff swallows (NB). We watched beavers swimming in the creek with wood ducks and coots. Barn owls hiss-screamed around midnight, and a raucous kingbird/oriole/night heron chorus got us up and going the next morning.

Nevertheless, we ended up with only 58 potential nesting species in that block, 17 short of Atlas I. I guess we'll have to go back next year. Actually, they few of us go almost every year. Who would want to miss the Comanche in spring?

- Steve Jones

Note: A dozen or more canyon blocks remain available for adoption in Region 26. We still have a half dozen local blocks available for adoption as well. Let me know if you'd like to take one on.



**Toto in Holt Canyon**  
photo by Steve Jones

**BCNA Summer Events Schedule**

**Saturday, July 11, 6-10 a.m.** *Breeding Bird Atlas Lyons blockbusting party.* Leaders: Maggie Boswell and Steve Jones (303-494-2468; curlewsj@comcast.net). Help complete the Lyons block by observing nesting behaviors of foothills and grassland birds. Meet at the Heil Ranch open space main parking area off Left Hand Canyon Drive.

**Friday, July 17, 3 p.m.** Lecture on the amphibian extinction crisis at Henderson Museum, University of Colorado (see related article, page 1).

**Sunday, July 19, 5:30-10 a.m.** *Breeding Bird Atlas trip to the BCNA Ralston Buttes block.* The first visit to a breeding bird block is always exciting. Who knows what we'll find? The more eyes and ears, the more we're likely to see and hear. This will be a mostly driving reconnaissance, with short forays into the woods. Meet at the Eldorado Springs commuter parking lot at the northeast corner of SH 93 and Eldorado Springs Drive at 5:30 a.m. Steve Jones (303-494-2468; curlewsj@comcast.net).

**Boulder County Audubon Offers Birdwatching Certificate Class**

Sue Cass, Steve Jones, and Scott Severs will teach an Introduction to Boulder County Birding class this fall. This Audubon certificate class covers the ins and outs of birding, from using binoculars and field guides to identifying birds by field marks and song. Observe hawks, ducks, woodpeckers, and songbirds in their natural habitats while learning about their ecological roles and conservation needs.

The class is handicapped accessible and open to all.

Saturday, September 12, 8 a.m. to noon. Birding fundamentals. Walden Ponds Wildlife Area.

Saturday, September 26, 8 a.m. to noon. Songbirds. Walker Ranch Open Space.

Saturday, October 10, 8 a.m. to noon. Waterfowl. Walden Ponds Wildlife Area.

Saturday, November 7, 8 a.m. to noon. Raptors. Foothills Nature Center and eastern Boulder County.

Tuition: \$90 (\$80 for Audubon members). Limited to 12 participants

To register: Contact Mary Balzer: Marybalzer@qwest.net

### Fond Memories of Jan Carnes

BCNA lost a beloved board member and friend when Jan Carnes died in April, a few weeks after being diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor. Jan served as BCNA secretary and board member for seven years. She and her husband John conducted wintering raptor and ecosystem stewardship surveys. Jan was a longtime organizer of the annual ecosystem symposium and cochaired this year's symposium committee.

But Jan's primary contribution to our group was her clear-headed, positive, and good-natured approach to environmental issues and organizational deliberations. She was a great listener who made everyone around her feel appreciated and respected. She loved science and scientific inquiry, and she incorporated that passion into her respect for all living things. Jan took equal delight in a soaring red-tail, a fairy slipper orchid, or a barking prairie dog.

Jan grew up in Laramie, where she became a consummate ice skater and a student of nature. After graduating from the University of Wyoming, she raised three children. Her son Eric reports that she threw his third birthday party on the same day that she gave birth to his older sister. He remembers her reading out loud to her children from full works of fiction such as *Watership Down* and *The Last Unicorn*, along with psychological works by Claude Levi-Strauss and Julian Jaynes.

"She was also an artist," writes Eric, "and she and her kids always made their own greeting cards and wrapping paper... She also played the piano, and drove me to and from Greeley for lessons. As her grandchildren were born, the family made each one a quilt, each a little more elaborate than the last."

Jan eventually earned a doctorate in clinical psychology, went into private practice as a therapist, and later became director of the pain rehabilitation program at Boulder Memorial Hospital.

"Always one to practice what she preached," writes Eric, "she used self-hypnosis as an alternative to anesthesia at her dental appointments. She and John kept busy at home (while pursuing their careers)... They cooked together, made their own mushroom tea, yogurt, wine, and bread, discussed psychology and theology together, walked and biked across Europe, and kept a prodigious crop of houseplants thriving."

After retiring, Jan became an avid birder and worked as a Boulder County volunteer naturalist. She took up digital photography, and spent hours on the computer editing her shots. When she became active in the Boulder County Nature Association, she brought new life and optimism to the organization.

We will miss Jan more than we can express. We feel thankful and very blessed for all that she and John have contributed to BCNA.



### Spring Spectacle on the Platte

In mid-March an intimate and enthusiastic group of naturalists from BCNA traveled to the "Great Bend Region" of the Platte River in south central Nebraska to experience one of nature's most stunning mass migrations.....

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that of the Sandhill Crane. Carol and Dave Kampert and my husband, Alan, and I who have witnessed the "spring spectacle on the Platte" many times were joined by Jessica Sandler and Nicole deLorimier who would share the thrill of their maiden encounter with these extraordinary birds. In addition to the good and warm company of our fellow travelers we were blessed with the bluest of skies, unseasonably warm temperatures and the safe passage such conditions allow.

We planned both an evening and predawn session in the blinds at the Rowe Sanctuary and both were special in their own way. Our first evening was warm, the setting sun so bright and it's reflection off the river so intense it was nearly impossible to look upriver to the west. Fortunately, most of the cranes did not settle into the shallows of the Platte until after sunset, at a distance at first and closer to the blind as the sky darkened. On this night, March 14th, state biologists estimated each mile of the Platte River between Grand Island and Kearney sheltered an average of 30,000 cranes. YES! We timed our visit perfectly.....at peak migration!

The next morning we marched silently in single-file through the predawn chill to a different blind south of the sanctuary. Though darkness obscured the river, a constant chortle rose and then subsided as each crane awoke and sought its life partner and yearling offspring among the throng. A different sound emanated from across the river, muffled at first, but as blackness turned to charcoal and then the grayest of grays, the cackles grew louder. Before the new day was born thousands of Snow Geese rose off the river in unison and flew low over the blind with a deafening whirl of wings and chorus of honks and hinks. It appeared we had been doubly blessed as our small group also witnessed the high point in the northern migration of literally millions of waterfowl....., Canada, Cackling, Greater White-fronted and Snow Geese....., Pintails, Redheads and Mallards. A bonus I did not anticipate was the infectious elan of our novices that spread through our group. Thank you, Jessica and Nicole!

During the day we headed east along the south side of the river where we encountered groups of Sandhill Cranes, large and small, feeding on waste grain in fields of corn that had yet to be turned over, a gift from the local farmers. We spotted Wild Turkeys, several Bald Eagles and numerous Ferruginous Hawks, both pale and dark.

**BCNA Board of Directors**

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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:*  
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- *Education:*  
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-*Website:*  
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-*Wintering Raptor Survey:*  
 Sue Cass (303-494-5345) and  
 Jim McKee (303-651-2414)

We had heard that an enormous number of Snow Geese had settled on the pond at Mormon Island State Park near Grand Island and we decided to check it out. The lake is like countless others in the area, depressions filled with ground water that were hollowed out of the sand to provide fill for construction of the interstate highway. Only on this day this ordinary pond was extraordinary. Nearly its entire surface was covered with white and gray Snow Geese. As we studied the birds closer it became apparent the they were accompanied by smaller,

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stubby-billed Ross's Geese, as well. While we watched countless geese fall out of the sky to settle on the lake as surely as snow falls in winter, we played a guessing game amongst ourselves. At first, my guess of 50,000 birds was dismissed as too high, but before we departed we were all in agreement the estimate was conservative, at best. We discussed the dilemma created by an explosive population burst of Snow Geese in recent years, the inevitable destruction of nesting habitat far to the north and the likelihood that a precipitous crash will occur due to starvation or disease. Despite the gloomy foretelling, nothing could detract from the amazing experience we were sharing.

Our last evening in the area we positioned ourselves on the viewing platforms immediately south of the Lowell/Gibbon bridge on County Road L10C. During the month of March this is one of my favorite places in the whole world! The Platte River spread out before us, flowing out of an orange-colored sky that was filled with dark, ethereal clouds, clouds of Sandhill Cranes, emanating from every compass point, all converging on the river. A symphony filled our senses accentuated by what Aldo Leopold so elegantly described as the "trumpet in the orchestra of evolution"....., the call of the Sandhill Crane. This is as good as it gets! Ascendancy achieved!

--story and photos by Sue Cass

### **BCNA Summer Classes**

For complete descriptions and information about scholarships, visit [www.bcna.org](http://www.bcna.org). There is a \$10 tuition discount for BCNA members.

**Flowers of the Alpine Tundra**, with **Joyce Gellhorn**. Thursday evening, July 16; Friday, July 17. \$60. 303-442-8123.

**Stalking the High Country Butterflies**, with **Jan Chu** and **Larry Crowley**. Wednesday evening, July 22; Friday, July 24; Monday, July 27. \$105. 303-494-1108.

**Exploring Colorado Hummingbirds**, with **Steve Bouricius**. Sunday, July 26, 7:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. \$65. 970-434-5918.

**Pike Encounter**, with **Chris Ray**. Thursday evening, August 6; Saturday, August 8. \$65. 303-489-8863.

**Mushrooms of the Front Range**, with Rob Hallock. Thursday evening, August 13; Saturday, August 15; Saturday, August 29. \$75. 720-480-4452.

**Grassland Ecology**, with **Steve Jones**. Thursday evening, August 20; Saturday, August 22, Wednesday-Thursday (camping), September 30-October 1. \$90. 303-494-2468.



### Lynx Kittens Found in Spring Survey

DENVER, Colo.--The Colorado Division of Wildlife today announced that 10 lynx kittens have been found so far during the annual spring lynx survey. The kittens --seven female and three male--were the first documented since 2006.

Division of Wildlife researchers located five dens, including three near traditional release sites in the San Juan Mountains and two further north in Gunnison and Eagle counties.

"The discovery of kittens this year is extremely promising," said Tanya Shenk, DOW lynx field researcher. "The locations of the dens show that lynx are beginning to expand their ranges and are once again finding both food and habitat necessary for successful reproduction."

In addition, two dens housed kittens from Colorado-born parents--the first kittens documented where both parents are native to Colorado. Division biologists believe there may be additional dens and kittens not found during this year's survey.

"The number of lynx fitted with active radio collars is perhaps the lowest since we started the program," said Shenk. "We can't track all the female lynx so it is probably safe to assume there are more dens and kittens out there than what we found during our survey."

Researchers are currently monitoring 49 lynx with active radio collars. A large percentage of the original collars have stopped functioning and the vast majority of kittens born in Colorado have not been fitted with

transmitters. As a result, estimates of the number of kittens produced are conservative. The dens located by field staff during spring surveys reflect a minimum number of kittens in a reproductive season.

Division biologists speculate that a reduction in the snowshoe hare population may have contributed to a declining number of kittens surveyed in recent years. In Alaska and Canada, it is well documented that the population of lynx fluctuates with the snowshoe hare population. Limited observations by wildlife managers indicate that the hare population is down from just a few years ago.

Since the lynx reintroduction program began in 1999, a total of 218 lynx have been reintroduced. The cats were brought to Colorado from Alaska and Canada.

A total of 126 lynx kittens are known to have been born in Colorado: 16 kittens in 2003; 39 kittens in 2004; 50 kittens in 2005; 11 kittens in 2006 and 10 kittens in 2009.

While these results give a strong indication that lynx are adapting well to Colorado's mountains, DOW biologists are reluctant to say they've reached the conclusion of this project.

"We are very close to achieving all of our goals for the lynx reintroduction," said Rick Kahn, DOW lead biologist. "We have had successful breeding and we have had Colorado-born lynx reproduce. Our next goal is to determine if our level of recruitment is exceeding our mortality rates over a couple of years. We are very encouraged by the results this year and are hopeful that these animals will contribute towards a sustaining population for Colorado."

The lynx reintroduction program is funded by the DOW, private donations and Great Outdoors Colorado, which receives its funding through the Colorado State Lottery. The Colorado Wildlife Heritage Foundation has been instrumental in helping raise funds to continue lynx monitoring efforts.

--Photo and story courtesy Colorado Division of Wildlife.

# Support the Boulder County Nature Association

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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Type of Membership:

_____ Student/Senior (65 or over)	\$15
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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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